

Willetts Pt. is more sensible choice for Jets stadium

By Corey Bearak

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I visit stadiums on vacations the way my friend Dennis visits lighthouses. Vacationing this month, I toured ProPlayer Stadium, home of brother Richard's favorite Miami Dolphins and World Series Champion Florida Marlins.



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Like the Yankees and my Mets and Jets, the Marlins seek a new stadium. Government officials there seemed as poised as their New York counterparts to deliver. Nothing changed since I left Queens to visit mom in Florida: I still find it a folly to convey taxpayer monies to private sports team owners to build them a stadium so they can buy a few more free agents or just pocket the cash from tickets, television, radio, cable and merchandising.

I visited ProPlayer Stadium less than a week after I opined in Newsday that an Olympic/Jets stadium works next to Shea, not at all on Manhattan's Far West Side. As previous travels to Baltimore and Cleveland confirmed, it demonstrates how Willetts Point surpasses any other site when it comes to siting a sports stadium.

During our side trip to South Beach, I found the Miami Beach SunPost in the Kent Hotel (around the corner from the late Gianni Versace's mansion on Ocean Boulevard, for those who read gossip columns or watch E!) where Rachele and I stayed while leaving Jonathan and Marisa with their grandma in Del Ray Beach.

The April 6 lead editorial raised questions about a baseball stadium for the Marlins ("Striking Out on a Baseball Stadium"). Evidently, the Marlins seek to hold up Miami and Dade County for at least \$73 million toward a baseball stadium. Floridians don't know how easy they have it when the Jets, our mayor and governor want to hold us up for at least \$600 million and several billion more when you add in infrastructure costs and the MTA rail yard's air rights value.

The Marlins pledge \$137 million toward the overall stadium cost but rejected sites Miami proposed, including the former Miami Arena site surrounded by parking lots. Just like the Jets and NYC2012, which want to build on public property, the Marlins want their monument on waterfront parkland. Many major sports team owners think they can get electeds and taxpayers to play the fool.

The difference between New York and Miami is the plan. Miami lacks, as the Miami Beach SunPost states, "a more coherent strategy" for funding a private stadium. Absent the opposition of community groups, Broadway theater owners, economists, environmentalists, advocates for housing, schools and transportation, the Bloomberg-Pataki handoff might score.

Despite the public dollars giveaway, a labor leader and assemblyman I greatly respect favors the project for the union jobs that building a stadium and related infrastructure create. A Queens councilman who chairs the Finance Committee found favor with the mayor and his deputy mayor for Economic Development and Rebuilding by releasing a Council Finance Committee “analysis” that touted this wasteful scheme’s benefits.

Reporting by our dailies exposed this mere review of the Jets’ self-interested fiscal advocacy.

My friends Brian McLaughlin and David Weprin have our best interests at heart, but facts tell another story: A new Olympics/Jets stadium at Willets Point realizes more jobs.

Building the stadium in Queens actually allows the original, more sensible Javits expansion plan as financing becomes available. Development in Queens will spur private investment east and west along Roosevelt Avenue in Corona and the Flushing Bay and River waterfronts.

A Willets Point stadium means the demise of the very risky tax increment financing scheme that promises to repay public borrowing from the new property taxes realized by increased property values on the Far West Side.

Based on location alone, the Far West Side will naturally develop. And the tax dollars the city intends to devote to the private facility for the Jets and infrastructure diverts our dollars desperately needed for core services, affordable housing, new schools and the Second Avenue Subway, to cite just a few priorities.

Sometimes, otherwise caring and competent officials go down — lose office or stature or both — when they stay too long with a folly.

After my Newsday op-ed (Thank you, Spencer Rumsey!), Mayor Michael Bloomberg e-mailed: “The problem is the Jets don’t want to move to Queens, the cost of building is roughly the same (contaminated swamp problems), and this is not about the Jets, it’s about getting an addition to Javits that seats about 75,000 people so we can get the 50 biggest conventions to come here. As a jobs program for this city, nothing we can do is as important.”

Many New Yorkers want the Olympics and a new Jets stadium as much if not more than Bloomberg and his deputy, Dan Doctoroff. It only works in Queens. Let’s hope the mayor sees the light soon.

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