



April 2, 2006
Urban Tactics

Home, Sweet Homer: The New Mets Stadium

By [JEFF VANDAM](#)

WITH all the rancor in the City Council last week over plans for a new Yankee Stadium, New Yorkers may forget that the city actually has two baseball teams that intend to open new ballparks by 2009.

Last week at City Hall, Mr. October himself, the former Yankee Reggie Jackson, defended the Yankees' plans to Councilwoman Helen Diane Foster of the Bronx, among other critics. Yet very little attention has been paid to the details of the planned Mets stadium, which were disclosed last month in the team's media guide and have been reprinted in at least one newspaper, The Queens Chronicle. Construction of Shea II is slated to start in a few months.

The Mets say they will not discuss the new stadium until they make an official announcement, which they say will be soon. But at least as described in the media guide, the new Shea, which will be built in the eastern parking lot of the current stadium, will depart sharply from the giant blue bowl that Mets loyalists have filled since 1964.

For example, Shea II features a clear tip of the hat to Brooklyn's late beloved Ebbets Field in its exterior brick facade. According to the Mets media guide, there will also be a ring of steel supports around the proposed stadium that are meant to evoke the city's bridges as well as the team's connection to the five boroughs.

The team promises that the new arena will include more bathrooms and more hot-dog stands than does Shea (exactly how many more is not clear), as well as wider seats and more legroom.

The stadium is scheduled to be ready for Opening Day 2009, and it will take shape as the Mets play their next three seasons. Although parking may be a concern during construction, one other potential worry can be put to rest. With the new stadium, which will benefit from subsidies from New York City and New York State, the Mets will agree to stay in Queens for at least 35 more years.

'Polo Grounds,' Perhaps?

For Mets fans, Shea II offers many topics to ponder, from field dimensions to seating capacity. High feelings surround one issue in particular — its name.

"Let's name the stadium appropriately either after the team or after an individual," Andrew Cardona, a lifelong Flushing resident, said at a public hearing about the plan held in Flushing this year. "But I hope it's not going to be called the Citigroup Field."

[Edward Kennedy](#), a computer operator and Mets season-ticket holder who lives in Rockaway Beach, Queens, likes the old name just fine. "Look at all those fields — 'Tropicana Field?' " he said as he wandered around the Mets store near Bryant Park last week. "I don't think they should change the name Shea."

On the Mets Web site, some fans suggested that Met Life, the insurance company, would surely be an apt stadium sponsor, but when other fans suggested naming the field for [Jackie Robinson](#), reaction was swift.

"The Mets have their own history," wrote a user named izzygone, who pointed out that Robinson, the Dodger, never wore the blue and orange. "I'd rather name it Gil Hodges Stadium."

Another online fan, named caliboi, added a dose of reality. "Face it, guys," he wrote. "The stadium will not be named after a person." But he acknowledged that there was one person — and a son of Queens at that — who could pull it off. "Trump Field, or Trump Park," caliboi wrote. "His name is everywhere."

Pray for Sun

Most fans seem to approve of the field's overall design — most of it, anyway.

John Pasterick, wearing a Mets windbreaker as he made his way home to Old Bridge, N.J., from Midtown last week, said he was too young to remember Ebbets Field and could not compare it with designs for the new park. But what he liked about earlier plans for the new Shea, he said, was its retractable roof, a detail missing from the current renderings. "You can get all excited about the weather on Opening Day," he said, "but the next week it could be 40 degrees and raining."

Others chafed at the fact that the new Shea will have 11,500 fewer seats than the old one. "If they intend to build a franchise that will compete every year," asked donmorf1, on the fan forum, "why are they going to provide fewer seats in the largest and probably most baseball-intense metropolitan area in the country?"

Gene Kelty, chairman of Community Board 7 in Flushing, questioned the accuracy of the plan's estimated 8,800 parking spots, and the reasonableness of their location. A lot at the Van Wyck Expressway Viaduct, Mr. Kelty said, is "so far remote that the people parking there should go instead shopping at the Home Depot. They are a lot closer to that site than the stadium."

Eric Okurowski, a resident of Babylon, N.Y., who operates a stadium-analysis site, www.stadiumpage.com, favors a bay view beyond the outfield instead of the scene of Willets Point and Northern Boulevard that fans of the new stadium will see.

But he knows this is a pipe dream. "My two favorites are PNC Park in Pittsburgh and AT&T Park in San Francisco partially because of the view of the water beyond the outfield fences," he wrote in an e-mail message. "Sadly, that's just about impossible in Flushing unless they move the Whitestone Expressway!"

More practically, Mr. Kennedy of Rockaway Beach noted that the orientation of the new park's outfield and the opening behind it could have another drawback: fans without tickets will no longer be able to glimpse the games from the exit platform of the No. 7 train.

Goodbye and Good Luck

Most fans were willing to say goodbye to, and even to deride, the Mets' longtime home.

"It's a dump," said Mr. Pasterick, the fan from Old Bridge. Asked if the old park should be torn down, he gave a sympathetic smile. "It's time," he said, as if bidding a last farewell to a friend.

Others were more descriptive. "Today, Shea's interior is a dark, damp, smelly dungeon full of confusing ramps and escalators that don't work half the time," mitchesq, another online user, wrote last week.

Some admitted to the prospect of shedding a tear when Shea meets the wrecking ball. Others were already thinking of what they might claim.

"I'd want a seat," Mr. Pasterick said, with a smile. "I'd put it in my backyard." Is there a color he would prefer? "Either orange or blue," he said, perhaps not coincidentally picking some of the best seats in the house.

- [Copyright 2006The New York Times Company](#)

-