



## LAW &amp; GOVERNMENT

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## Curran makes changes to Nassau's crippled assessment system

By DAVID WINZELBERG

In an effort to repair Nassau County's broken property tax system, Nassau County Executive Laura Curran has set new assessment levels.

Curran and County Assessor David Moog announced Wednesday that the changes to the January 2019 tentative assessment roll for tax year 2020/2021 are aimed at maximizing assessment accuracy and integrity. It's also designed to avoid the need for mass settlements from the Assessment Review Commission and payment of excessive refunds.

Curran signed an executive order that sets the level of assessment for residential properties at .1 percent and the assessment level for commercial properties at 1 percent, according to a county statement.

The changes are an attempt to get back to fair-market values, after a county freeze on assessment levels in 2011 that's handcuffed the system ever since.

During that time, real estate values increased dramatically, creating a big discrepancy between market values used by the county in determining assessments and actual market values. Curran says the combination of the frozen roll and mass settlements severely degraded the accuracy and integrity of assessments and shifted the tax burden disproportionately.

"The county needs a defensible assessment roll to stop the cycle of mass settlements and borrowing that has left an already cash-strapped county with over \$700 million in cert (certiorari) debt," Curran said in the statement. "The prior administration left the county with a corrupted assessment roll from its eight-year degradation of prop-

erty values. I am committed to developing a strong financial plan that eliminates debt to pay for future property tax refunds."

Curran signed an executive order in March 2018 to unfreeze the assessment roll and begin a reassessment of the more than 400,000 residential and commercial properties in the county. Curran originally agreed to a .25 percent level of assessment for residential properties, but adjusted that to .1 percent after an extensive review by Moog.

"The change will ensure a consistent level of assessment whether or not a resident completes the grievance process," Moog said in the statement.

Besides setting new assessment levels, Curran is seeking legislative action from the state that will further ease the transition for property owners.

"We need taxpayer protections from the state and will seek help from our state representatives to protect our residents during this transition," Curran said in the statement. "We look forward to working with the members of the Senate and Assembly on this important legislation."

Curran also wants the county legislature to approve a contract for a software program that provides residents with a fuller understanding of their assessments. Residents would be able to access the web-based system from their home computers, smartphones and tablets.

Laureen Harris, president of the Association for a Better Long Island and a tax certiorari specialist with the Cronin, Cronin, Harris & O'Brien law firm, the change will allow the county more flexibility in its assessment system.

"For residential properties, it is an abso-



Photo courtesy of Nassau County

**LAURA CURRAN AND DAVID MOOG: The county needs a defensible assessment roll.**

lute laudable goal for the county to try and reflect fair market values," Harris said. "The devil is in the details. That would be the effect of the .1 percent residential assessment ratio when married to the state-mandated 6 percent cap on assessment."

Harris added that impact from the change in assessment levels for commercial property is tougher to weigh.

"It's much more complex on the commercial side because we're in the midst of a cultural change in the way people shop. And

the fate of brick and mortar, whether it be retail or office, is still unknown."

Curran continues to encourage residents to make sure their property assessments are accurate.

"Property owners will absolutely keep their right to grieve their assessments," Curran said. "Property owners, however, shouldn't have to file a claim to be treated fairly. That's our job. A correct, defensible assessment roll accomplishes that goal."

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## County moves to advance new Coliseum plan

By DAVID WINZELBERG

Nassau County Executive Laura Curran is proposing amendments to the Nassau Coliseum lease to pave the way for the latest plan to redevelop more than 60 acres around the Uniondale arena.

The Nassau Legislature will need to approve the changes to allow RXR Realty and BSE Global to move ahead with their \$1.5 billion mixed-use proposal.

RXR and BSE, which leases the Coliseum property, have pitched a plan to build 500 units of housing, 600,000 square feet of office space and 200,000 square feet of retail and restaurant space.

The amendments change the lease agreement with BSE to reflect the size of the redevelopment site to 66 acres, minus the 5 acres being used for the Memorial Sloan Kettering complex currently under construction, according to a county statement. It also adds in the \$85 million in state funds promised by Empire State Development Corp. to build parking structures to make up for the loss of surface parking at the site.

Curran is also seeking additional state funds for pedestrian bridges, which would

connect the Coliseum property with Hofstra University, Nassau Community College and nearby offices. The county is also seeking to secure economic incentives from the state to assist a corporate tenant.

Mt. Sinai Health Network has expressed interest in establishing a 100,000-square-foot medical research facility at the site. Mt. Sinai had previously signed a letter of interest to lease 100,000 square feet at the Coliseum property with Syosset-based Blumenfeld Development Group, which had pitched a similar redevelopment plan. However BDG's proposal was rejected by the county in May. Instead, the county issued a request for expressions of interest to redevelop the site in June.

"As council, we are studying these actions and their potential legal implications," said attorney Ronald Rosenberg of Garden City law firm Rosenberg Calica & Birney, which represents BDG.

"The Legislature's approval of these amendments is critical to moving forward with this top-notch development team and to getting shovels in the ground at the Hub as soon as possible," Curran said in the

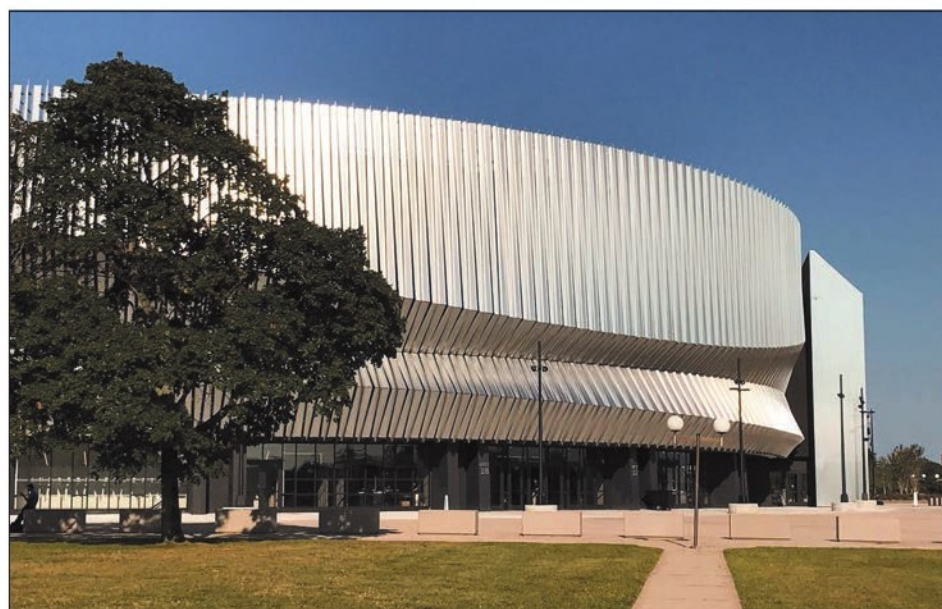


Photo by David Winzelberg

**The plan calls for 500 units of housing, 600,000 square feet of office space and 200,000 square feet of retail and restaurant space around the arena.**

statement. "Development at the Hub is essential to creating jobs and growing the county's tax base."

Brett Yormark, CEO of BSE Global said his company is looking forward to getting started on the project.

"By combining the vision of the county

executive and RXR, we are primed to build a project that can serve generations of Long Islanders to come through a combination of uses, including transformational commercial office space and destination and experiential retail," Yormark said in the statement.

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