

nassau county **nc**

The Nassau County Hub development plan: Reshaping both urban and suburban thinking

ms Michael Stein



**Windsor
Commercial
Real Estate**

In the five short years since Tom Souzzi was elected Nassau County executive, he has carefully created



Tom Souzzi

a special blend of two schools of economic thought. One might say it was a one two combo that could only work long term if properly followed through. In a first bold move, the executive has taken a fiscally crippled county out of the ashes by carefully restructuring government, cutting both spending and redundant jobs, and by the sale of county owned property, to

duced staff could not handle this type of growth for long, or maybe they could point out the fact that land can only be sold once to balance a budget. But Suozzi has a more far-reaching view of the county's future. Since land can only be sold once, it would seem Suozzi has seen fit to create a plan to make that land pay over and over again. With the county bogged down by population density, excessive traffic, and aging physical infrastructure this land would have to be part of a catalyst to jump start the county's economy to create a renewing source of business, industry and the taxes they would bring.

In order for the county's economy to grow and flourish, it is necessary to bring in more business. Bringing in more business means creating more jobs, but also requires more housing for employees of all economic levels to support various roles within those businesses. This smart growth approach is the cornerstone to the overall development plan for the Nassau County Hub. This is where the heart of a shining star will break ground as an example to the rest of the country, as many suburban communities reach similar stages



Rendering of the main plaza of the proposed Nassau County Coliseum.

balance a long time deficit budget. This swift move has quickly and effectively put the county back on its feet, and raised its bond rating to an A status, something that has not been seen for better than 10 years. This is a quick short-term fix that was artfully crafted and executed in what historians might deem the "blink of an eye."

More careful economists could pick apart this approach as a band-aid approach. After all, in a county with a swiftly growing population that currently ranks as about the third most densely populated "suburban" county in the country, one could point out that a severely re-

duced staff could not handle this type of growth for long, or maybe they could point out the fact that land can only be sold once to balance a budget. In order to achieve this goal, the county couldn't effectively undergo a study and develop a plan with the limited resources of a tenuously reconstructed budget. Instead, the county has elicited the help of both the federal government and private developers.

To bring in the help and vision of local developers, on August 12th, 2005 an RFP was issued for a plan to redevelop the aging Nassau Coliseum area, comprised of 77 acres of prime real estate. The development plan was to include all aspects of the above smart growth plan and a new sports arena, and included specific reference to, "Pro-



Rendering of the athletic complex of the proposed Nassau County Coliseum.

vide increased property and sales tax revenues for the county with improved economic and public benefits for the town of Hempstead and surrounding communities." While numerous proposals were submitted, the county boiled them down to four submissions for best and final offers, and later officially selected The Lighthouse Group as the final bid winner, although the key architectural feature of the Lighthouse Groups plan, "The Lighthouse" was stricken from the proposal due to perceived conflicts with the current image of the county as a suburban, not urban community.

As it turns out, one of the biggest shortfalls to realizing this vision of more business, better land use and increased tax revenues was the ability to move people to, from and within the new development zone.

The county's plan was viewed cynically by neighboring towns, some of which went so far as to say they opposed any plan that created so much as one more car worth of traffic. And in all fairness, a redevelopment of the coliseum area to include the type of density of residence and business that the county wanted, as well as the increased traffic created by a new major sporting and concert arena would have a huge impact and possibly over burden all surrounding communities. This is where the Hub MIS comes into play. Already in the works for three years, the county foresaw these issues, and made application to the Federal Transit Administration (FTA) for federal funding to subsidize a new public transporta-

tion system to make this dream possible. Now, running slightly behind schedule, the county is completing what is referred to as a Major Investment Study (MIS). This study evaluates the impact of major development on both traffic and the environment and how a new public transportation system will alleviate the burden of both, providing future growth for the suburban and urban communities. Upon completion of the MIS, the FTA will evaluate the proposed transportation solutions, and make a determination as to whether or not to provide federal grant funding for a new transit system. The three proposed transit solutions include, Bus Rapid Transit (BRT), Light Rail Transit (LRT), and Automated Guideway Transit (AGT), a driverless system such as the com-

puter driven monorail.

The overall plan seems like a carefully crafted one, and success would create a sort of cold fusion effect on an economic level, helping to create clean renewable sources of business and jump starting Nassau County to a viable self sustaining financial entity through the foreseeable future and beyond.

This type of a win would be not beneficial only for the county, but for Long Island as a whole, where it may serve to further diversify our economy and lessen its dependence on its larger urban relatives just west of it.

**Michael Stein is Managing
Principal of Windsor Commercial
Real Estate, Woodbury, NY.**



Aerial view rendering of the proposed Nassau County Coliseum.