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New \$3B shopping and entertainment complex to be built next to Citi Field



AMAZIN': An artist's rendering of Mayor Bloomberg's planned future for the area around Citi Field: a massive mall to replace the current maze of body shops and junkyards.

By DAVID SEIFMAN

Play mall!

Mayor Bloomberg made a pitch yesterday to develop the run-down Willets Point section of Queens with a 200-room hotel, retail and restaurant space, an interim 20-acre recreational field and a huge shopping center right next to the Mets' ballpark.

"Willets Point is one of those things that's gone on and on and on," the mayor told a breakfast meeting of the Queens Chamber of Commerce. "There are a lot of guarantees

this is going to get done on time, on budget, on schedule, and make a very big difference in our city.”

The plan unveiled by the mayor calls for 23 acres to the east of Citi Field to be revamped over the next 10 to 15 years in a \$3 billion project by Related Companies and Sterling Equities, the investment arm of the Wilpon family, which controls the Mets.

Cleaning up the contaminated land probably couldn't start before 2014. Assuming there are no delays in that process, construction would begin sometime in 2015.

Down the road, the Mets' parking area on the west side of the stadium would be moved temporarily to prepare for construction of 200 retail shops, movie theaters, restaurants and “entertainment venues” in an enormous, million-square-foot complex that hadn't been envisioned in the city's original 2008 proposal for Willets Point.

Mayors going back 50 years have been befuddled about what to do with Willets Point, a 62-acre expanse the mayor described as “one body shop and junkyard after another.”

The city has bought out 95 percent of the property owners, but is still facing lawsuits.

City officials insisted that they would prevail and that the project, which requires further approval by the City Council, would not get sidetracked.

“We anticipate fully that this project is going to happen exactly as planned,” said Seth Pinsky, president of the Economic Development Corp.

Bloomberg pointed out that the developers would have to pony up a \$35 million penalty fee if they decided to bail out.

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