

City Council Stated Meeting - April 5, 2006

by Mark Berkey-Gerard
Wednesday, April 05, 2006 12:00 AM

Every two weeks the New York City Council meets for its Stated Meeting to introduce and pass legislation. As a regular feature, Searchlight covers these meetings and posts a summary of the bills passed.

QUOTES OF THE DAY:

"If you couldn't trust the Yankees for the last 83 years, what makes you think you can trust them now?" - Councilmember Charles Barron voting against a new Yankee Stadium.

"We will make sure they live up to their promises. And if they don't, the Yankees aren't the only ones who know how to swing a bat." - Councilmember Maria del Carmen Arroyo, voting in favor of a new Yankee Stadium.

MEETING SUMMARY:

YANKEE STADIUM

The New York City Council approved a plan to build a new Yankee Stadium in the Bronx by a vote of 45 to 2.

The council's action allows the Yankees to move ahead with a proposal to demolish the existing stadium, which was first built in 1923, and build a new 54,000-seat stadium next to it.

Much of the adjacent 22-acres Macomb's Dam and John Mullaly parks will bulldozed and replaced with a series of new parks. (For more on the parkland swap, read Gotham Gazette's [article](#) .)

Four new parking garages will also be built to accommodate about 3,000 cars.

Most council members supported the plan and argued that they successfully fought for concessions from the Yankee organization and the Bloomberg administration that will benefit the community, including:

- A commitment to build an additional 15 acres of parkland
- \$8 million in funding to renovate another nearby park
- And 120 additional on street-parking spaces for area residents.

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The day before the vote, Governor George Pataki and Mayor Michael Bloomberg said they would urge the Metropolitan Transportation Authority to build a new Metro-North Railroad station adjacent to the proposed stadium site, which will help reduce traffic congestion in the area on game days.

"This has been made a much better project, not just for the Yankees, but for the Bronx," said Speaker Christine Quinn.

In addition, the Yankees signed a "community benefits agreement" that promises that the organization will invest \$700,000 a year into a trust fund that will be distributed to community organizations, pay \$100,000 a year to help maintain parks, and give 15,000 free tickets a year to local community groups.

"Little kids will no longer have to play in parks that are dilapidated," said Councilmember Joel Rivera.

But critics of the plan like Helen Foster, whose district is near Yankee Stadium, said the plan was bad for the community.

The community board rejected the plan. No money has been committed to build a Metro-North Station. Some of the new athletic facilities will be built on top of parking garages. And while the Yankees will pay for the stadium, the city will pay approximately \$130 million to redevelop the parks and build the parking garages.

"This looks like a win-win for the Yankees and leftovers for the community," said Foster.

Councilmember Charles Barron, who also voted "no," said that the Yankees have been bad neighbors for years and have done little to help one of the poorest neighborhoods in the city.

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"If you couldn't trust the Yankees for the last 83 years, what makes you think you can trust them now?"

Councilmember Melissa Mark-Viverito questioned why the city is still building four parking garages when the Metro-North stop is meant to reduce automobile traffic; she voted against the parts of the plan related to the garages. The vote on the sections with parking garages passed by a vote of 44 to 3.

Two other council members - Rosie Mendez and Leticia James - abstained from the vote.

The meeting sparked spirited debate and advocates for both sides packed the council chambers. Neighborhood opponents passed out fake dollar bills with the face of Councilwoman Maria del Carmen Arroyo "who represents the district" on them, suggesting she had been bought by the Yankees. On the other side of the issue, Bronx Democratic boss Jose Rivera led a group of construction workers in a cheer of "Build It Now!"

The council's action related only to the land use aspect of the plan. The Yankees are also seeking \$866 million in tax-exempt bonds to help finance the plan. The council has scheduled a hearing on the financing for the Yankee Stadium "and a new proposed Mets stadium" for April 10. The full council is expected to vote on the financing in three weeks.

Several council members said they would continue to monitor the Yankees to make sure they live up to their agreements.

"We will make sure they live up to their promises," said Councilmember Maria del Carmen Arroyo "And if they don't, the Yankees aren't the only ones who know how to swing a bat."

The Yankees plan to start construction on a new stadium this summer and finish by spring 2009.

BUDGET MODIFICATION

While the Yankee Stadium debate took up the majority of the meeting, the City Council also approved a modification to the existing 2006 budget.

It includes a \$575 million allocation to help fund the Health and Hospitals Corporation, which has amassed a huge deficit.

The council also approved \$1 billion toward a trust fund for retiree health benefits, a plan the mayor called for in his recent budget proposal.

The budget also includes an additional \$16 million for the overhaul of the Administration for Children's services, which is hiring more caseworkers in the wake of the death of 7-year-old Nixzmary Brown, who was killed by her stepfather.

The budget modification passed by a vote of 46 to 3.

The three council members from Staten Island — Andrew Lanza, Michael McMahon, and James Oddo — voted "no" because none of the money for hospitals was allocated to facilities in Staten Island.

POLICE PAY

The council also voted on a bill (Intro 244) related to compensation for firefighters who have worked previously as police officers. The bill would not allow the firefighters to count the years they worked as police officers toward their seniority or pay.

The bill was introduced at the request of the mayor's office.

It passed by a vote of 39 to 10. Several council members said it was not fair to disregard the service of police officers. Charles Barron, Dennis Gallagher, Andrew Lanza, Mark Viverito, Rosie Mendez, Anabel Palma, Dominic Recchia, David Yassky, Vincent Gentile, and James

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Oddo all voted "no."

The next Stated Meeting is scheduled for April 26, 2006.

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