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Nassau Coliseum in Uniondale / Photo by David Winzelberg

Pally: Key reasons new proposals are needed at Nassau Hub

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Over the past 10 years, through two county administrations, Nassau County has been trying to find a new alternative plan for the rejected “Lighthouse” plan which was the first endeavor to provide a mixed use development project for the Nassau Hub. Over that period of time, through countless plans and planning processes, nothing has happened at the Nassau Hub other than a renovated Nassau Memorial Coliseum, which still stands in the middle of acres and acres of parking lots.

Now, with the advent of a new administration, plans are once again being made for a new multi-use development at the Nassau Hub. Unfortunately, the current discussion depends on a request for proposal which was sent out by the county in 2013, before the advent of the new arena at Belmont, before the appropriation of \$85 million in state funds for a “transformational” project based upon high tech and bio-tech job growth, before the realization that multi-family housing should be included within any development at the Hub and before there was major discussion of using the LIRR right of way to provide a new express bus service from the Mineola train station to the Hub directly. All of these recent

decisions have changed the parameters of the development opportunities and have caused many new possibilities to come into focus for the Hub.

None of this is more important than the inclusion of \$85 million in state appropriations to the project, based upon the high tech and bio tech jobs which were going to be located at the Hub as part of the original Northwell medical research facility, which has now been moved to Manhasset. The state appropriation for this purpose is to be used to fund the construction of two parking garages which are necessary to replace the at-grade parking which is necessary for the operation of the Nassau Veterans Memorial Coliseum. Without these funds, no development on the at-grade parking can take place, thus almost eliminating the development options. We must make absolutely sure that any proposal meets the state criteria for the funds to be used, which is based upon the inclusion of such high tech and bio tech job opportunities within the plan as a focal point of any development option.

Second, the previous Request for Proposal for the land specifically prohibited the inclusion of any type of housing within the parameters of the Nassau Hub. While the county now wants to include some measure of housing within any new plan, such a decision, without giving everyone who may have bid the first time an opportunity to now include housing in any plan, would not be fair or legal to everyone else. There is no question that many residential developers did not submit a bid in the first instance because the county had not specifically prohibited any opportunity to include housing in their plans. While any plan may be limited at the moment to the current town zoning of 500 units, such a plan should not provide a barrier to future housing options should the zoning be changed to provide for a number of units which will meet the needs of today's millennials.

While everyone is frustrated that no action has been taken at the Nassau Hub for the past 10 years and no longer want to look at acres and acres of cement, one should not substitute speed or current action for the opportunity to create a new plan which meets all of the needs of Nassau County, especially those placed upon the plan by New York State for the parking garages. A new look at the site by all concerned, for the next few months, may result in a plan which can work for every purpose and for everyone. Let us make the Nassau Hub both "Special" and "Transformational" now, for we have only one opportunity to get it right.

Pally is the Chief Executive Officer of the Long Island Builders Institute and a member of the Board of Commissioners of the Metropolitan Transportation Authority.