



Chairperson, Martha Taylor

*The City of New York*  
*Borough of Queens*

**Community Board 8**

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District Manager, Marie Adam-Ovide

**Zoning Committee Meeting**

N250046ZMQ & C250047MMQ – Queens Future Map Change and Amendment Presentation.

DATE: October 28, 2024

Committee Members Present: Hersh Parekh, Zoning Committee Chair, Maria DeInnocentiis, Board Member, Kenneth Cohen, II, Board Member and Tobias Paris, Board Member

Committee Members Absent: Edward Chung, Howard A. Fried, Mohammed Islam “Delwar”, James Gallagher, Jr., Michael Hannibal, David Mordukhaev, Deepti Sharma, Jesse Rosenbaum, Seymour Schwartz and Douglas Sherman

Others in attendance: Michael Sullivan, Chief of Staff, Steve Cohen [Mets Owner] representing: Julissa Ferrevas-Copeland, Gregg Pasquarelli and Sean Caffery, Marie Adam-Ovide, District Manager and CB8 Staff Member, Nettie V. Norris

Zoning Committee Chairperson Hersh Parekh called the meeting to order at 7:30 p.m.

*Zoning Chairperson introduced himself and asked everyone to introduce themselves.*

***Hersh Parekh – We are here for the Queens Future Map Change and Amendment - ULURP N250046ZMQ & C250047MMQ. With that I will turn it over to Sully.***

**Michael “Sully” Sullivan**

We are here to ask you to make a couple of mapping changes to our existing map; to create a zoning district to enable us to move forward with a project that would basically take the 50 acres of asphalt parking lots around Citi Field and transform half of that land, 25 acres, into a creation of a brand-new New York City public park. The aim is to build; maintain long-term and provide public safety; take the other half of the parking lots to build an entertainment complex to tie together the three sports venues around us: baseball, soccer stadium that is coming in across the street and tennis.

By way of background, I am Steve Cohen’s [Mets Owner] Chief of Staff. I’ve been with Steve for 17 years. When he bought the team four years ago, against my better wishes, he got on social media. From that first day being on Twitter, and during his opening day press conference, he heard from Mets fans. He heard from the community members around us. We were able to address a lot of things that were brought to our attention: bringing back Black Jerseys on Friday nights, celebrating the Mets history, retire numbers, and improve the ballpark experience. There was one big question that we heard over and over again, which was

concerning the area around Citi Field. The issue went something like this: we win a game, there's no place to celebrate, have a beer and have fun. We get to the game early, there is no green space to hang out and have a great time in.

Now, what we're going to show you is after four years of pursuing a community engagement process by which we ask the very simple question over and repeatedly. If we were going to try to transform the area around Citi Field, what would you want to see here? I've had over a thousand meetings now in the local community which Julissa Ferrevas-Copeland has helped me organize. We've had listening sessions with over 30-40 people to 400-500 held in local churches. Julissa will help in taking you through what all of that looks like.

We are in the early stages of this project. The process that the city and state has laid out says that we first need to deal with our zoning and land use related actions. Next summer we have to present this whole project as part of a formal submission, an RFA to the state of New York. At that time, all of the details of our project will become public along with all of the other bidders. We'll have a video fly through of what it all looks like and at that point, next Summer, there will be public hearings and debate about the gaming portion of this project. What we're doing is using casino gaming as the pay for transforming the area around Citi Field. It's less than 10% of the square footage of the project but it pays for the whole thing. It's what draws people to the area year-round. The one restaurant we have on Seaver Way right now, we can't keep open outside of baseball season. The gaming piece of this will help keep the building open all season. It's a black hole in the wintertime.

Later next year we go before a location citing board and ultimately at the end of next year, the gaming commission will decide where to put these three licenses. These three licenses were laid out by the state law in 2013. Queens residents voted 64% favorable of creating these down state licenses. They'll be in and out at the end of the season.

Back to Steve's opening day press conference four years ago, he made it clear to him that baseball is not just about the players on the field. It's about the communities and neighborhoods around us.

Just to orient you with what else is going on in the neighborhood:

- A Soccer Stadium is being built across the street
- Affordable housing with 2500 units and a small hotel

This is not our project but just to give you the full context of what's going on in the neighborhood.

We have our lease for the next 82 years. We've partnered with:

The Hardrock Hotel, Cheryl McKissack, Bill Thompon and Henry Cisneros.

**Presentation:** (slideshow)

A city map amendment (MM) and a zoning map amendment (ZM) on city-owned property to facilitate a new 3.7 million GSF mixed-use development including a gaming facility, music hall, hotel, convention space, parking and other amenities in Flushing Meadows Corona Park, Queens. The development site is within Joint Interest Area 81 and has been referred to Queens Community Districts adjacent to the site including 3, 4, 6, 7, 8, 9.

**Julissa Ferrevas-Copeland – Community Engagement**

She followed-up with what Sully was explaining about how the project came about after four years. What the community wanted was to hear specific project goals.

- Engaging with the community, having small-intimate workshops and spending thousands of hours getting input from the residents early on.
- Door to door knocking and getting 20,000 signatures.

- Had larger workshops/engagements with community residents at Citi Field with approximately 1800 in attendance.
- Space to create jobs, have beautiful green spaces, eateries and entertainment.
- Not having to go to the Manhattan to enjoy live music, good restaurants and bars. The area is desolate after ball season.
- Partnerships with Hardrock, Cheryl McKissack, Bill Thompson and Henry Cisneros.

### **Gregg Pasquarelli – Site Design, Transportation Solutions and Mapping Actions (slides)**

He elaborated on his design idea and went back to the original vision from the 1939 World's Fair plan. James Corner was the project lead for the highline in NYC, similar thinking on Queens design.

- He went back and forth on the slides with the before and how it would look after.
- Creating a public space for everyone. Having a park, green space, food halls, conference centers, parking, sensory playgrounds for kids and entertainment.
- Connecting the park to the waterfront.
- The MTA station, train line #7, that takes you to Citi Field does not have wheelchair/baby stroller etc. accessibility. This will be a major transformation but needed.
- The goal is to create something very special for Queens.

### **Michael Sullivan**

Community benefits:

- 1Billion dollar commitment to Queens (see slides)
- Union jobs – full time jobs
- Union projects (see slides)
- MWBE – hire and train locally

**Sully closing** – We need to win the gaming license to pay for this project. This is a once in a lifetime shot. 64% positive response from Queens/78% from neighbors.

*Michael opened the floor to questions from the board members.*

### **Maria DeInnocentiis**

From looking at it, it really is a beautiful place. The Tennis Center that is there now was initially to be opened for use by the community. Unfortunately, we don't have access. We will need parking. Where will that be and how much will it cost us? Controlling heavy traffic - Whitestone, Roosevelt and the Grand Central.

- **Answer** [Michael Sullivan]: Egress and Ingress (peak demand) Volume of arrival and departure. Traffic is heavy because people come and go at the same time because there is nothing to do in the area before and after a game.
- Need the center lane on the 7-train open. It closed and will reopen in the Spring of 2025.
- MTA/LIRR has been adding additional cars before and after games.
- Need to clean up Uber & Lift pick up and yellow cabs/ ride sharing.
- Ferry Service will be brought back to flushing bay and world fair's marina
- Named garages, Manhattan, Westchester. When you leave the game, you will have specific garage signs for your car.
- It will cost 20Million dollars to build a Pedestrian Bridge to help separate people and cars.

Solution – demap ramp for Manhattan exit road to Connecticut/Westchester. The need for more parking will cost 1Billion dollars for 3 gates around the parking lot.

We must give people things to do. Conferences will be held during the week when it's quiet. It will not overlap with the soccer and baseball schedules.

**Maria DeInnocentiis**

When the Casinos were built in Atlantic City, it was supposed to develop the communities around it. If you go to Atlantic City, it is disgusting. How do you plan to build up the Roosevelt and Elmhurst side to prevent that from happening-where it just gets worse? You said there was money being funded for community outreach.

**Answer** [Michael Sullivan]:

We're going to make the improvements along Roosevelt: lighting it up, painting it, putting in flowers and trees etc. as Brian was showing you on the slides. The area will be open to the public. This is a NYC park. It's not a gated community. We're offering to build it and maintain it for the Parks Department.

**Maria DeInnocentiis**

Does it remain a park?

**Answer** [Michael Sullivan]:

It remains a NYC public park. All this land remains city land. We have a long-term lease on it but it is a NYC public park.

**Kenneth Cohen**

I think this is a great project, a great opportunity. I am a member of IBW Local 3. The access to all those jobs, both in construction and once those are complete are very important. We have Local 3 Union Hall within our community as well as Electchester which houses thousands of Local 3 members. The ability for me to go and essentially work in my neighborhood, for me, is extremely important. Having access to generational jobs where you read these articles about casino workers in Vegas negotiating raises for themselves. That could be people from Pomonok, the Bland Houses and Oakland Gardens that have access to those generational career opportunities. I am a baseball person – went down to Philly for one of the playoff games and despite being around a bunch of Philly fans, I had a good time. I hung out, had a Philly Cheesesteak, a couple of beers – it was fun. I've been to the ballpark village in St. Louis, which is an amazing area to just hang out. I don't even think it was baseball season. They had a lot of activities to do all year round which I thought was very special. We don't have that anywhere except Manhattan. To be able to highlight Queens in this way is very special. I can't say anything but good things about this. I hope we can agree and support both the CB8 and the community.

**Michael Sullivan**

I just want to reflect two quick things about what Kenny just said. We have 2500 units of housing, not sure how many residents per unit but I would love to give as many people moving in jobs that want them. Also, there is no place for kids to place. These are polluted, industrial lots. There are no green spaces and it's a food desert. This all ties in with what Greg and the team have put together. We have eleven unions in the building at Citi Field today and we welcome our brothers and sisters in labor to help us build this staff and maintain it. There will be over 6K full-time jobs with health care and childcare.

**Kenneth Cohen**

As a member of a union who has had the opportunity to work at Citi Field in different capacities, whether it be electrical maintenance or day to day operations, I am very appreciative of the support that you all give us, and I will support that in my capacity. You put your money where your mouth is.

**Tobias Paris**

Do you have any real time stats or timing percentages on traffic in the area?

**Answer** [Nancy Doon]: There will be no impact in the streets or on the subways – no delays. (referring to the slides for numbers).

**Hersh Parekh**

In addition to food courts, I encourage you to partner with the Queens food farm. You can bring a farm stand where you can have fresh fruits and vegetables that will be available to people locally.

**Michael Sullivan**

Letter J referenced the slide showing the roof top green garden where they will grow food that can be bundled and given to the people in the community. It's a 15K square-foot multi-purpose, flexible use plaza and we've talked about having a farmer's market.

**Hersh Parekh**

You mentioned creating a sensory playground. If you haven't already, I would suggest you speak with the Queens Center for Progress. They are based in this district, and they work with adults and children on the spectrum helping them lead as normal lives as they can. The Director of Development is Wendy Gennaro, who is also a CB8 Board Member. She will be at the November meeting, but you can also reach out to them directly.

**Michael Sullivan**

I love that idea. This came to us directly from the community. We can reach out to the director and do a workshop with them as well.

**Hersh Parekh**

We ask that you bring some of the job fairs to our district as well. So that the residents, if they are interested in working, whether it is with a union, apprenticeship or not. We want to make sure we have some of that hiring activity in our community. Recognizing you have six community boards you're working with here, would be rational and reasonable.

**Michael Sullivan**

We are happy to do it. We can train, hire and we commit to this, and Hard Rock agrees to it as well. We have over a dozen workforce partners we're working with.

**Maria DeInnocentiis**

Just one last question. You have six community boards you're working with. Have any of them taken a vote on any of this yet?

**Michael Sullivan**

No. We haven't had a final vote on any of this. You are our third meeting.

**Hersh Parekh**

Community passport – do you have any restaurants from our community district on your list? If not, we can help you identify some that can become a part of this partnership and arrangement.

**Answer** [Michael Sullivan]: I'll go over the entire list and get back to you. This is a small subset of over a hundred that have signed up. I'd love for it to be 300-400 so we'd like to sign up more restaurants. We have a team working with us on this. It is a win, win situation.

**Hersh Parekh**

Can you go back to the slide that has the actual land use actions, the demapping slide in particular. Ultimately, this is what we will be voting on so I want to make sure we all understand that.

**Hershe Parekh**

In terms of this demapping, would this allow you to do anything on this demap space or are you locked into the proposal you presented to us within this demap space?

**David Karosky**

We are locked into this proposal, with some flexibility of course. As we go forward with our RFA to the state, we are locked in. We must build what we've shown them in its entirety, if we want the license. We have the lease until 2105.

**Michael Sullivan**

We must include all these things in our submission. We can't come in and build a hotel and not build the Taste of Queens food hall or not build the park. In order to get our license to open the doors, we must deliver all of the elements that were included in the RFA, or we don't get the license to open. If we don't live up to the long-term commitments we made, we could lose our license to operate. The gaming commission is essentially the enforcement mechanism. We must build everything we promise.

**Hersh Parekh**

You have an 82-year lease that goes to the year 2105. Is there a scenario where you say you can build a hotel and the gaming complex now and ten years later build the remaining?

**Answer** [Michael Sullivan]: We can't open the gaming complex until we've built everything. They won't let us. It's in the state legislation.

**Tobias Paris**

Who's proposing this up in Albany?

**Answer** [Michael Sullivan]: Jeff Aubrey, local assembly member, introduced the bill in Albany and is supported by Larinda Hooks, his likely successor. Senator Ramos supports all of the purposes except for the gaming. We're still working on the senate companion to that bill. We will focus on that at the next session.

**Hersh Parekh**

The community fund of 160 million dollars – You're already working with many organizations in our community. We just want to make sure they are also part of the consideration for that process as well. Make sure it's an open, transparent and fair process for the groups in our community.

**Maria DeInnocentiis**

Will it be an open process where anyone can apply?

**Answer** [Michael Sullivan] Yes. Anyone can apply for grants. The online website will open soon and will be very simple to navigate.

**Kenneth Cohen**

Will you have an advisory board to help with distribution of funds that will be distributed to the community?

**Answer** [Michael Sullivan]: In the four years that I've been working for Mr. Cohen on this project, the needs of the community have shifted, constantly. The Mets and Hardrock do a lot in the community. We're committed to working with the community. We want to reserve the right to ensure the groups are well run and the dollars are not going to executives and overhead but going to programmatic purposes and that they are ethical groups that are doing the right thing.

**Michael Sullivan**

In closing, I would like to say "Thank You" for this opportunity. I'll say 2 billion dollars to open the site, will be an extraordinary value to the state.

**Hersh Parekh-** We need to vote now if there are no further questions.

**Maria DeInnocentiis**

Do we still need to vote even though there are only four of us?

*DM Adam-Ovide – Yes, you should still vote.*

**Hersh Parekh**

Can we just ask the applicant to please step outside while we vote. Thank you all.

**Kenneth Cohen**

This is a recommendation to the full board.

**Hersh Parekh** asked for a motion to recommend approval of this land use application - N250046ZMQ & C250047MMQ.

So moved by Kenneth Cohen, seconded by Tobias Paris. All those in favor – Aye.

**Maria DeInnocentiis**

My only concern is that we are the least impacted community board, and the other boards haven't spoken yet. Which bothers me, that we are going to vote on it in two weeks before everyone else has a chance to.

**Hersh Parekh**

Everyone needs to vote on this by the middle of November. By the time that we vote as a full board, all the boards will be voting or have voted. They have had 3 committee meetings and have not gotten any full board actions yet.

**Kenneth Cohen**

Our vote should be independent of any other board. I'm not voting on what's going to benefit East Elmhurst and Corona. I'm voting on what's going to benefit our contingency in Community Board 8. Based on this presentation, when it comes to the union portion it's in our best interest.

**Maria DeInnocentiis**

That's very narrow. You're supposed to look at what's better for the residence in Queens in general.

*DM Adam-Ovide – No, that's not it.*

**Hersh Parekh**

Our focus is Community Board 8. That's why I asked some of the questions I asked. Our purpose is to make sure that as one of the boards that have an interest in what happens in Flushing Meadows Park, even if there's no negative impact in our community, that we still gain some of the positive impacts that this project brings. Kenny mentioned jobs and hiring in our community. I do want to make sure that they do some hiring in our community as well. As close and as more impacted as Community Boards 3,4, and 7 might be, I think we still deserve to have opportunities for some of the jobs, some of the community funding, some of the restaurants that can benefit from the Passport partnership program, the Queens Center for Progress partnership on the Sensory Playground. I'm excited about this project but I do want to make sure that each of the benefits I just mentioned are also a part of the commitment that they are going to make to our community.

**Hersh Parekh – let's vote. All those in favor say Aye.**

**All members present voted in favor:**

**Members for:**

Hersh Parekh, Kenneth Cohen, II, Maria DeInnocentiis and Tobias Paris

**Members who voted against:** None     **Abstention:** None

The meeting was adjourned at 8:45 p.m.

Respectfully submitted by,  
Nettie V. Norris, CB8 Staff  
November 4, 2024

