

The Public Ought to Know: Jets stadium plan inappropriate for far West Side

By Corey Bearak

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City Hall remains fixated on a so-called New York Sports and Convention Center on Manhattan's far West Side. This proposal threatens to torpedo our city's Olympic bid. It also diverts the attention of many high-level city officials from other needs as they scheme for a site that makes no sense.

Memo to Mayor Mike: Drop the West Side Stadium for the Jets and the Olympics; move it to Willets Points, Queens. Succeed in your Olympic bid championed by Deputy Mayor Daniel Doctoroff.

The well-respected Regional Plan Association and the American Planning Association (New York chapter) find the Jets/2012 Olympics sports complex inappropriate. It remains speculative whether the NYC2012 bid will succeed.

This summer New York's oldest good-government group, the Citizens Union, advocated a City Council vote on the entire far West Side development plan; the current items for Council review do not include the far West Side stadium.

A city Independent Budget Office report this summer found the city's far West Side scheme financing to be more costly.

Big bucks finance both sides of the debate, including dueling television ads. Cablevision supports - some argue created - New York Association for Better Choices, which also opposes the far West Side site. Cablevision owns Madison Square Garden, the Knicks and Rangers and provides cable television to the Bronx and part of Brooklyn.

The Jets and NYC2012, backed by some labor and real estate interests, support Doctoroff's scheme.

I remain unaffiliated in advocating a Queens stadium. A fervent Jets fan, I drafted this column at my Community Board 13 meeting wearing the Jets cap Queens Olympic Committee Chairman Dave Oats gave me last month.

An important personal matter caused Oats to reschedule a talk at one of my local Democratic clubs to "preview" the Queens Olympic Committee proposal for a new stadium in place of Shea. Since I wrote three columns here and one for Newsday, I spoke in his stead.

Without endorsing it, I noted the Queens Olympic Committee plan involves one stadium to meet the needs of the Jets, the Mets and the Olympics. The committee unveiled its plan this past weekend at the Queens Museum of Art.

It could work, but my advocacy does not preclude two stadiums: one for the Mets and the other to serve the Jets and the Olympics. Private money should fund whatever gets built.

Oats probably picked the Queens Museum of Art to unveil the Queens alternative because Mayor Michael Bloomberg revealed changes to the NYC2012 bid there in August.

The city made other changes in its Olympic bid, including lower high-rise units in the Hunters Point, Queens Olympic Village, switching gymnastics competitions from Madison Square Garden to the proposed Atlantic Yards Arena in Brooklyn where the Nets hope to land and moving aquatics from Astoria to Williamsburg, Brooklyn.

Oats' not so subtle message: The city can and has revised its 2012 bid to improve its chances. Move the stadium to Queens; everybody wins.

Returning from Englewood, N.J., where I was in the A&E "Live by Request" with John Fogerty audience with fellow Queensites Ted, Kirby and Barry, my friend Steve noticed the Henry Hudson Parkway becoming the Joe DiMaggio Highway.

That caused me to recall attempts by the previous mayor to build a far West Side Stadium for the Yankees. Those efforts failed and now the Yankees look to build anew in the Bronx.

The NYC2012 stadium scheme represents another ruse to help drive the development on the far West Side, where 20,000 people live and more than 40,000 work.

The far West Side, home to many service industries that benefit the city as a whole, lends itself to natural development if left to market forces. No need exists to devote precious government, planning and financial resources there.

The far West Side scheme includes other elements that would divert anticipated revenue that could fund other city needs. This includes schools, libraries, more cops and firefighters and, perhaps, tree-pruning. If the financing fails, not an impossibility, even more of our tax dollars, including from Queens, would be diverted to subsidize the far West Side scheme.

Our pockets ought not to be picked to support a private sports stadium or developers when the benefits net little if any money for municipal needs. And while we're talking subsidy or tax breaks, revisit the longtime exemption awarded Madison Square Garden; it also makes no sense.

The city can win the Olympics. The Jets can get the stadium, but in Queens. Wouldn't it be nice? Willets Point has all the right elements: highways, light rail, subway and ferry access. Revise the bid, Mr. Mayor, before it gets too late.

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