

# Islip aims to upgrade MacArthur

Town to seek \$60M in federal funds for airport

BY ANTONIO PLANAS  
antonio.planas@newsday.com

Islip Town officials plan to seek \$60 million in federal funds to build a 100,000-square-foot concourse and upgrade existing facilities at Long Island MacArthur Airport to attract more customers and new airlines.

Among the proposals discussed by the town board are designating \$5 million in the 2019 preliminary capital budget for design costs of a new west concourse — replacing the existing 8,200-square-foot building constructed in 1990 — and an additional \$1 million for design costs for upgrades at the airport's baggage claim terminal.

Airport Commissioner Shelley LaRose-Arken said she's hoping to move forward with the proposals next year by securing \$6 million in bonding. Officials would then seek designers for the two projects, LaRose-Arken said.

Adopting bond resolutions and accepting contracts for the design of the projects would have to be approved by the town board, LaRose-Arken said.

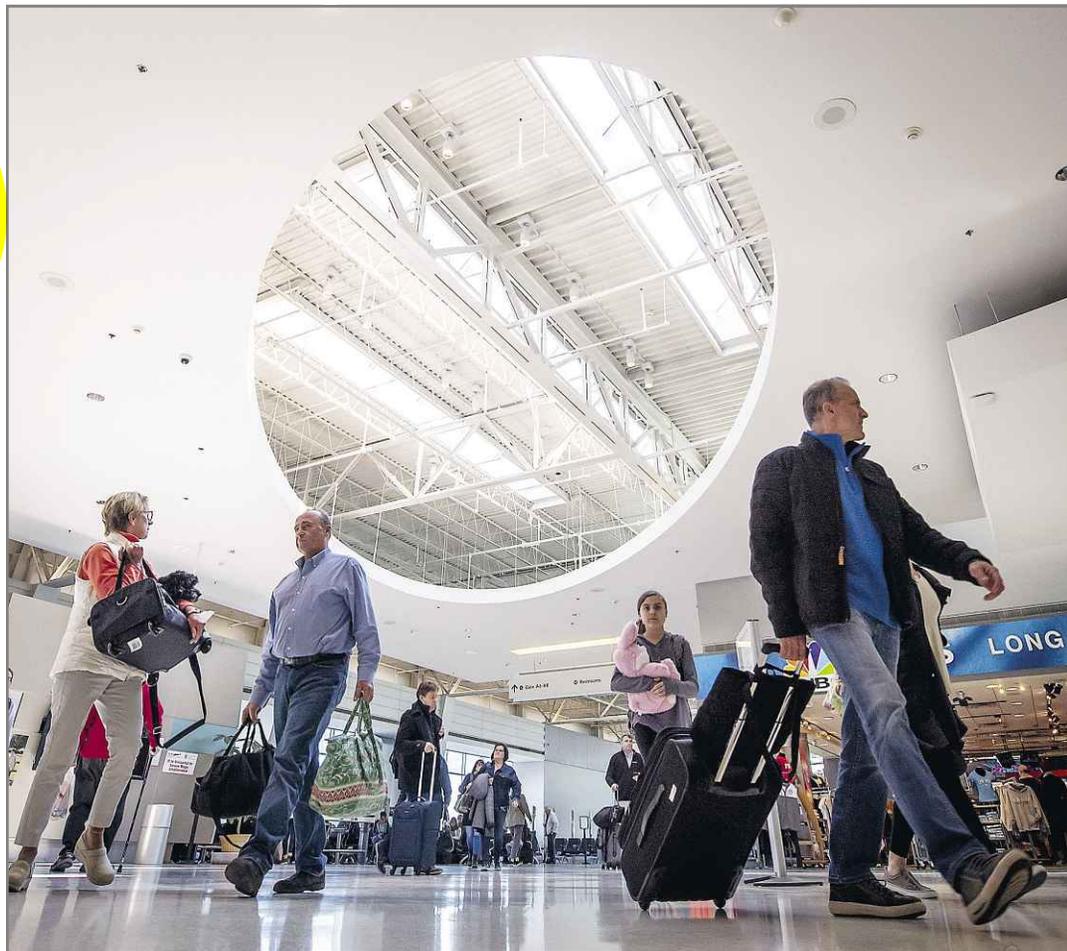
If bond measures are passed and designers are contracted, MacArthur would move up the priority list to compete for funding from a \$1 billion grant program overseen by the Federal Aviation Administration. The grant program targets money for capital projects considered secondary airports such as MacArthur.

The airport would seek \$50 million from the program for construction of the concourse and an additional \$10 million for upgrades to the baggage claim area, including replacing its roof and vestibule doors, LaRose-Arken said.

If Islip board members pass bond resolutions, the \$6 million would be reimbursed by funds from the passenger facility program, a \$4.50 ticket tax, LaRose-Arken said.

The Ronkonkoma airport has struggled to attract and keep airlines and struggled financially, but last year recorded a surplus and announced added flights.

"We have to change with the



About 1.6 million people are projected to use MacArthur Airport this year, an airport official said.

industry," she said. "We have to go out and recruit new [airline] carriers. And we have to look at the N.Y. metro area and get more people to come out and use this airport." Airlines now using MacArthur include American, Southwest, Frontier and Elite Airways.

About 1.1 million passengers used MacArthur in 2017. An estimated 1.6 million are projected to use the airport this year, LaRose-Arken said.

Islip Comptroller Joseph Ludwig told board members at

their meeting last week the FAA is looking for "shovel-ready projects," which could mean funding the entire \$60 million cost for construction of the projects.

"The hope is that we will have this design study done in time, so that we can tap into some of that billion-dollar surplus money," Ludwig said.

LaRose-Arken said planning for the new concourse and renovations are only in the beginning stages, but construction could be completed by 2022.

The design for the new concourse could include a two-level building, she said. Each 50,000-square-foot level could include three gates and three new jet bridges. The existing concourse is more than 10 times smaller than the proposed facility and was meant to be a temporary structure, LaRose-Arken said.

"We don't want to miss this opportunity," she said. "This is the time — we are competing with all the secondary airports in the country."

## Villages sue Nassau over sales tax revenue

BY JESSE COBURN  
jesse.coburn@newsday.com

Freeport is leading dozens of villages in a \$21.5 million lawsuit against Nassau County and its three towns over allegations that the county shortchanged the villages in distributing sales tax revenue.

The lawsuit, filed in late October, states the county "unlawfully and arbitrarily withheld tax revenue from the Villages" meant to help them keep local property taxes low and defray

the cost of municipal solid waste services and environmental control.

The legal action, which now involves 27 villages, also names Hempstead, North Hempstead and Oyster Bay towns as defendants over allegations Nassau counted the village populations as part of the town populations in divvying up sales tax revenue, which unfairly inflated the amount the towns received.

"I just want to see that the Village of Freeport gets its fair and equitable share," Mayor

Robert Kennedy said. "This has been going on for many, many years, and it has to stop somewhere."

Spokesmen for Nassau County and Oyster Bay said they could not comment on pending litigation. A North Hempstead spokeswoman and a Hempstead Town spokesman declined to comment.

The Nassau County sales tax rate is 4.25 percent, according to the state Department of Taxation and Finance. Nassau should direct one-third of 0.75

percent of revenue to towns and cities and as much as one-sixth of the 0.75 percent to the villages, according to a 2015 report by the Office of the New York State Comptroller.

Freeport Village Attorney Howard Colton said the county and villages previously negotiated the amount transmitted to the villages, but former County Executive Edward Mangano's administration did not, and sent only about \$120,000 in sales tax revenue to Freeport annually. In 2017, the county

sent the village no sales tax revenue at all, he said.

The Nassau Interim Finance Authority warned in October that the county could have a \$59 million deficit next year.

The average sales tax rate in New York State — including both the state and local portions — is 8.45 percent, according to the state comptroller report.

Nassau and Suffolk counties have some of the highest sales tax rates in the state, per the report.