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The Public Ought to Know: Not choosing Queens a major mayoral issue

By Corey Bearak

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Corey Bearak

Naomi E. remarked at our friend Charlie Wade's birthday party how I often injected our favorite band - Poco - into some columns. At that party across the Hudson where Charlie's wife, Dorothy, set the bar very high for any wife who gives her hubby a surprise 50th (not too subtle hint to Mrs. Bearak), I caught up with friends from around the region and they became an informal focus group of sorts when we talked about the proposed Far West Side stadium.

Between chats with Poco's Rusty Young, Paul Cotton and Jack Sundrud, who played two rocking acoustic sets at Charlie's party at Union, N.J.'s Galloping Hill Inn, Jon R., a Giants season ticket holder from Connecticut objected to his favorite football team joining the Jets on Manhattan's Far West Side. He cited the traffic. He had no problem with the Giants joining the Jets at Shea or an adjacent site.

I recall discussing with Steve C. from Long Island our commute that Sunday afternoon with no football game. We both drove across 34th Street west toward the Lincoln Tunnel. We both endured several - seven was my count - traffic signal changes traveling west on 34th Street after we passed Fifth Avenue before we crossed Sixth Avenue and Broadway. Imagine the traffic on a game day. Next time, I'd probably prefer to pay the extra tolls driving through Staten Island or the Bronx to reach Charlie's nabe.

The discussion with Jon R., whose artwork graced Poco's last two CDs - "Running Horse" and "Keeping The Legend Alive" - and its www.poconut.com Web site, followed his real concern that the Giants could abandon New Jersey. I do not necessarily believe that notion and am resigned to the Jets working a deal to share a new stadium in New Jersey with their NFL rivals.

I reach that view despite the full court press the Jets unveiled last week with a new commercial featuring former mayor and current presidential hopeful (at least in his own mind) Rudy Giuliani touting the Far West Side stadium for the Jets and the Olympics.

Interesting, Giuliani failed in his attempts to move the Yankees there. He did succeed in perfecting the use of City Charter Revision Commissions, which his successor adopted and adapted to promote political aims and derail voter referendums each mayor found distasteful.

March 31 is the date the MTA expects to decide on bids received by its March 21 deadline on the Far West Side rail yards. As I write this, we may learn how the Jets bid compares to Cablevision's mixed use proposal.

The mayor has also increased pressure suggesting opponents of his stadium risk the city's bid for the 2012 Summer Olympics. After the head of the International Olympic Committee visiting team said the city needed a stadium to have a chance to win the bid, City Hall and NYC2012 folk spun her remarks to mean no Olympics here unless the city builds the Far West Side stadium. Olympic venues often change after a host city's selection.

Everyone seems to forget the WFAN Mike and the Mad Dog show interview with Jets President Jay Cross. Cross, in an interview more than a year old, placed the blame squarely on the mayor when he explained the Jets' non-interest in Queens.

The mayor pretty much dissed Queens as a site, claiming the business types won't buy luxury boxes at a Queens site. He seems to forget Queens - specifically, a site across Roosevelt Avenue from Shea Stadium - serves as home to the U.S. Open. You cannot get more highbrow than the United States Tennis Association's National Tennis Center in Flushing Meadows Corona Park. And by the way, that project followed the City Charter's community review process the mayor and governor reject for the Far West Side.

If Queens can host one of the major international grand slam tennis events and two World's Fairs, what makes it inadequate to host a superbowl and Olympic stadium, not to mention two NFL teams?

Why does City Hall fail to press the clear advantages of a stadium plan for the Olympics, Jets and Giants either next to Shea or in its place?

What can be wrong with a site that includes subway, bus and rail access, proximity to two of the region's major airports, surrounded by three major highways, and easily accessible by high speed ferries from throughout the region?

The failure to choose Queens may become a major issue this election year; perhaps it may loom larger than the stadium itself. Selecting Queens would remove the stadium issue for the mayor's opponents.

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