

October 31, 2011

When newsmakers release a report late on a Friday afternoon, chances are it's usually not something that puts them in the best light. Stories released in the classic "Friday afternoon dump", as the cynical strategy is called, are purposely intended to be a one day story published over the week end. Such may well be the case of the Long Island Economic Council's release on late Friday October 14th of its proposal it subtitled "Nassau Hub Transformative Project" but which could be subtitled "Dump into Belmont Park All Pet Projects."

Hofstra University President Stuart Rabinowitz, who has apparently ignored the call to step aside as co-chairman of the Long Island Economic Council, must take some "credit" for the plan his group released on a recent Friday afternoon. Hofstra University's 220 acres of not-for-profit property on Hempstead Turnpike is adjacent to the 77 acre site of the Nassau Coliseum that is owned by the taxpayers of Nassau County. The Long Island Economic Council's report is proposing that the Nassau Coliseum site be changed to a new research and development complex. Even more disturbing is the suggestion that the Nassau Coliseum, which since 1972 has been the heart of the entire development, could be moved from "the Hub" to Belmont Park!

The suggestion that Nassau Veterans Memorial Coliseum, built for under \$32 million in 1972, should make way for Hofstra's grand vision for its own neighboring 77 acre site is incredible! As our Statement of Principles on Belmont Park has already referenced; when Yankee Stadium was replaced, it was rebuilt across the street and when the New York Mets home was replaced, it was replaced in its own existing parking lot.

The current Nassau Coliseum, which originally contained 409,963 square feet of floor area, can be replaced at the same place it already exists by a state of the art entertainment center. Representatives of the Shinnecock Indian Nation have also expressed interest in obtaining a portion of the Nassau County "Hub" site to construct a casino. What was predicted at its opening in *The New York Times* to become "the Disneyland of Nassau County" could finally become a reality. There are also over 6,000 parking spaces at Nassau Coliseum. So the proposal by the group, led by Hofstra's President, that \$150 million from New York's taxpayers should be used to build a new 6,000 space parking garage at the very same site where they already exist, sounds absurd.

Belmont Park, which opened in 1905, has been called the Taj Mahal of American Racing by *Sports Illustrated* and was envisioned by August Belmont, Jr., William Whitney and other horse owners to be enjoyed by future generations as much as Central Park, Prospect Park or Van Cortland Park. The "vision" of Hofstra University Rabinowitz's group, however, is to turn Belmont Park into an all you can eat buffet line full of half-baked ideas.

The less than 400 words that the Long Island Economic Council dedicates to Belmont Park in its 32 page report demonstrates the lack of consideration they have given it. Their report even rather sloppily refers to Belmont Park as “Belmont Raceway”. Any thoroughbred horse fan knows a “raceway” is for trotters or NASCAR races, while the sport of kings is run on a track. The cursory references to Belmont Park also suggest that a casino be built as well as a stadium for a semi professional soccer team. Perhaps the planning group also does not realize that the 10,000 seat stadium at Mitchel Field was built for a professional soccer team. Once again, why recreate at Belmont Park what already exists at the Hub? If a semi-professional soccer team is interested in playing in Nassau County, perhaps Hofstra’s President could offer the use of the 13,000 seat stadium at Hofstra University, since it has disbanded its highly regarded football team. The new soccer team could even use the practice facilities where the New York Jets used to play, since they are no longer at Hofstra either.

As to the suggestion for the location of a casino in Nassau County, if Nassau County planners are eager to obtain a steady revenue windfall from a casino, then the first place it should be built is on land already owned and controlled by Nassau County. Just because Hofstra University President Stuart Rabinowitz does not want a casino at the Hub near Hofstra does not mean it cannot be done there.

Keep the Nassau Coliseum where the Nassau Coliseum is now. If Nassau County wants a casino, it should be built on its own land at the Hub and not at Belmont Park.

October 17, 2011

Hofstra University President Stuart Rabinowitz is being called upon by the Floral Park Task Force on the Development and Preservation of Belmont Park to immediately recuse himself from the Long Island Economic Development Council and to cease any further involvement with the group, especially concerning the potential location of a casino or moving the Nassau Veterans Memorial Coliseum from its present 77 acre site, which is adjacent to Hofstra's 220 acre campus, to Belmont Park, which is owned by the State of New York. The Long Island Economic Development Council, which is co-chaired by Hofstra's president, was launched this past July by New York Governor Andrew Cuomo, as one of ten regional planning group competing for \$1 Billion in state funding earmarked for local projects they determine to be part of their regional strategy. The Floral Park Task Force was formed as a result of the State of New York's taking over control of Belmont Park from NYRA in 2008, and as a hosting neighboring community, Floral Park has been very concerned about the various plans that have been discussed concerning the future of Belmont Park.

Hofstra University President Stuart Rabinowitz has been the co-chairman of this important planning group that has been advising Governor Andrew Cuomo on Long Island's regional priorities, including the prioritizing the potential inclusion of Nassau County's 77 acre site that is currently occupied by the Nassau Veterans Memorial Coliseum. This past summer, the tax payers of Nassau County soundly defeated a referendum proposing that a new arena be built at its current site to replace the Coliseum, which was built in 1972. The New York Islanders have threatened to move if they are unable to play in a new arena when their current lease with Nassau County expires. There have been several proposals made concerning "the Hub" including the Lighthouse plan proposed by the New York Islanders' owner Charles Wang, which was dramatically scaled back after a thorough review by the Town of Hempstead.

Representatives of the Shinnecock Indian Nation have also discussed having 40 acres of the Hub site set aside in order to build a casino. Hofstra President Rabinowitz has said, "We're not only opposed to a casino [near] Hofstra University, but we have every intention of fighting it" according to Newsday [June 11, 2010]. Hofstra University President Rabinowitz has also told the New York Times that the prospect of an adjacent casino would be 'awful' and that scholars and researchers "would not be attracted to live in an area where there were busloads of New York City people coming to gamble." NYT [July 23, 2010].

While there are a host of projects in need of such funding on Long Island, under the leadership of Hofstra's President, the planning group has apparently focused its initial attention on the 77 acre site which is adjacent to Hofstra University's 220 acre campus on Hempstead Turnpike. In the Long Island Regional Development Council's submission of its 32 page report, less than 400 words are dedicated to the development and future of Belmont Park. Whatever the merits of redeveloping the 77 acre Hub site to fit nicely into the vision that not for profit landowner Hofstra University has for its own future, Hofstra's President must not be the one leading the planning group making such decisions.

Floral Park has set forth its position. We support maintaining Belmont Park as a world class thoroughbred racing facility, as it has been for over a century. Floral Park submitted its

Statement of Principles to the State of New York in 2007, demanding that any discussions concerning the future of Belmont Park include its hosting communities in Western Nassau County. We respectfully, but unequivocally, call for Hofstra University President Stuart Rabinowitz to step aside and resign in order that the process leading to any proposed changes at Belmont Park are made transparently and fairly to ensure the communities surrounding Belmont Park are given the same consideration as Hofstra University has apparently been granted in determining the future of its neighboring 77 acre Coliseum site.

October 10, 2011

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The tenth and final principle relates to oversight and transparency. This principle speaks to more than just a measure of trust; this is a requirement that must be memorialized into law. The State of New York, its governor and elected state representatives, has a moral obligation to fairly and equitably represent the interests of all New Yorkers. Our 2007 Statement of Principles speaks to the fundamental issues of fairness. The analysis of this tenth principle articulates the apparently deliberate yet inequitable treatment the surrounding communities of Belmont Park are subject to when compared with other - State owned; NYRA operated - thoroughbred racing facilities.

TRANSPARENT RESPONSIVE OVERSIGHT CREATES COMMUNITY TRUST

X. The neighboring communities must be involved and considered in any significant change of operations or activities at the facilities. The facilities must be subject to formal local oversight and review to consider all proposed additions, renovations or demolitions at the sites. There should be the establishment of a corporate ethics compliance official and a local community liaison who will be available to the surrounding communities to ensure implementation of both the letter and spirit of this Statement of Principles.

One of the most disappointing aspects of the State of New York's taking over effective control of the 435 acre Belmont Park from NYRA has been the continued lack of transparency associated with its current and future operations. As one of Floral Park's elected representatives, it is frustrating to learn that the Shinnecock Indian Nation was holding informational meetings about their plans at Belmont Park without any representative from the Village of Floral Park being invited to participate. We have made our displeasure known, however, to representatives of Senator Jack Martins, NYRA as well as those knowledgeable about the Shinnecock Indian Nation's proposal. While we are optimistic that promises that representatives from the Village of Floral Park, in recognition of our status as a host community of Belmont Park, will not be "inadvertently" omitted from any future discussions concerning Belmont Park, we would be more at ease if those assurances were written into law rather than merely expressions of apparently good intentions.

Ironically, when the State of New York passed the legislation in 2008 to take over control of Saratoga, Aqueduct and Belmont Park from NYRA, and while a new local community advisory board was created for the communities surrounding Saratoga and Aqueduct, once again the communities surrounding Belmont Park were unbelievably, left out in the cold! Despite the submission of our Statement of Principles in 2007 to the State of New York, which clearly expresses Floral Park's interest in participating in such an advisory board for Belmont Park, the governor signed the bill on February 13, 2008 without establishing a similar advisory board for Belmont Park. We immediately raised the issue with Senator Craig Johnson, who represented our community at the time. Thereafter he introduced an amendment to establish a 15 member

advisory board for Belmont Park, of which 4 members were to be designated by the Mayor of Floral Park, with the approval of Floral Park's entire Board of Trustees. In addition to the 4 designees from Floral Park, 4 would be designated from the Town of Hempstead (3 of whom reside within the Hempstead hamlet of Elmont); 4 would be designees of the Elmont Community Coalition of Civics and 3 would be designated by NYRA itself.

Once again the mysterious ways of Albany resulted in a failure to pass bill S.766-2009 creating a local advisory board for Belmont Park. Now that representatives of the Shinnecock Indian Nation have proposed construction of a casino and hotel facilities at Belmont Park, along with who knows what other changes the backroom discussions in Albany may be scheming to foist upon the communities surrounding Belmont Park in the future, the need of Floral Park to have a formal role as host community of Belmont Park is now greater than ever. While we would want any group overseeing the developments at Belmont Park to include a corporate ethics compliance official and a local community liaison who will be available to the surrounding communities to ensure implementation of both the letter and spirit of this Statement of Principles, at least having a formal board would be a good start. Why the neighbors of Saratoga and Aqueduct have been given a formal voice in what takes place there, while the State of New York continues to ignore the neighbors of Belmont Park begins to look more like an act of commission rather than an inadvertent act of omission. Even a barn yard dog at Belmont Park knows when it has been accidentally tripped over and when it is purposefully kicked; so do the communities surrounding Belmont Park. It's about time the State of New York demonstrates that they will treat us like a member of the family rather than being left out in the cold in Belmont Park's barn yard dog house. They should know by now that our bite will surely be worse than just our bark!