

Testimony of Lee Compton before the ESDC - December 16, 2004

My name is Lee Compton. I am the second vice chair of Manhattan Community Board 4 and a member of the Hells Kitchen Hudson Yard Alliance.

Our community strongly supports an expanded Javits convention center. But we believe that the proposed Jets Stadium has nothing to do with creating the convention center the City deserves.

Our focus should be on defining what makes a convention center great. On learning what would attract the best convention business and maximize economic benefits for the City and State. Then we could decide how the Javits should be expanded.

Instead, we've suffered through a mad, disorganized scramble to find the best justification for a Jets Stadium as a mediocre convention center expansion. A justification that seemed to change weekly until it achieved its current, masterful form that shortchanges the Javits in almost every way.

I ask you to consider some operating questions that you deserve answers for before making your decision.

Mr. Doctoroff says that the proposed structure takes a day to change configuration between a stadium and convention space. Does that mean that instead of the widely repeated ten to twelve days the actual number is 20 to 24 convention days lost to the Javits due to football? Or perhaps 30 to 36 if it takes a day to change on either side of a football game? That would be one-third of the peak fall convention season.

Mr. Doctoroff points to a reconfigurable Japanese auditorium as a precedent for the proposed stadium. An arena that is one quarter the size of the proposed Jets Stadium, one that changes its configuration a few times a year, not twice a week as this stadium would have to do, and one that is not open to the elements.

We all know that things that move get stuck. And they break. Consider the person responsible for the stadium's configuration. In the back of his or her mind is always going to be the possibility that there could be a problem, and that person is going to build in a margin of safety.

If the Jets were going to play on national TV on Monday night, would you schedule a convention event that finishes on noon Sunday? Or 5:00 PM Saturday? Or even 5:00 PM Friday? You would always worry that something might happen, and so you would be conservative and start early. That further reduces the number of convention days available to the Javits.

That suggests two other questions. Who would be liable for damages caused by a stadium that wouldn't convert in time? What would a plenary hall stuck in stadium mode do to repeat convention business?

With the stadium used for football games and other sporting events and concerts, and the need to ensure that the stadium is in the stadium configuration for those events, just how much of the year will the stadium really be available to the Javits for convention use? I suspect the number of days would end up being far fewer than we are being told.

We need the best possible Javits we can build, not a badly compromised rationalization that's available only a few days a year. We urge you to reject a Jets Stadium and approve a Javits expansion that would do what a convention center should do all the time, benefit the City and the State.

Thank you.