



Chairperson, Martha Taylor

*The City of New York
Borough of Queens*

Community Board 8

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District Manager, Marie Adam-Ovide

Parks Committee Meeting: Soccer/cricket stadium in Cunningham Park.
Date: Thursday, October 25, 2018
Time: 7:30 p.m.
Place: Community Board 8 Office
197-15 Hillside Avenue
Hollis, NY 11423

Bhithara Martha Fulton, Parks Committee Chair

Board Members: Robert Block, James Gallagher Jr., Marc A. Haken, Robert Harris.

Also in attendance: Gabriel Echevarria Administrative Manager for NYC Parks, Davinder Paul Singh representing Council Member Barry Grodenchik, Elaine Young for West Cunningham Park Civic Association, Bassett Thompson, Cricket Commissioner for NYC Public School, Marie Adam-Ovide, CB8 District Manager, and Izabela Szczepanska, CB8 Staff Member

Chairperson Fulton called the meeting to order at 7:30 p.m.

Purpose:

Bhithara Martha Fulton – To review the proposal for a soccer/cricket stadium in Cunningham Park.

Asim Deen – Mr. Deen stated that prior to coming to America he played soccer and cricket for over ten years. Coming to America his goal was to do better for himself and for his country. For 38 years, he has been doing community work: was a 9/11 first responder and a first responder during Hurricane Sandy. Drafted a petition with his daughter; got 575 signatures; forwarded it to Senator Tony Avella’s office, to save the Hollis post office that was slated for closure. In five weeks he got the results he wanted.

Today, his main objective is to take care of kids. He would like to build a stadium to generate money. He drove around and observed many locations and in his view the best and most ideal location was Cunningham Park. Everybody wants to come to NYC, especially to watch cricket and soccer. He is asking the Board to look into this proposal to build a domed stadium for the purpose of using it year round. Commissioner of High School Cricket Mohammed Aseem will enlighten us on his knowledge of cricket.

Bhithara Martha Fulton – **Do you have any financial backing?**

Answer: [Mr. Deen] - No, not yet. Last night I was with my friend Scott Stringer and he would be one of the main people. I spoke to him regarding this proposal about seven or eight months ago and he never thought I would continue this.

Chairperson Fulton asked Asim Deen to begin the presentation to the Committee.

Mohammed Aseem – Mr. Aseem stated that the main reason for this presentation is to give a visual of the cricket and soccer stadium and the pictures will tell a story.

These are some of the main highlights of the presentation on the proposed domed stadium:

- Location: south side of 73rd Avenue and Francis Lewis Boulevard is the general area.
- The Long Island Expressway is nearby and in the area.
- Multi-purpose use of facilities can also be used for sports, entertainment and culture.
- Bringing the rest of the world to New York City for cricket and soccer from all around the world.
- Would put NYC on the international map for cricket and soccer and make it the cricket capital of the U.S.
- Would bring many jobs in the area.
- There are over 35,000 cricket players who are registered in USACA leagues at the senior and junior levels.
- A cricket field has approximately 500 feet in diameter and a soccer field is approximately 300 feet by 400 feet. The soccer field would be able to superimpose on the cricket field.
- Baseball and cricket are the best known members of a family of related bat-and-ball games.
- Police officers also have their own cricket club.
- Cricket has an increasing footprint in New York, Florida, California, and Texas particularly through large immigrant communities from India, Pakistan, Bangladesh and the Caribbean.
- More teenagers are playing soccer in the U.S. than ever before.
- The number of participants in U.S. high school soccer programs has recorded an all-time high in the 2016 and 2017 season, with over 800,000 boys and girls playing the sport across the country.
- In the domed stadium there are layers of seating. First round of seating closest to the pitch is 30,000 spectators and then followed by another ring which can increased to 50,000 right up to 100,000.
- One does not need to put all of the infrastructure at one time. Can be done in phases.

During the presentation, several questions were raised by the Board Members. The following is a re-cap of the questions and the responses received:

Marc Haken – What is the location of where the picture was taken (*referring to page 5*)?

Answer: [Mr. Aseem] – In Florida.

So this is a stadium in Florida?

Answer: [Mr. Aseem] - Yes.

Is there another stadium in New York?

Answer: [Mr. Aseem] - No.

After the presentation a short video was played on cricket, once the video finished Mr. Aseem thanked everyone for watching.

Bob Harris – We need to figure out where they want to place this facility.

Bhitihara Martha Fulton – Marie, Martha, and I went on a site visit. Gabe can tell us perhaps better than I can where that exactly is.

Answer: [Mr. Echevarria] – The two locations from the photos is the south side of 73rd Avenue. I don't know which side you are looking at. On the north side we have fields eighteen and nineteen where you have the cricket pitch.

Marc A. Haken – That's where there are ballfields and three soccer fields. So it's not there.

Answer: [Mr. Echevarria] – It's fields eighteen and nineteen.

Are you talking about going up to St. Francis High School where the two cricket pitches are now?

Answer: [Mr. Echevarria] – There is one cricket pitch there now.

There is one legal cricket pitch. Did you take out the second cricket pitch?

Answer: [Mr. Echevarria] – There is a second one on 73rd Avenue and Hollis Hills Terrace.

Okay but in that general area.

Answer: [Mr. Echevarria] – Right.

There are two cricket pitches on the other side of St. Francis Prep going down. They were put up and are permitted out. On the south side there are existing facilities and three soccer fields.

Answer: *[Mr. Echevarria] – Yes, three.*

There are three soccer fields that are permitted out. Near Francis Lewis Boulevard, there are also several baseball fields that are cricketed out.

Answer: *[Mr. Echevarria] – Right.*

There is no place to put a stadium that could accommodate 30,000 people. It would not benefit the community at all or Cunningham Park. How are these people going to get to this stadium?

Answer: *[Mr. Deen] – We have the Long Island Expressway.*

The Long Island Expressway is nowhere near Cunningham Park. Are they going to get there by bus, train or car because I presume it would be by car?

Answer: *[Mr. Deen] – Yes.*

Where are you putting the cars?

Answer: *[Mr. Deen] - You have to create facilities.*

In addition to the stadium you need to create parking facilities. Assuming there are three people in each car it would be around 10,000 cars that need a parking spot. Do you know how large all of Cunningham Park is?

Answer: *[Mr. Deen] – No, I do not.*

It's about 375 acres. About how much of that is wooded? *[Directed at Gabriel Echevarria]*

Answer: *[Mr. Echevarria] – Probably about two thirds of it.*

About two thirds of it is wooded and you wish to put a stadium that would benefit a very small number of residents of Community Board 8 is that correct?

Answer: *[Mr. Deen] – No, that is not correct.*

How many people of Community Board 8 would benefit from this stadium for soccer or cricket?

Answer: *[Mr. Deen] – Maybe I should read the letter.*

How many high schools in Community Board 8 have cricket? *[Directed at Bassett Thompson]*

Answer: *[Mr. Thompson] - I am not sure of Community Board 8 itself.*

Community Board 8 goes from Hillside Avenue to the Long Island Expressway, from Van Wyck Expressway to the Clearview Expressway. There are approximately 28 public schools and I am also the chair of the Youth and Education Committee. How many high schools are within Community Board 8 and have cricket teams?

Answer: *[Mr. Thompson] – We have Hillcrest High School and Jamaica High School.*

There is no Jamaica High School. We have four schools and a field near Jamaica High School.

Answer: *[Mr. Thompson] – In the PSL of sports there can only be one campus.*

It's a joint team made up of four schools?

Answer: *[Mr. Thompson] – Yes, Jamaica campus is comprised of the Jamaica cricket team. We have Jamaica High School, Edison High School, Van Buren High School, and Hillcrest High School.*

Van Buren High School is not in Community Board 8.

Answer: *[Mr. Thompson] – Okay maybe it is not.*

It's on the other side of the Clearview Expressway and belongs to Community Board 13.

Answer: *[Mr. Thompson] – The stadium that is going to be built is not going to be for Community Board 8 High Schools.*

It's going to be built for the City of New York.

Answer: *[Mr. Thompson] – Yes, we have 40 schools that play cricket.*

Will schools from the Bronx and Staten Island come to Cunningham Park to play?

Answer: *[Mr. Thompson] – Not necessarily but when using it for major matches.*

Okay, thank you. I appreciate your involvement within the community. You mentioned Tony Avella and saving the post office. He does not represent that area. What input can he have on a federal facility?

Do you know who Friends of Cunningham Park is? Friends of Cunningham Park has been around since 1993 and we put on shows in the park, and summer movies. We lobby for funds from various elected officials to do things for the park. Cunningham Park is maintained as a premium park of North East Queens. The initial concept that you said was to generate money for the City of New York?

Answer: *[Mr. Deen] – Correct.*

Cunningham Park is not there for that purpose. It is also why we do not have the Big Apple Circus there anymore. Why did you not look at Flushing Meadow Park? It is several thousands of acres and is available by subway or already has the parking facilities there.

Answer: *[Mr. Deen] – Well I looked around and this was the most suitable.*

Marc A. Haken – Why is this a more suitable place as opposed to Flushing Meadow Park or Fort Totten Park?

Robert Harris – Or Randall’s Island?

Marc A. Haken – Exactly or Randall’s Island where they have a large number of sports facilities.

Answer: *[Mr. Deen] - I looked at the convenience.*

The convenience for whom?

Answer: *[Mr. Deen] – The roadways.*

There is no subway route that goes to Cunningham Park. People are going to come by car and you are going to have to take out more of the park. You can’t touch certain trees because the entire park is called forever natural. People wanted to put a pool in the park and couldn’t do it. Why didn’t you look at Flushing Meadows Park it seems like an obvious choice to me?

Answer: *[Mr. Deen] - That can be a second option.*

That should be your first option.

Answer: *[Mr. Deen] - This is the reason why we have meetings.*

I am telling you in my opinion as the Chair of Friends of Cunningham Park and as the Youth Committee Chair of Community Board 8, I would not vote in favor. It does not belong there and where are you getting the funding? I know Scott Stringer very well and he can’t give you money.

Answer: *[Mr. Deen] – This is a first phase.*

You are telling us you have no idea where the funding will come from?

Answer: *[Mr. Deen] - We can lobby.*

Who would you lobby?

Answer: *[Mr. Deen] - I would go to my senator and my councilman.*

Who is your State Senator?

Answer: *[Mr. Deen] - Senator Leroy Comrie.*

Okay, you would lobby him and who else would you lobby?

Answer: *[Mr. Deen] - My Council Member Barry Grodenchik.*

Robert Block – Barry Grodenchik is on the south side and Nily Rozic our Assemblywoman is on our side.

Answer: *[Mr. Deen] - Alicia Hyndman is my Assemblywoman.*

Marc A. Haken – Alicia Hyndman does not represent Community Board 8 and I know her very well. Barry Grodenchik and Leroy Comrie only represent about a third of Community Board 8. The cost of the stadium would be how much 50 million?

Answer: *[Mr. Deen] – No, you are looking at a billion dollars.*

I really think you will need to do more research and you will need to focus more on Flushing Meadow Park.

Answer: *[Mr. Deen] - Right.*

The local residents of Community Board 8 are not in favor of such a facility in Cunningham Park. People started to play cricket in the parking lot years ago and today we have two pitches. They are both used and the Guyanese Cricket Association hold the permits for the pitches. Thomas Edison High School plays on Joe Austin and the Jamaica complex plays in a new beautifully renovated field. Is that not where they play their cricket? *[Directed at Bassett Thompson]*

Answer: *[Mr. Thompson] – No.*

The high school plays on the Frank Padavan Campus?

Answer: *[Mr. Thompson] – No, we play in Kissena Park and Baisley Park*

Kissena Park is another monster park why don’t you look into that? Though I would sincerely recommend Flushing Meadow Park.

Bhitihara Martha Fulton – Yes, because of transportation.

Marc A. Haken – The transportation, size, availability and several tennis stadiums are why I recommend Flushing Meadow Park.

Gabriel Echevarria – There is also the New York Mets.

Marc A. Haken - They have the availability for parking. I don't think the civic associations that represent the residents across the street or one block over are in favor of this. The impact that it would have on them would be disastrous. I could never vote in favor of such a thing that would have a negative impact on the local residents of Community Board 8.

Answer: *[Mr. Deen] - As I said that is why we have meetings, to be educated. We can look into that.*

Asim Deen – We pay tens of millions of dollars in taxes. Where is all our money? Where is our facility?

Answer: *[Mr. Haken] – Go play in Flushing Meadow Park that's where it belongs.*

Asim Deen – Now as I said in this letter baseball has a stadium; football has a stadium; hockey has a stadium. Cricket and soccer do not have a stadium. We the Asian and West Indian Communities contribute tens of millions of dollars into this economy.

Marc A. Haken – I think you should fight for one.

Asim Deen – We need something professional.

Bhithara Martha Fulton – Everyone supports you having a stadium. Everyone supports cricket and I love soccer. I don't think we are against soccer or the community or against the stadium. It's just the wrong location.

Answer: *[Mr. Deen] -Right*

I would suggest to you get corporate financial banking. How do you think Citified was created? It was by Citibank. Look at an industrial site like College Point with public transportation. We took a look at the sites Marie and Chairwoman *[Martha Taylor]* of the Community Board. Did you go? *[Directed to Marc Haken]*

Answer: *[Mr. Haken] – I couldn't make it but I know it like the back of my hand.*

My first impression is that you want to tear up a green site and trees to put up a stadium where there is no room for parking. The roads are narrow and the other side is used by school children. If you want it to be a financial venture that is very different from promoting the sport. That is my personal opinion but that doesn't mean that we don't want you to have a soccer stadium. The petition you submitted did not have a lot of valid signatures and a lot of them aren't in our Community Board area. You don't have to raise all the money but search to see if nonprofit agencies or corporations will help you. I don't know enough about stadiums but it looks like a commercial venture.

Answer: *[Mr. Deen] – It is.*

If you want a commercial venture this is not the right location.

Answer: *[Mr. Deen] – I understand that and that is the reason we are in a meeting. With all of your knowledge [Directed to Marc Haken] about the park and what it can and cannot facilitate, I agree. I was directed Flushing Meadow Park and I am going to look at this. I am not going to stop.*

Right, no don't.

Answer: *[Mr. Deen] – I am not a quitter and we are going to follow up on this. We are going to speak to our Elected Officials. Cunningham Park has certain limits and trees that you cannot touch and I respect that. I am not here to force anyone.*

We are just giving you a response from the community.

Chairperson Bhithara Martha Fulton asked the other Board Members if they have any comments they would like to add.

Robert Block – We are talking about a stadium that would seat 30,000 people. If the majority come by car that is 10,000 cars looking for parking. There are already problems with parking in the area. If you have 10,000 cars every major event looking for parking than you've got a big problem. They will be parking in people's driveways. We went through this for years with the Big Apple Circus and this would be the Big Apple Circus on steroids. This is absolutely unacceptable.

James Gallagher Jr. - When you mentioned that there is going to be a stadium for thousands of people with a dome on it, nothing in New York City other than the Flushing Meadow Corona Park's tennis stadium has a

dome on it. Maybe check out Belmont Park where there is more parking. A lot of Flushing Meadow Park is sinking land. A facility is needed but maybe not that big for the people in the community to play in.

Answer: *[Mr. Deen] – It's not only for the people in the community. It's to bring the rest of the world.*

James Gallagher Jr. – You need to get it next to the airport.

Robert Harris – We are a residential area with one family homes sometimes two family. You can't put a giant domed stadium and 10,000 cars in this kind of neighborhood. We had a proposal for a swimming pool and ice skating rink and we had to stop that. As I said, I drive by 70th Road and watch them play cricket. I work for several high schools and I write about the cricket and soccer players. Some of the kids are going to college with scholarships for cricket and soccer. We worked on Flushing Meadow Park with Senator Tony Avella who regrettably we lost to the primary. The stadium and the parking are very big things. You are talking about a national thing and you need to go through your Congressman or Grace Meng. You need State, Federal, and Corporation money. You also need the right location but not in a residential neighborhood.

Answer: *[Mr. Deen] – That was understood and I am also here to get educated.*

You are getting a lot of information now.

Answer: *[Mr. Deen] – The suggestions have been made for Flushing Meadow Park.*

Marc A. Haken – Or, Kissena Park.

Bhithara Martha Fulton – Kissena Park is also a good idea because they are vastly underutilized.

Answer: *[Mr. Deen] – Okay.*

Robert Harris – You also have to worry about the neighbors there also.

Marc A. Haken – I was going to say if this proposal was in your neighborhood a block away from where you live I doubt very much if you would be in favor. I also don't think that Alicia Hyndman who is a very good friend of mine would be in favor of it. The two sites that were mentioned Kissena Park which is easily available by subway and bus or Flushing Meadow Park which is also easily accessible, unlike Cunningham Park.

Chairperson Bhithara Martha Fulton asked if there is anyone else [from the public] wants to make a comment.

Elaine Young – Everything that I was thinking was already stated. You now understand this is not an appropriate location but I think what you want to do is wonderful and you should be doing it. The suggestions from the Chair [Bhithara Martha Fulton] of the committee are right on target. Just understand we are not against what you're doing we are not against cricket or soccer we're just against it in Cunningham Park.

Answer: *[Mr. Deen] – Correct, I agree. Now that the gentleman has shared light for me to see that location.*

Davinder Paul Singh – Speaking from Council Member Barry Grodenchik's office I think this proposal has not gone to him yet. If it did he would have a big problem with it. The Park needs to be kept natural. As Mr. Harken said forever wild forever natural. He supports the Community Board with whatever decision they make.

Answer: *[Mr. Deen] - You helped a lot with a lot of different issues when I put forth and they have been solved. What we will do is look at those locations that have been pointed out and see what can come out of it.*

Bhithara Martha Fulton – We support cricket and we support your community. Is there a motion?

Marc A. Haken - Let me first explain what this means. There is not a quorum. What will happen is in the November Community Board meeting the chair [Bhithara Fulton] will make a report give the consensus of Committee. The consensus is saying whether this committee would approve or disapprove the proposal and then we will be asking the full Board to give the same response.

Answer: *[Mr. Deen] – What Community Board serves Flushing Meadow Park.*

Marc A. Haken – Flushing Meadow Park has five separate Community Boards which all have a piece of it.

Marc A. Haken made a motion to approve the proposal for the domed soccer/cricket stadium in Cunningham Park seconded by Bhitihara Martha Fulton.

A vote was taken to approve the proposal.

Count in favor 0 **Opposed:** 5 **Abstained:** 0

Board Members in Favor:

None

Board Members Against:

Robert Block, James Gallagher Jr., Marc A. Haken, Robert Harris, Bhitihara Martha Fulton.

Chairperson Bhitihara Martha Fulton provided a Parks update that the Commissioner told her that they were beginning to do plans to renovate some of the comfort stations in Community Board 8.

Marc A. Haken – Also, before every Community Board meeting you can sign up for public participation. You may speak for two or three minutes to speak to the entire board. That’s at the very beginning of the meeting.

Asim Deen – If I understand the Community Board has a certain input in Flushing Meadow Park.

Robert Harris – The real power is inside the civic associations, tenants and political clubs. That’s where the power is and they also have some money. The money comes from the legislators. Councilman Barry Grodenchik has five million every year but he has to spread it around the whole area. Congresswoman Grace Meng might get some money from Congress but we have a trillion dollar deficit.

Adjournment:

Marc A. Haken made a motion to adjourn this meeting at 8:37 p.m.

Respectfully submitted,

Izabela Szczepanska, CB8 Staff

November 13, 2018