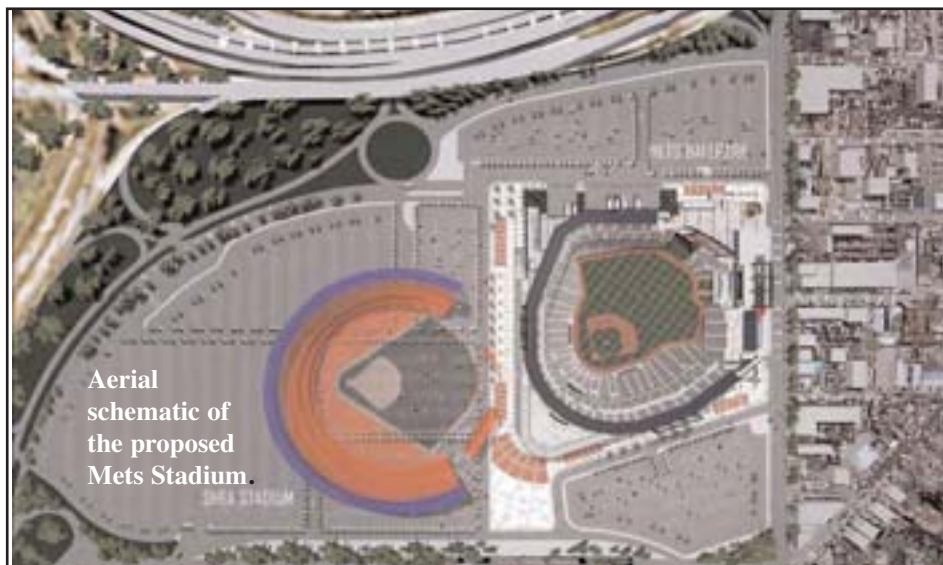


Council Aids Board 7 With New Mets Stadium



BY RICHARD GENTILVISO

With new ballparks for the Mets and Yankees by 2009 a reality, it's easy to forget this all came about when just a year ago New York City was trying hard to lock up a bid for the 2012 summer Olympic Games and Mayor Michael Bloomberg was lobbying hard to build a new football stadium for the Jets in Manhattan.

But when the West Side Stadium, which was also the centerpiece for the 2012 Olympics was sacked late in the game by the opposition, the mayor turned to his bullpen to try to save the day (to use a mixed sports metaphor).

After spending years and millions saying an Olympic Stadium couldn't be built in Queens, the mayor brought in the Mets, who quickly agreed to build a new ballpark just to the east of Shea Stadium that could be retrofitted into an 80,000-seat facility for the Olympics.

A new Yankee Stadium, to be built in Macombs Dam Park, just north of the current Yankee Stadium, would also be approved as long as the Yankees agreed to double up with the Mets in their park for the 2012 season.

But less than a month later, in July 2005, the city lost its bid for the 2012 Olympic Games. Even so, the Mets and Yankees had both won their long desired new homes and the Jets are permanently moving to New Jersey.

"The city moved very, very quickly," Councilmember John Liu said at the May 8 meeting of Community Board 7 in Flushing. By votes of 48 to 1 for the Mets' Stadium and 46 to 3 (one abstention) for the Yankees' Stadium, the city council approved the financing plans on April 26. The city will issue tax-exempt bonds in the amount of \$632 million for the Mets and \$930 million for the Yankees, to be paid back to the city by the teams.

Liu said there was concern by members of the Queens City Council delegation that the local community had been left out of the process. "That's why many of my colleagues, and I stepped up and said although we all want a new stadium, something has to be given to the community."

In response, the Mets have agreed to designate at least 25 percent of construction jobs to companies from Queens, 25 percent of jobs to Queens residents and 25 percent of all contracts to women and minority businesses and workers. The Mets will also donate \$500,000 to community groups and Little League teams in the borough.

There is also a commitment by the Bloomberg administration to improve infrastructure around the stadium, including the complete reconstruction of the Roosevelt Avenue Bridge, Liu said.

"We appreciate the work that went in from the council," said Board 7 First Vice Chair Chuck Apelian. Citing failed efforts to reach out to the Mets, Apelian said a lapse in communication between the team and the board had occurred. With high hopes the Mets will resume their place as a good neighbor, Apelian said the team would be an organization "we can be even prouder of than we are now." Apelian said the Mets intend to begin construction soon, after the current home stand.

One week after the final approval for the new Mets' and Yankees' ballparks, Bloomberg said the city had no plans to bid for another Olympics. "I do not believe that the opportunities that we had when the 2012 bid was put together will exist for a 2016 bid", according to a report in the May 5 *New York Times*.

Noting the recent passing of long-time board member and Transportation Committee Chair Victor Ross, Apelian said Ross was a terrific human being who always looked out for the community. "Victor, we're going to miss you," he said.

Albany Passes Auto, Home Fuel Tax Relief Legislation

Consumers suffering from gas pump price shock and skyrocketing home heating costs finally received some potential relief yesterday when both houses in the Albany legislature passed bipartisan tax cutting measures that could bring consumers some savings.

However, reports circulated in Albany after passage of the bills said that Governor George Pataki may veto the measures when they come to him for his signature.

The measure involving home heating costs was sponsored by Assemblymember Michael Gianaris (D-Astoria) and authorizes the repeal of the New York City 4 percent sales tax for all forms of home heating costs, including oil and gas. The lawmaker estimated it could save New Yorkers more than \$300 million a year.

As for the effort to lower motorists' gasoline costs, the lawmakers voted to cap the sales taxes on gas and diesel fuel at 8 cents per gallon, effectively freezing the tax at the present \$2 per gallon rate, according to state Senator Serphin Maltese (R-C, Middle Village).

Maltese' senate colleague, Senator Frank Padavan (R-C, Bellerose) stated, "Yesterday's agreement on capping and reducing the sales tax on gasoline is one of the best things to come out of Albany this year.

"My colleagues and I in the senate have passed similar legislation three times and I am elated that the Assembly leadership has finally realized the need for relief

from soaring gas costs."

Padavan said the bill was crafted after legislation he first passed in the senate last February 15. He stated, "I understand how burdensome rising fuel costs have been and know that a reduction in the sales tax is only a portion of what needs to be done. but I also know it will help—estimated savings are more than \$450 million annually."

Gianaris cited the same potential savings estimate on the gas sales tax reduction. "Currently motor fuel is subject to a 4 percent sales tax which rises as the price of gas increases," he explained.

Gianaris, taking a slap at the Bush presidential administration, stated: "In the face of the federal government's failure to address sky-high gas prices, it is necessary for those of us in state government to do whatever we can to make things a little easier."

The gas tax plan takes effect on June 1 for the state sales tax relief. The local sales tax cut on home fuel takes effect July 1.

Maltese pointed out that the gas sales tax slash legislation requires that service station owners who collect the sales tax for the state, must pass along the savings to consumers.

He said the state Commissioner of Taxation and Finance, in conjunction with the state Consumer Protection Board chairman, would be charged with enforcing the 8 cent-per-gallon cap.

—John Toscano

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Ground Broken For Rockrose At Queens W.



Joining in the groundbreaking festivities at Queens West May 9 were City Councilmember Eric Gioia (second from l.); Charles Gargano (c.) chairman of the Empire State Development Corporation; Developer H. Henry Elghanayan (with helmet), and Borough President Helen Marshall.

Groundbreaking took place for a Rockrose Development building on the Queens West site in Long Island City, Tuesday, May 9, in front of the Pepsi Cola sign on the East River. The 394-unit residential complex, which will stand 290 feet tall, is scheduled to open in late 2007 and will feature 825 parking spaces and a supermarket to serve residents of Queens West and the surrounding community. Rising on 74 acres of prime waterfront property directly across from Midtown Manhattan, the Queens West development has become one of New York City's booming mixed-use properties in recent years.

Borough President Helen Marshall said that when Queens West is completed, it will include not only new housing, but a supermarket, schools and a library. Gioia continued to call for more opportunities for the middle class in the fast-developing area, including more home ownership opportunities and middle-income housing for New Yorkers.

Photo Dominick Totino