

July 20-26, 2012

Mangano doesn't need Wang on the ice



**Desmond
RYAN**

New York Islanders owner Charles Wang was initially blocked in redeveloping the Nassau Coliseum because he proposed a skyscraper.

Then he was blocked by taxpayers who declined to pick up the cost of a new Coliseum.

But now Wang's most difficult opponent in allowing him to play a role in determining the future of the Coliseum may be, ironically, Charles Wang.

Nassau County Executive Ed Mangano has proposed a new clean-sheet approach to redeveloping the Coliseum site. He is inviting developers from throughout the region and across the nation to consider participating as a "master developer" for the purpose of assisting the county and the Islanders in drafting a plan that will work.

The public response from Mr. Wang has been silence. His counsel has been consistently unavailable to the media. His camp ignores repeated requests for comment.

Sports industry observers believe Wang is either shopping the Islanders to a new owner or hunting for a local municipality, or developer, to be the partner willing to build him a new arena. Regardless, Mr. Wang hasn't given the county or his Islanders fans any firm direction since he lost the county referendum to buy him a new Coliseum. Added to this is a curious Coliseum proposal from, of all places, the Nassau Democratic Committee. Say what?

Against this backdrop, Mangano has repeatedly stated he very much wants the Islanders to remain in Nassau. In addition to bragging rights, there is an economic rate of return in having a professional sports franchise in Nassau. But Mangano needs a fully engaged Islanders owner in order to be successful in that pursuit. He needs someone who isn't still sulking over the fact that no one shared his previous visions for the property.

Mangano holds the ultimate trump card. The county owns some of the most important commercial real estate on Long Island. If Mr. Wang continues to pout his way through the appointment of a Mitchel Field master developer, Mangano can still deliver to taxpayers any number of different development options that include entertainment, cultural, sports, retail, educational and commercial uses. All

of them mean a significant private investment of dollars within the very heart of Nassau County, union construction jobs, new tax revenue and an opportunity to create a "smart build" project that incorporates 21st century planning and amenities.

Before he removes himself from the next and most likely successful chapter of redeveloping the Coliseum, Mr. Wang has to face some basic realities. New hockey franchises aren't in huge demand, the Islanders franchise even less so. These teams have a huge financial burn rate, especially those that fail to grab the imagination of their fan base.

If Wang is successful in unloading the team off Long Island, he will do so at a significant loss. If he stays on Long Island but is a tepid participant in this inclusive Mangano effort, he runs the risk of seeing a plan evolve without his creative input.

It's time for Mr. Wang to move beyond the resentment of a referendum lost a year ago this summer and understand that he can either become a full partner in designing the future or let Mangano harness the forces of the marketplace to reinvent the Coliseum property for the benefit of the taxpayer.

Ryan is executive director of the Association for a Better Long Island.