

Editorial: Mark Lesko faces challenges before and after leaving Brookhaven

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Brookhaven Supervisor Mark Lesko's decision to resign, in order to become the executive director of Accelerate [Long Island](#), is good for the region. But it's tough news for the huge town, which is grappling with major budget problems. On balance, it is a positive step toward creating a new economic core: high-tech industry.

Accelerate is a coalition of research institutions -- Brookhaven National Laboratory, Cold Spring Harbor Laboratory, Hofstra University, [North Shore-Long Island Jewish Health System](#) and [Stony Brook University](#) -- and the business community, including [CA Technologies](#), Canrock Ventures, a venture capital fund, and the Long Island Association, which incorporated Accelerate and will house its two-person staff. The goal is to build a vibrant technological economy here.

The Island's research strength is sure to churn out good ideas that can become thriving companies paying good wages. But if past is prologue, a lot of those start-up firms are likely to leave the region, because of its high costs. Accelerate is supposed to change that pattern. In fits and starts, the Island has been trying to pull together its research strengths for two decades. But this specific approach owes a lot to Lesko. He did the research, looking at the way [San Diego](#) helped its technology industries grow, and he played a key role in the launch early last year, along with the Rauch Foundation. The search committee cast a wide net for a director, but it finally reached out to Lesko, because he knows the region and the players -- and has the ability to harness them harmoniously.

Unfortunately, his departure comes exactly when he has to prepare an ugly 2013 budget. Lesko says all of his municipal budgets have had to be unsavory, and this one will be, too. For a town with a large payroll and shrinking revenues, both layoffs and tax increases have to be considered. But Lesko is leaving the day after he produces that unpalatable budget in mid-September.

The town always adopts its budget before Election Day. But this year it will have to do that without a supervisor elected by all the people, because voters won't pick Lesko's successor until Nov. 6. Weeks before then, his coalition-building skill will have moved to Accelerate, where it will be a major asset. But without that talent at Town Hall, the chance of increased partisanship and gridlock is real -- even though Lesko says he'll submit a balanced budget and start the town on a three-year path to stability, without further draining its reserves.

Another concern arising from his departure is the fate of one of his signature initiatives, the

Ronkonkoma Hub, a transit-oriented development project of great regional importance. But Lesko expects to have nailed down the needed agreements with Tritec Real Estate, the master developer, before he leaves. And Councilman Tim Mazzei, who got the ball rolling on a Ronkonkoma land use plan to begin with, will still be around and is expected to be a reliable moving force for the hub.

Lesko is the right choice for Accelerate, but as he learned in studying San Diego, this sort of effort takes time. We hope that Lesko is going to be there for the long haul and not announcing in a couple of years that he plans to return to elective politics. Accelerate is his baby, and he must not leave it an orphan.

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