How Team Bloomberg Tried to Sell You the World’s Most Expensive Stadium—and Got Booted to Queens

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Eroses had different motives, but they shared scorn for the Jets deal

In the doomed deal to use state money to build a West Side stadium, Assemblyman Sheldon Silver wasn’t alone: there was a lot in the plan not to like and sway of people who didn’t like it. They all had their reasons—civil virtue wasn’t the only race—but those living next to where the New York Sports and Convention Center could have risen, motives didn’t matter. We all want to protect our interests here,” said Levitch, one of the Hall’s Kissin- ners who battled the proposal, tells the story. “Everyone’s got a self-interest. There’s nothing with that.”

While they are worried that a West Side stadium plan could expand, last week was the final for the anti-stadium forces to savr story and for Mayor Michael Bloomberg to muster—at least until the mayor listed the Queens plan. At one point, the mayor lamented that the plan took a lot of bit of our district to get ahead and our on-go-attitude at the opponents of the West Side stadium would disagree. Against the combined power of the governor, the billionaires mayor, U.S. Olympic officials, a wealthy team owner, the National Football League, and the construction union, a money-cast prevailed. Here they are, in no particular order:

- Richard Ravitch: the elder statesman of the opposition, the former Metropolitan Transportation Authority chairman was a lone public voice of skepticism from the development world. He tells the Voice that he was most terrified that he might get the risk that the MTAs would get shorted on the deal. “The idea of conveying that property at less than market value was not in the interest of the city and the transit agency,” Ravitch says. That simple critique stuck, especially when salary problems arose to highlight the MTAs financial woes.

- Residual Plan Association: When other civic organizations were taking a hands-off approach to the stadium deal, the RPA weighed in—after internal discussions “more extensive . . . than on any other issue in memory” and despite denouement by Deputy Mayor Dan Doctoroff. The RPA’s argument (“there is no compelling need to place this in a part of the city that should be devoted to high-density office and residential development”) helped transform the debate from a narrow argument by skeptical residents to a larger discussion of the city’s priorities.

- Joan Gonzalez d’Al: While the tabled plans were post-poison for the stadium deal, the Daily News columnist kept asking uncomfortable questions about the design plans, traffic problems, and complex real estate deals encompassed by the Hudson Yards push. Anti-stadium advocates also credit Bob Herbert and the New York Times editorial writers who raised their voices in skepticism.

- The Pule: Silver threw the big punch last week, but he was only the latest elected official to come out against the stadium deal. Neighborhood residents credit a long line of politicians—Congressman Jerry Nadler, state senators Tom Duane, Eric Schneiderman, and Liz Kruger; assemblymembers Advocate Enid Bible, Debra L. Glick, Dov Hikind, and Scott Stringer; councilmembers Gale Brewer and Christine Quinn; and Public Advocate Betsy Goldstein. They just staff members to the anti-stadium efforts, lobbied their leaders in Albany and on the council, heard press conferences, and in some cases, went to court.

BY JARRETT MURPHY

Stopping a stadium

‘We’ve learned how to take our own parochial interests and connect them up with the broader interests that other New Yorkers might have.’

The politics of New York City are more complex, interrelated subjects that the stadium deal has been. “We’ve learned how to take our own parochial interests and connect them up with the broader interests that other New Yorkers might have.”

A AVENUE: It was last spring, about a year before the Hall’s Kissin’ at the Yards Alliance formed. “We got a call from Canlevi- us, asking how they could help our effort,” Levine remembers. “It was very scary.”

Joining forces with a massive corpora- tion to protect its bottom line was a nothing venture, Levine says. But the effort, he knew we needed needed a major support. We were we needed lobbyists. We knew we were going to litigate. We knew we needed all assets of resources, like T-shirts, photo- props, a professional organizer—and a voice the high halls of government. Canlevius divided it all. “We would never had had the seats in Albany that this campaign got with the Garden’s lobby, and that’s the va- cuity of politics in New York,” Levine says.

Canlevius wasn’t the only business interest to help fight the stadium. A few developers lent support to the alliance, but did so quietly to avoid angering the mayor and Doctoroff. Gerald Schindler, chairman of the Shubert Organization, also pitched in on behalf of Broadway theaters worried about how stadium traffic would affect their audiences. But only Canlevius had the clout and clout was the key move in the whole stadium drama: the rival bid for the MTA site.

“We were a stroke of genius,” Levine recalls. “It exposed the fact that the law had not been written for this” and that the cash- strapped MTA might be able to get millions more for the valuable site. The cable giant’s move forced the MTA to press for a―more bidding, delaying the closure of the Jets deal. And once the MTA opened a formal process, the anti-stadium forces got innum- erous for some of their suits.

HUBERMAN: The Daily News dubbed “hopeful.” The Post called him “as small minded and parochial a pol as any of the backseat drivers he was opposing.” But to those who opposed the stadium, the Assembly Speaker was the biggest hero of them all because in the end he was the only one who Doctoroff and Co. couldn’t get around.

I thought that Silver was courageous,” says Gene Russinoff of the New York Public Interest Research Group (NYPIRG). Sil- ver’s comments about his decision (read like the words from someone, whether you agreed with him or not, who had a deep affec- tion and concern for his district.” Rus- sinoff tells the Voice.

But it wasn’t just Lower Manhattan that was on Silver’s mind. “Shelly really was af- fronted, rightly so, by the mayor’s failure to respect the wishes of the people on a new government,” Russinoff adds. Offers agree. As much as the plan’s design dragged stalling the construction and dis- ease of the arrangement, its back- ers might have been the fatal flaw—like the Mouse in the House. Shelly Silver swung the fatal award.

DOCTOROFF: Of course, it takes two to make a partner. John Fisher, a West Side ac- tivist who didn’t join the alliance, notes that “Doctoroff helped too—they way they opened the door, they tried to educate the people’s thirsts.” That approach managed to convince the Waverly group and one about the stadium itself. It added yet another con- tribution to the coalition, one that agreed on at least the most need.