

COMMENTARY

Create an innovation district at the Nassau Hub



**Charles
STRAIN**

The opportunity to redevelop the Nassau Hub's Coliseum site into a proposed biotech park is an extraordinary one that can be a major catalyst for economic growth on Long Island, if we get it right. That means designing it so that it is not another office park but a true innovation district: a walkable mixed-use neighborhood that capitalizes on Long Island's strengths in research, healthcare, and biotech; provides a range of housing to attract the talent that we need, including recent college graduates; and offers public transit to connect it easily to New York City and the region.

The timing is perfect, as Long Island is emerging as a remarkably vibrant setting for the sciences that relate to health and healthcare. Long Island already has nearly 300 biotech companies employing almost 24,000 people.

As chair of NYU Winthrop Hospital, I watch this evolution with excitement about the dynamic environment that Long Island is becoming. Not only do we have a wealth of renowned institutions related to science and health, but they are increasingly collaborating to create a culture of innovation.

The Long Island Bioscience Hub, for instance, is a partnership between the Center for Biotechnology, Stony Brook University, Cold Spring Harbor Laboratory, Brookhaven National Laboratory, and the Feinstein Institute for

Medical Research. Cold Spring Harbor Laboratory has created an affiliation with Northwell Health to accelerate cancer research, diagnosis and treatment. The Hofstra Northwell School of Medicine attained full accreditation in 2015. And Winthrop-University Hospital completed its affiliation with NYU Langone Health System earlier this year.

Within this fertile environment, the Nassau Hub's biotech park can play a crucial role as a focal point of innovation, a magnet for other institutions and collaborations and a visual representation of Long Island's dynamism. Memorial Sloan Kettering Cancer Center has started to build a major cancer treatment facility there and New York State recently approved \$85 million for the construction of parking garages that will free up about 20 acres of land for further development.

But what's vital is that the biotech park becomes a true innovation district – one that can be transformational for the Long Island economy – and not just a collection of office buildings. A new study by the Long Island Index titled "Nassau Hub Innovation District" underscores that point. It calls for current plans to be augmented with a critical mass of multifamily housing, more flexible R&D space and a new bus rapid transit service called the Hubway to connect the Coliseum site to the Mineola LIRR station.

Those actions would convert the site into a 24-hour live-work-play district that can accommodate start-up businesses and the talent they attract and link them to other resources in the region. The study found that such an innovation district would create 14,300 high-quality jobs in Nassau County and

generate more than \$3.4 billion in economic activity statewide. It would also stimulate additional development beyond the Coliseum site to the broader hub area.

What makes the Coliseum site so special and pivotal for Long Island's economic growth is that it encompasses 77 acres of prime property about 20 miles from New York City and it is controlled by Nassau County and the Town of Hempstead. That makes it the most important undeveloped asset on Long Island.

Its location is also ideal in other respects. It is adjacent to Hofstra University and its Hofstra Northwell School of Medicine and Fred DeMatteis *School of Engineering* and Applied Science; it is accessible to nearby Nassau Community College; it has immediate access to Meadowbrook State Parkway and is a short drive to the Route 110 biotech corridor and Republic Airport.

All of this creates an opportunity that is without parallel. As I sit in my office overlooking the Coliseum site, I see a sea of parking lots and imagine a day when this could be the site of one of the most innovative districts in America – galvanizing and stimulating one of the most dynamic economies in the nation.

It's not a pipedream; it's a distinct and very real possibility. The challenge is to seize the opportunity and create an innovation district that can become a major catalyst for the rejuvenation of the Long Island economy in the 21st century.

Strain is a partner in the Uniondale-based law firm of Farrell Fritz and chairman of the board of NYU Winthrop Hospital in Mineola.