

Experts: Islanders' exit makes Hub pivotal

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in the future of the land.

Islanders owner Charles Wang announced Wednesday that the team will move to the new Barclays Center in Brooklyn when the Islanders' lease with Nassau County expires on July 31, 2015.

With the team gone, experts said county and Hempstead Town officials must decide the fate of Nassau Veterans Memorial Coliseum, the Islanders' home for the hockey club's entire history.

The team's impending departure provides an opportunity for planners to start over.

"We should take a clean sheet of paper, without the fate of the Islanders hanging over our heads, and re-imagine what is going to be there," said Scott Rechler, the chief executive of RXR Realty in Uniondale who along with Wang proposed the now-scuttled mixed-use Lighthouse Project for the Hub.

Currently, three companies are vying to be designated by Nassau as master developer of the property. RXR is not one of them.

Without a professional sports team, Rechler said it would not make sense to rebuild or replace the Coliseum. He said the parking needed for an arena leaves little land for other uses.

"You start fresh and say, 'We don't have that arena there' . . . What could we build that would be an economic engine for Long Island's future?" he said.

The Nassau Hub -- 77 acres of prime land in the center of the county -- should be "re-imagined" with an eye toward creating good-paying jobs now that the Islanders will leave the Coliseum in 2015, experts said Wednesday.

The Hub could be pivotal in Long Island's drive to commercialize inventions from local universities and laboratories into products that sustain new companies, the experts said. In addition, Hofstra University's medical and engineering schools are expected to play a role



Others, however, said they still saw a need for a concert hall/sports complex, but only as part of a larger project.

David Blumenfeld, vice president of the [Syosset](#)-based Blumenfeld Development Group, which wants to develop the Hub, said, "[Long Island](#) deserves some sort of sports and entertainment venue, but not as a stand-alone" like the Coliseum.

He said the Hub should have housing, research facilities, entertainment and stores. New construction should serve as a downtown, akin to his company's Arches outlet mall in [Deer Park](#), he said.

Another would-be Hub developer, Baldassano Architecture in [Patchogue](#), has already proposed three hotels, five restaurants and a 200,000-square-foot exhibition hall.

Desmond Ryan, executive director of the developers' group, Association for a Better [Long Island](#), said, "development cannot be done piecemeal. The first decision has to be what to do with the Coliseum."

The [Long Island](#) Regional Economic Development Council, appointed by Gov. [Andrew M. Cuomo](#), recently endorsed a \$2 million grant for infrastructure improvements at the Hub. That request may now be imperiled.

Council vice chairman Kevin Law said the group would meet soon to decide whether to continue pressing for the state money. He also cautioned against moving too quickly. "This presents a new opportunity for some real economic development growth," Law said.

Stuart Rabinowitz, the council's other vice chairman and [Hofstra University](#) president, said he wants "sound development of the Hub" and pledged to work with all interested parties.

With Candice Ferrette

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