

Willets Pt. stadium supporters must rev up voices

06/24/2004

After more than one year of “The Public Ought to Know” columns, why not look at how government, policy makers and others in the media paid attention, or not.

City Hall continues to press for a stadium on the far West Side of Manhattan despite the impracticability of that site and the unique and obvious suitability of the site at Shea Stadium in Queens advocated in two columns. The battle involves big bucks, competing television commercials, high-paid consultants and self-interested wealthy moguls.

Public beware. While Charles and James Dolan of Cablevision, who own Madison Square Garden, support (and fund) efforts to block the Bloomberg-Doctoroff stadium next to the Javits Convention Center, their advocacy and that of many community-minded West Side residents centers on blocking a stadium — not on getting what we in Queens welcome.

Queens residents who support the stadium option at Shea need to rev up their voices, not be cogs in a fight between two corporate titans. The merits of this fight demand that our borough’s voices and advocates step out front and center while Cablevision and Mr. Robert Wood Johnson IV, the owner of my beloved Jets, duke it out.

That fight involves land, which remains a major resource in Queens. Land and its uses generate revenue and fuel our borough economy. When City Hall and the Port Authority announced a deal to renew the PA’s operation of LaGuardia and Kennedy airports, they did not want to include the communities.

This column raised the requirement for City Council approval; Queens residents who find the projects and other sweeteners in the lease extension less to their liking can turn to their city legislators to express their concerns. As a result of pressure from local community boards and politicians, Queens council members got the Port Authority to agree to renegotiate the amount of money Queens would get out of the lease deal.

Another column discussed how property taxes and assessments influence market values. It raised strong objections to the mayor’s 18.5 percent hike, which is really more than 22 percent on homeowners. It recommended reform proposals, and a great part of the city budget debate that remains unresolved at this writing centers on competing mayoral and City Council speaker plans to return some of that hike.

Interestingly, the mayor advocates a rebate after complaining about the Council’s absentee owner surcharge he agreed to include in last year’s budget and later got the Council’s acquiescence to delay as part of a mid-year budget deal. A rebate is really no different in philosophy than the surcharge, since both proposals treat owners who occupy their homes and co-ops better than those who own but rent the space out or use the home solely as a business.

The consensus for differential treatment of those who own and live in their homes vs. those who seek to profit by the lower assessment rates of homes should keep the debate focused on this column's recommendation to reform the property tax, restore fairness to the system that produces inequitable assessments and rescind the across-the-board hike City Hall foisted upon all taxpayers (without gutting the city treasury).

And in April this column threw its weight behind a bill to prohibit racial profiling by city law enforcement agencies. A bit self-interested because this columnist wrote the original bill? Perhaps. But the merits of the issue prevailed, and the Council and City Hall negotiated and agreed on legislation that the Public Safety Committee, chaired by Councilman Peter Vallone Jr. (D-Astoria), passed June 2 and presented to the full Council five days later with a vote expected by the end of this month.

Absent a mayoral surprise, expect the mayor to sign into law this legislation originally proposed a few weeks short of three years ago by then Bronx Borough President Fernando Ferrer. The key difference involves the absence of reporting requirements from the original bill to the amended version; effective City Council and Civilian Complaint Review Board oversight could obviate any need to revisit that omission.

The statement of city policy that the legislation sends once it becomes law this summer sends the right message to those communities where we need to strengthen police-community relations.

And as winter began, this column focused on excessive noise that wrecks the "quiet enjoyment" of life in many of our neighborhoods. Six months later, the mayor and the speaker announced legislation to address much of the noise that may impair our ability to sleep late or at all. The Council's Committee on Environmental Protection, chaired by Councilman James Gennaro (D-Fresh Meadows), who followed noise issues in a prior life as a Council staffer, gets first crack at making sure we get workable legislation.

Perhaps we can look forward to a quiet fall and maybe my son, Jonathan, will not call me on vacation to complain about noisy lawn care devices in the middle of winter.

Another year. A few more issues to explore. Offer your recommendations. Maybe you have a recommendation for reform that the public ought to know.

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