

# Coliseum plan needed soon, observers say

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A year after Nassau County Executive Edward Mangano first proposed building a new hockey arena with hundreds of millions of taxpayer dollars, neither he nor anyone else has come forward with a plan to redevelop Nassau Coliseum and the valuable 77 acres that surround it.

But area business and civic leaders said a definitive plan has to emerge soon.

The Islanders' lease on the current Coliseum expires in 2015, and team owner

Charles Wang has said he won't keep the team in the current arena beyond that. Also, \$750 million in new state funding for economic development projects is available this year, and the Long Island Regional Economic Development Council must receive project proposals by June 15.

Council co-vice chairman Kevin Law said a "real plan with commitments" must be in place by the end of 2012.

"I think all sides are going to have to give," said Law, who also heads the Long Island Association, the region's largest business group. A workable solution, he said, has to include money from the cash-strapped county and from Wang, as well as a willingness from Hempstead Town officials to make changes to the development zone they established for the site.

Mangano said Friday that within the next month, he will have a proposal for the site that could compete for state funds and meet the June 15 deadline. But those funds, to be divided among 10 regions across the state, would provide only a fraction of what's needed to build a new arena, make infrastructure improvements and provide for parking. The entire Long Island region will receive a maximum of \$25 million for capital projects.

Last year, Nassau County's pitch for the Hub, the Uniondale land that includes the arena, failed to receive any of the \$101.6 million given to Long Island's 66 winning projects.



Said Law's co-vice chairman, [Hofstra University](#) president Stuart Rabinowitz: "I really hope we get something that's doable" for this year's round of funding.

#### Failed referendum's fallout

[Islanders](#) senior vice president Michael Picker did not return calls for comment. Since the failure in August of a referendum to authorize [Nassau](#) to borrow up to \$400 million to build a new Coliseum and a minor league ballpark on the site, Wang rarely has spoken publicly.

If the referendum had passed, construction would be under way and "hundreds and hundreds of construction jobs would have been created now," Mangano said in an interview Friday.

Despite the failure of previous redevelopment plans and [Nassau's](#) current budget deficit, Mangano said he remains optimistic.

"I've been pursuing it aggressively and actively since August," he said. "I have not given up hope."

Legislative Minority Leader Kevan Abrahams (D-[Freeport](#)) says there still is time to develop a plan for the arena. But noting Mangano's recent campaigns to privatize the county sewer system and reorganize the county's police precincts, Abrahams said: "It does not seem like the Coliseum has been a priority for this administration. The county executive needs to sit down with developers to put up money to get the project up and rolling."

#### Local interest

County officials had planned to issue a request for proposals for the site earlier this year and some local developers expressed interest. In February, Mangano's office said more details would emerge after he met with Gov. [Andrew M. Cuomo](#), but that meeting came and went without an announcement. Mangano said Friday that he stopped the RFP effort when Picker said in mid-February that Wang would not bid on the RFP.

"It would summarily end any opportunity to keep the [Islanders](#)," Mangano said Friday of an RFP without the team's involvement. "We really would not have accomplished our primary goal, which is still to retain the [Islanders](#) and to create a sports entertainment destination."

Since then, said Rabinowitz, "it's been very quiet."

Developer Vincent Polimeni, of [Garden City](#), said he hasn't heard anything since a meeting he and other developers had with Mangano four months ago. "I don't even know if they're planning on putting anything out there," Polimeni said of the county executive and Wang. Polimeni said he still has "major interest" in joining a redevelopment effort but that the next move is Mangano's.

Mangano said he is looking at low-interest financing options, which could help to bring down the project's cost, and did not discount the possibility of providing some county funds.

"We are working to identify other finance institutions that have an appetite to invest for a more modest return," Mangano said. "That is an option."

[Hempstead](#) Town Supervisor [Kate Murray](#), meanwhile, said the town will be flexible. "Once a developer is designated, we're ready, willing and able to sit down and have a conversation and try to work this out so that the Islanders stay and we get good development once and for all," she said.

## Behind the scenes

[National Hockey League](#) Commissioner [Gary Bettman](#) said recently that he does not expect the Islanders to stay at the existing Coliseum past 2015. Mangano noted that an agreement would have to be reached before then.

Law said there have been recent conversations and efforts to develop a new plan, but the discussions have occurred out of the public eye.

"Just because there's not a lot of hooplah going on right now doesn't mean there aren't discussions and things being worked on," Law said.

Sources with knowledge of discussions about other potential local sites said the Coliseum's current location is not the only Long Island option. [Belmont](#) Racetrack and spots in [Suffolk](#) County, including [Suffolk Community College's Brentwood](#) campus, are not off the table, they said.

Developer [Bruce Ratner](#), who is building the [Barclays](#) Center in Brooklyn, has said he'd welcome the Islanders if they can't make a deal work in [Uniondale](#).

Mangano said [Barclays](#) is more than just a competing location for the Islanders, because it also will be another venue for concerts, family shows and other events.

"They have now entered our market and they are the shiny new quarter in the market," Mangano said. "And we are the old, dull, beat up quarter in the market. And that's the real concern that I have."

But Mangano and other advocates said they're still optimistic that a deal will come through at the Coliseum site.

"We're hopeful that all of the parties will continue to talk and we're very supportive of moving the project forward," said John Durso, who heads the Long Island Federation of Labor. "It's absolutely vital to the future of Long Island, not just Nassau County, and an integral part of getting Nassau County back on the road to financial solvency."

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