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The Public Ought to Know: Don't link Stadium to city Olympic bid

By Corey Bearak

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Corey Bearak

Avid readers know I question a Far West Side stadium, but unlike many who oppose that folly, I support New York City hosting the Olympics. Early columns touted Queens as the best Olympic stadium site, replacing or in tandem with Shea Stadium, home of the resurgent New York Mets.

Mayor Michael Bloomberg and Deputy Mayor for Economic Development Daniel Doctoroff contend that stadium opponents, if successful or just plain loud and contrary over the next several months, would cause the city to lose out on being selected by the International Olympic Committee. These dedicated public servants should look more closely in the mirror - a vision problem perhaps.

Mayor Mike and Doctoroff - his deputy mayor for the Olympics as cure-all for the city's economy - question the intentions of stadium opponents: they want construction on the misplaced stadium now to influence the International Olympic Committee to select The Big Apple.

Our officials are concerned by the delays in two needed state approvals and the Jets' recent dance with the New Jersey Sports and Exposition Authority, hosted by that state's interim governor, who would like to take credit for keeping both football teams with New York monikers that play west of the Hudson River. Expect easier negotiations with Richard Codey with no plans to run than an elected governor who must face the voters.

Those state approvals certainly await resolution of the valuation of the Metropolitan Transportation Authority's rail yards; this includes the Empire State Development Corp. ,controlled by Gov. Pataki, who supports the stadium, and the Public Authorities Control Board consisting of the governor, state Sen. Majority Leader Joseph Bruno from upstate Saratoga and Assembly Speaker Sheldon Silver, who represents downtown Manhattan. The MTA recently seemed to realize its responsibility to secure fair market value - top dollar - for the site. This only occurred after public outcry, calls for referendums on whether to site the stadium and for open bidding on the site and self-interested opponent Cablevision, owner of Madison Square Garden, made its own bid.

The city and Jets want the MTA to deduct the cost of building a platform over the rail yards. They argue that the land remains worthless without it. It appears a little history lesson may be in order.

Does anyone recall what happened over the Grand Central rail yards? The construction there involved no overall platform with new buildings placed on top as proposed for the far West Side. Every building over the Grand Central yards created its own platform and sank its own pilings and columns, depending on the engineering requirements of the specific structure. For Grand Central, the city's limited role involved the streets between the buildings (in conformance with the Manhattan grid and the Park Avenue wide viaduct). For every building, each developer designed and constructed the necessary superstructure to support the specific projects. The Grand Central model could easily work and may represent a likely scenario for alternative proposals on the far West Side.

All this creates uncertainty about the city's ability to host the 2012 games on the eve of the visit of a delegation from the IOC to check out our fair city. The stadium site represents but one problem. Other game sites make less sense. My favorite example is holding beach volleyball on a site where no beach and no sand exist. Dumb. Why not the Rockaways in my home borough or Orchard Beach in the borough where I last worked for the city. And to be fair leave beach volleyball in Brooklyn, but why not move it to Coney Island's beach to host an Olympic match?

New York, the world's media capital, makes an attractive site for the Olympics. Unfortunately, a fixation on a site plan developed without

consultation with the communities of our city might just cause New York to lose out on 2012. So who's really killing the Olympics?

City Hall's failure to offer a back-up plan that involves no city money in building a stadium elsewhere in the city suggests a brinkmanship that highlights how successful business types may not realize the limits of their experience when it is applied to the public sector. More and more, I lean to a conclusion that the focus on the stadium site and the promotion of the 2012 bid with that stadium demonstrates a gross mismanagement by City Hall of a significant project.

It appears the Bloomberg administration has dedicated more brain power and energy to its Olympics/Stadium effort than to economic development outside Manhattan's strong business districts, the city's structural deficit. I could go on. And it might all be for naught.

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