

## LONG ISLAND / SUFFOLK

# Developer to study feasibility of Ronkonkoma arena/convention plan

A Chicago developer has pitched an arena, hotel, medical facilities, conference center and retail shops for 40 acres between the LIE and MacArthur Airport.



Suffolk legislators approved a plan aimed at developing an arena near MacArthur Airport and the Ronkonkoma railroad station.  
Photo Credit: Credit: Crawford Architects

**By Carl MacGowan**

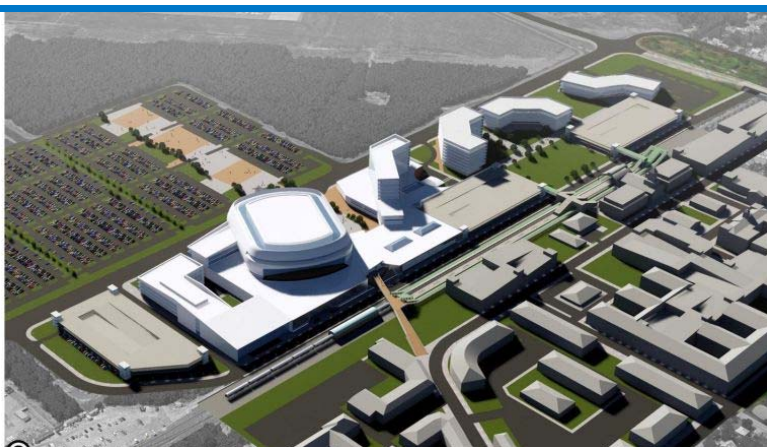
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The Suffolk Legislature voted Tuesday to give a Chicago developer eight months to flesh out its proposal for a \$1.1 billion sports and convention center in Ronkonkoma.

The legislature voted 14-3, with one abstention, to pave the way for Jones Lang LaSalle to become the master developer of a project that would turn a county-owned parking field into a sprawling complex featuring a 17,500-seat arena, a hotel and medical and research offices.

The vote does not authorize construction of the complex, but gives JLL and its development partners, including hockey entrepreneur Ray Bartoszek, time to assess the project's feasibility.



Some lawmakers said they supported moving the project forward despite reservations that the proposal lacked details about traffic and sewage treatment facilities, and concerns that the arena may not attract a sports team.

The New York Islanders and the National Hockey League have said they have no interest in the Ronkonkoma site.

Legis. Tom Cilmi of Bay Shore, leader of the Republican caucus, said he supported the overall plan because it was the one “best suited to the community.” But he said he was “cynical” about the arena’s prospects for success, adding he is concerned about traffic and parking.

Legis. Rob Calarco (D-Patchogue), the legislature’s deputy presiding officer, said he was willing to give JLL time to fine-tune its proposal, but said he had doubts.

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“My concern is we may be selecting a vendor [with] a proposal that may not be viable,” Calarco said.

John Cameron, of Woodbury-based Cameron Engineering & Associates, a subcontractor for JLL, said the proposal likely will be altered as developers study details and seek tenants.

But he said Suffolk’s population of 1.5 million

people would attract a sports team and concerts.

“There’s a strong market for this arena in Suffolk County,” he said.



The deal approved by legislators would give JLL eight months to study the project’s feasibility, including how it will be financed and what infrastructure improvements must be made. JLL is required to replace thousands of county-owned parking spaces that would be lost during construction of the complex.

Besides the arena and hotel, the JLL plan calls for a convention center and retail space on 40 acres or more between MacArthur Airport and the Long Island Rail Road’s Ronkonkoma station.

The selection came after a two-year process that included feedback from Ronkonkoma-area residents who viewed the competing proposals. The project has received support from Ronkonkoma civic association and business groups such as the Long Island Association.

The inclusion of public input received praise from some lawmakers.

“I think this is a model for how things should be done – not only for this project but for all projects,” said Legis. William Lindsay III (D-Bohemia).

But Legis. Robert Trotta (R-Fort Salonga), who voted against the measure, and Legis. Kevin McCaffrey (R-Lindenhurst), who abstained, said the selection process left them in the dark about details of the proposal.

Legis. Leslie Kennedy (R-Nesconset) and Legis. Tom Muratore (R-Ronkonkoma) also opposed the resolution.

“I’m not saying this is a bad thing, but the process . . . was horrible,” Trotta said.

*With Rick Brand*

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Carl MacGowan is a Long Island native who covers Brookhaven Town after having previously covered Smithtown, Suffolk County courts and numerous spot news and feature stories over his 20-plus year career at Newsday.