

REPORT ON THREE DECADES OF LOCATIONAL ANALYSIS FOR A BROOKLYN ARENA

**SUBMITTED IN RESPONSE TO
ATLANTIC YARDS ARENA AND REDEVELOPMENT PROJECT DEIS**

**FOR
DEVELOP DON'T DESTROY BROOKLYN**

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NOTE: Develop Don't Destroy Brooklyn, a local community organization opposed to the location of a basketball arena in Prospect Heights, commissioned Barnacle Planning Studio to produce an analysis of the DEIS' discussion on siting a basketball arena in Brooklyn. Urban Planner Simon Bertrang reviewed the last three decades of studies dealing with siting a sports facility in Brooklyn and authored this report.

INTRODUCTION

Brooklyn has no major league sports team - and has not had one since the Dodgers left for Los Angeles in 1957. The Bronx has the Yankees; Manhattan the Knicks, Liberty and Rangers; Queens the Mets; but Brooklyn, with a population of close to 2.5 million, doesn't have a team. Neither does it have a venue that could host a team. Now the owner of the New Jersey Nets has proposed to move the team to Brooklyn - and to build a new arena on three blocks in Prospect Heights - near the intersection of Atlantic and Flatbush Avenues.

The arena is part of much larger 22-acre mixed-use redevelopment project by Forest City Ratner Companies (FCRC). Bruce Ratner, its President and CEO, leads the investment group that owns the Nets. This proposed project includes, in addition to the basketball arena, 16 buildings, mostly residential, ranging in height from 20 to 60 stories. The Empire State Development Corporation (ESDC), the State of New York's public economic development agency, has agreed to act as the lead agency for FCRC's proposed project. This agreement between ESDC and FCRC means the project has been designated a "Civic Project" under the Urban Development Corporation Act and is subject to the State's environmental review process and that the project is exempt from the City's zoning and regulatory authority.

As part of this required environmental review, ESDC released its Draft Environmental Impact Statement (DEIS) for the Atlantic Yards Arena and Redevelopment Project in July 2006. As per the State Environmental Quality Review Act, the DEIS sets out to address a wide variety of issues - assessing the environmental effects of the proposed project, evaluating reasonable alternatives, and identifying measures to mitigate significant adverse effects.

One of the items it addresses is the decision to build a major-league basketball arena in this particular location. Under a section titled First-Class Sports Venue in Chapter 1: Project Description (Pages I-9 through I-12), the DEIS references a 1974 study by the City of New York and uses it as the justification for the decision to locate Brooklyn's first professional sports venue in almost fifty years on the Prospect Heights site.

This study examines the arguments of these three pages in the DEIS that provide the rationale for the location of an arena in Prospect Heights and finds them incomplete and inaccurate. We have also reviewed the 1974 *Preliminary Study of Feasibility: Brooklyn Sports Complex* referenced by the DEIS, as well as two other studies on the location of a major sports venue in Brooklyn (authored in 1984 and 1994 respectively): Pratt Institute Center for Community and Economic Development's June 1984 *The Brooklyn Sports Study Phase I: Locational Analysis*, conducted on behalf of the New York State Urban Development Corporation, and the Temporary State Commission on Brooklyn Recreational Facilities and Brooklyn Sports

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Foundation's June 1994 *Brooklyn Sportsplex Development Plan* prepared by TAMS Consultants. The 1974 study analyzed ten sites, including five in downtown Brooklyn. The 1984 study considers eleven sites, including four previously considered in the earlier City study. Finally, the 1994 Development Plan looks at the feasibility of locating a 12,300 seat multi-use arena in Coney Island - partly based on the conclusions of the Pratt Institute's study a decade before: that Coney Island was the preferred location for a major sports complex.

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The siting criteria and analysis for the proposed basketball arena in Prospect Heights are summarily dealt with in three pages in Chapter 1 of the DEIS. The major source of information is a preliminary study three decades out of date. The DEIS does not include a comprehensive comparison of potential arena sites in Brooklyn and does not engage in a convincing site survey and feasibility analysis for any site. The location of a sports arena for Brooklyn has been studied repeatedly over the last few decades - and yet the DEIS fails to identify those studies and ignores their results, choosing to focus on the Prospect Heights location to the detriment of a sound economic development and planning process for Brooklyn.

After reading the 1974 study and the successive studies on arena locations in 1984 and 1994, we looked at the current status of the sites identified. Based on the siting criteria proposed in the DEIS and the 1984 locational analysis, we find that the preferred location for an arena remains Coney Island. ESDC must examine Coney Island and other potential Brooklyn arena locations as viable alternatives to a Prospect Heights arena. ESDC and the people of Brooklyn need a clear comparative analysis of appropriate alternatives in order to develop an authoritative conclusion as to the best location for a Brooklyn arena.

There is NO evidence or argument made in the DEIS as to why an arena should be located at FCRC/ESDC's chosen Prospect Heights location or why a proposed Brooklyn arena must be developed in conjunction with a major residential development. ESDC has made a gross error by ignoring the results of the 1984 and 1994 studies that found Coney Island to be the best site in the borough for a multi-use arena.

SUMMARIES OF PREVIOUS STUDIES

Before proceeding to look at a Coney Island alternative for a new Brooklyn Nets basketball arena, we summarize below the three studies that should have been addressed by ESDC in the DEIS. We have attached copies of these three studies to this report.

Preliminary Study of Feasibility: Brooklyn Sports Complex (November 1974)

Besides the fact that the information in this study is 32 years old - and the city and Brooklyn have changed dramatically since then - the most compelling reason that the results of this decades old study should not form the foundation for a siting analysis and decision in the DEIS for the Atlantic Yards Arena is that the study is a *preliminary* analysis that does not draw any conclusions as to the most appropriate site for an arena. The DEIS' reliance on this outdated and incomplete study is unacceptable.

While the study certainly lays out the socio-economic conditions in Brooklyn thirty years ago, catalogues the then existing sports and entertainment facilities, describes the transportation network and planned improvements, develops a conceptual program for an indoor sports complex, and includes a series of 1 to 2 page site analyses for each of ten sites, it does NOT make any conclusions, establish any siting criteria or attempt to develop a comprehensive cross-site analysis of the feasibility and desirability of locating an arena in any of these locations.

This study cannot in good faith be used as the basis of a planning decision in the year 2006. Beyond a clear but now extremely outdated catalogue of sites and relevant contextual information, it does nothing but detail a scope of work for the final feasibility analysis that would allow the city to determine the preferred location for a Brooklyn Sports Complex.

The Brooklyn Sports Study: Phase 1 Locational Analysis (June 1984)

Ten years later, the Pratt Institute Center for Community and Environmental Development picked up where the City left off. It conducts a similar survey of sites, this time eleven instead of ten. Four of these sites, Coney Island, Broadway Junction, Atlantic Terminal and Brooklyn Army Terminal, are the same ones considered by the City in 1974. The report was prepared by Pratt Institute for the New York State Urban Development Corporation, the same entity undertaking the current study and proposal (In or about 1995, UDC changed its operating name to ESDC).

However, in distinction to the City's study, this *Locational Analysis* goes well beyond a demographic analysis, an analysis of transportation networks and a catalogue of sites and existing conditions. It develops a set of site selection criteria and then applies them, selecting two Coney Island sites as the clear favorites and then developing "test-fit" preliminary design proposals to prove the viability of both sites.

Some of the site selection criteria used in the 1984 study are much the same as those identified by the ESDC in the DEIS: adequate size, accessibility via mass transit and the highway network, and proximity to existing infrastructure. However, the earlier study also includes a more comprehensive set of site requirements than the DEIS chooses to apply: the site selected should reinforce the economic vitality of the surrounding community, should be located mostly on

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land that is vacant and readily available for acquisition, and, finally, should be in a community that is supportive of the proposed arena. The site criteria and requirements are spelled out on pages 13-14 and 18-19 of the 1984 study.

After carefully explaining these site selection criteria and the rationale behind them, the study sets out to apply them to eleven sites, ranking them and comparing them to each other. The result is that three sites emerge as worthy of further study, including two in Coney Island and one at Fresh Creek (near East New York). The Pratt Institute study then develops preliminary design proposals to test and demonstrate the degree of viability of each of these three sites.

Coney Island is tapped as the clear winner: either the Coney Island “waterfront” site on the Boardwalk (Steeplechase Park and Abe Stark Rink) or the Coney Island “gateway” site on Coney Island Creek (the former Brooklyn Union Gas site). Both are identified as the recommended sites for future Brooklyn sports facilities.

Brooklyn Sportsplex Development Plan (June 1994)

Ten years later, in 1994, the Brooklyn Sports Foundation and the newly established Temporary State Commission on Brooklyn Recreational Facilities retained TAMS Consultants to do a detailed study for the development of a Brooklyn Sportsplex, a multi-use arena, on the site of Steeplechase Park. This study is not a wide-ranging survey like its antecedents; it is a highly-focused evaluation of a single site. It includes a market analysis, acquisition plan, environmental impact analysis, operations plan, traffic operations plan, financing plan, cost estimate, and architectural program.

The striking thing about this study is that it clearly identifies the 1984 Pratt study as its foundation. Both in the Executive Summary (Page i):

“TAMS has also drawn from the Brooklyn Sports Study prepared by Pratt Institute in 1986 [sic] and sponsored by the New York State Urban Development Corporation.”

and, again, on Page 13:

“The Brooklyn Sportsplex project has been developed in part based on the original study by the Pratt Institute that helped define the program and identify the site for a sports complex in Brooklyn.”

It also references that since that 1984 study, the case for a Coney Island Arena has also been strengthened by a 1993 Program and Architectural Concept developed by Edward Larrabee Barnes/John M.Y. Lee and a Market and Financial Analysis undertaken by Deloitte & Touche.

This well-developed plan for a Coney Island Arena was submitted as part of the legislative mandate that created the Temporary State Commission on Brooklyn Recreational Facilities in 1993.

LOCATIONAL ANALYSIS IN DEIS

In 2006, the DEIS drafted by the ESDC for a Brooklyn Arena spends exactly three pages on site selection. Ignoring the progressive results of three decades of work, the ESDC looks only to the most dated of the previous studies for a Brooklyn sports venue. In 1974, the Preliminary Study identified possible sites for a sports facility; in 1984, the Locational Analysis recommended two sites in Coney Island as the best in the borough; and, in 1994, the Development Study provided a detailed picture of how a multi-use arena would work on one of the Coney Island sites.

Since one of ESDC's stated goals is establishment of an arena in Brooklyn, it must consider all reasonable locations and must conduct an unbiased locational analysis - the kind of comprehensive survey, site analysis and ranking that was recommended in the City's original study and conducted by Pratt Institute a decade later in its UDC sponsored study. Instead it has stated that only the Prospect Height site works for the arena, without backing up this claim with a thorough comparison of the alternatives.

A listing of other potential sites are given vague dismissals which do not seem to stand up to scrutiny. For example, on Page 1-11 of the DEIS, Coney Island is identified as one of "the sites that are no longer available" because it is "now home to KeySpan Park..." The DEIS does not mention Coney Island again. A quick examination of the existing and available vacant properties near the former Steeplechase Park shows that this is not true. Contrary to what the DEIS states, the construction of Keyspan Park for the Brooklyn Cyclones has not precluded the construction of a basketball arena on city-owned land to its west. In fact, the success of Keyspan Park has shown that a sports venue works well within a mixed-use entertainment district.

Both Coney Island sites are still available today and the rationale for their development as sports facilities is as strong as ever. Our own initial analysis of the Coney Island Alternative to a Prospect Height arena is presented in the following section. Proper planning requires that ESDC develop a more complete and thorough siting study to help inform the public policy decision as to where in the borough it makes sense to build a multi-use basketball arena for the Brooklyn Nets.

CONEY ISLAND ALTERNATIVES

Two Coney Island sites were recommended for a Brooklyn sports facility in the 1984 Locational Analysis.

The larger site, dubbed the Gateway site in 1984, is a vacant swath of land sandwiched between Coney Island Creek and the Belt Parkway (see Figure 1). It is currently owned by Keyspan and would afford plenty of room for a basketball arena. Without delving into the details of the design of a new arena and associated development, we have superimposed the footprint of the proposed Prospect Heights arena on the Keyspan property (see Figure 2). While obviously an arena would need to be designed to fit onto this specific site, the diagram demonstrates the scale of the site and certainly convinces us that a detailed development study for an arena on this creekside location would be able to successfully locate a multi-use arena on the same scale as the one contemplated for Prospect Heights.

The smaller site, designated the Waterfront site in 1984 is on the western end of the world-famous Coney Island Boardwalk, sandwiched between the beach and Surf Avenue (see Figure 3). The minor-league Keyspan Park was constructed on the eastern end of this site. However, there remains more than adequate room for a new basketball arena. Once again we have superimposed the proposed Prospect Heights arena over the waterfront Coney Island site – in two configurations (see Figure 4 and 5). The first attempts to fit the arena on existing public property, while the second assumes acquisition of adjacent privately-owned vacant and underutilized parcels to create a more generous space between the two sports facilities. This simple preliminary analysis convinces us that a new arena could easily be located on the remaining vacant land to the west of Keyspan Park.

The Prospect Heights site and proposed arena are shown at the same scale as a reference (see Figures 6 and 7).

To understand these Coney Island sites fully, ESDC's planners need to look at real test-fits for an arena, including identification of necessary infrastructure improvements – for example new ramps providing direct access from the Belt to the Gateway site, a pedestrian bridge over the creek linking the Stillwell Avenue Terminus and Coney Island district to the Gateway site, a series of parking garages on adjacent vacant parcels in either scenario and improvements to Surf Avenue for the Waterfront site. ESDC must give these viable sites the same consideration that it gives to the Prospect Heights site.

Only the Waterfront site was further investigated in the 1994 Development Study. However both sites are still available for redevelopment and need to be fully analyzed for comparison to the Prospect Heights site. ESDC must use a set of objective criteria to answer the question: how do these two sites measure up to the Prospect Heights site proposed in the DEIS.

FIGURES 1/2: CONEY ISLAND GATEWAY SITE



Figure 1: Aerial Photo of Coney Island Gateway Site



Figure 2: Prospect Heights Arena Footprint on Gateway Site

FIGURES 3/4/5: CONEY ISLAND WATERFRONT SITE



Figure 3: Aerial Photo of Coney Island Waterfront Site



**Figure 4: Prospect Heights Arena Footprint on Waterfront Site
(Public Property only)**



**Figure 5: Prospect Heights Arena Footprint on Waterfront Site
(Public Property and adjacent Private Lot)**

FIGURES 6/7: PROSPECT HEIGHTS SITE



Figure 6: Aerial Photo of Prospect Heights Arena Site



Figure 7: Prospect Heights Arena Footprint on Site

PRELIMINARY COMPARATIVE ANALYSIS

This report includes an initial comparative assessment of the sites, using both the DEIS siting criteria and others from the 1984 *Locational Analysis* (see Table 1 below and the following pages for details). The DEIS criteria are not underlined, while the additional criteria drawn from the Pratt Institute Locational Analysis are underlined.

TABLE 1

SITING CRITERIA	<i>CONEY ISLAND GATEWAY</i>	<i>CONEY ISLAND WATERFONT</i>	<i>PROSPECT HEIGHTS</i>
1 Adequate Size	+	+	+
<u>2 Land Availability</u>	+	+	-
3 Mass Transit Access	+	+	+
<u>4 Mass Transit Capacity</u>	+	+	-
5 Proximity to Central Business District	-	-	+
<u>6 Supported by Mixed Use Development</u>	-	+	+
<u>7 Highway Access and Capacity</u>	+	+	-
<u>8 Supports Economic Development Goals</u>	+	+	+
<u>9 Strong Community Support</u>	+	+	-

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1 Adequate Size. All three proposed sites have at least 240,000 SF as required by the first DEIS siting criteria. Any potential site must meet this basic threshold criteria. This should be qualified in all three cases – the space for an arena is there – whether or not it is readily available is another question.

2 Land Availability. This criterion is not included in the DEIS although it is in the 1984 *Locational Analysis*. Both Coney Island sites are available for redevelopment. The Gateway site is an abandoned gas property in single ownership (Keyspan, the gas company that bought the rights to name the home of the Brooklyn Cyclones) while the Waterfront site is in public ownership (New York City Department of Parks and Recreation) and the adjacent vacant site is controlled by a single private owner. In addition, Coney Island still has a multitude of vacant parcels near both sites for any necessary accessory parking garages. The Prospect Heights site in contrast is still occupied by residential and commercial uses. Most, but not all, of the site is now controlled by FCRC, but key pieces of the site remains in the hands of multiple private owners. Final site acquisition may be significantly delayed while any eminent domain case works its way through the court system. In addition, the proposed Prospect Heights site requires the demapping of two city streets and the relocation of the Vanderbilt Avenue railyard at considerable public expense.

3 Mass Transit Access. All three sites have excellent mass transit access. The D, F, N and Q trains all have their terminus at Stillwell Avenue, a few blocks from both the Waterfront and Gateway sites. The M, N, Q, R, W, 2, 3, 4, 5 and LIRR trains all stop at the Atlantic Avenue/Pacific Street station a few blocks from proposed arena site. If the only variable that needed to be considered was access, then the Prospect Heights location would come out ahead by virtue of its more central location and adjacency to the nexus of subway and commuter train lines converging on Downtown Brooklyn. However, in addition to access, any thorough locational analysis for the arena must consider available mass transit capacity.

4 Mass Transit Capacity. The Coney Island subway lines have low existing passenger loads and substantial reserve capacities. In addition, the Stillwell Avenue station is a newly renovated jewel – with wide ramps and platforms designed to handle a surge in crowds and efficient vertical movement from platform to street. The Atlantic Avenue/Pacific Street station on the other hand has no reserve capacity – the platforms and trains are overcrowded, the platforms narrow and the maze of underground corridors connecting the various platforms confusing. If mass transit's capacity to absorb new riders, especially the kind of surge in riders associated with the beginning or end of an NBA game in New York City, is taken into account, the Coney Island sites are far superior.

5 Proximity to Central Business District. This is the least convincing of the DEIS siting criteria – since it is unclear how an arena's proximity to down-

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town is critical to the facility's success – or vice versa . The justification given is that this is a necessary criteria for locating an arena “so that the office component of the mixed-use development would add to the critical mass of business activity.” This reasoning only proves sound if the mix of uses in the proposed development needs to include offices. Yes, offices need to be close to a CBD, but if the arena is in a mixed-use entertainment district instead, like Coney Island, it doesn't need offices to achieve the ESDC's goal of a sports facility thriving “in combination with a strong mix of urban land uses.” In addition, there is no support in the DEIS for the argument that there is a critical need for offices in Prospect Heights since the ESDC plan permits substitution of residential for the commercial.

6 Supported by Mixed Use District. If we broaden the CBD Proximity criterion to a more fundamental Supported by Mixed Use District criterion, then the Waterfront site vaults to first consideration. The City's new vision for Coney Island is a year round entertainment district with exactly the kind of “strong mix of urban land uses” that ESDC prefers for an arena location. This vision was given a strong booster with the formation of the Coney Island Development Corporation in 2003. The Gateway site is not embedded in the planned Coney Island mixed-use district (although it is only several blocks from it) and is more like a traditional stand-alone sports facility site. A Prospect Heights arena, as ESDC noted in the DEIS, would be planted in the proposed Atlantic Yards development and literally nested within four mixed-use towers.

7 Highway Access and Capacity. The two Coney Island sites have excellent highway connections: the Belt Parkway west to the Verrazano (and to Staten Island and New Jersey) and to the Brooklyn Battery Tunnel (and therefore to Manhattan); Ocean Parkway north to the heart of Brooklyn; and the Belt Parkway east to Queens and Long Island. These parkways seem to have significant reserve capacity (certainly in 1984 they did). In contrast, the Prospect Heights site has no direct highway access, although both Atlantic Ave and Flatbush are major arterials. The traffic analysis in the DEIS demonstrates that these roads are already at capacity with intersection levels of service “F” – a transportation failure which will only be exacerbated by Arena events.

8 Supports Economic Development Goals. A Coney Island arena would help the City achieve its economic development goals in a revitalized Coney Island. The CIDC's September 2005 *Strategic Plan Brochure* lays out a vision for a vibrant neighborhood and mixed use entertainment district with enhanced amusements and seaside attractions. To quote the *Plan*:

“Recent investment, including construction of the Brooklyn Cyclones' home at KeySpan Park, restoration of the Stillwell Avenue Terminal, and development of substantial amount of infill housing within the community have all laid the groundwork for a renaissance. Future improvements to public spaces and redevelopment of vacant land can

PRELIMINARY COMPARATIVE ANALYSIS

strengthen the businesses and residents that make the neighborhood so unique, and restore Coney Island as New York's playground."

Major sports venues in Coney Island could be to the early 21st Century what the amusement parks in Coney Island were to the early 20th Century: the economic driver of a major metropolitan destination. Finally the fall and winter NBA season means that a Coney Island arena would attract crowds to the neighborhood during the beach community's off-season, a long time goal of the City and the CIDC. Redevelopment of Vanderbilt Yards with appropriately scaled development would also advance the City's economic development – bringing thousands of units of housing and retail space to the vacant gap between Fort Greene and Prospect Heights, bridging the rift created by the rail yards. However, nothing in the economic development goals of the Prospect Heights neighborhood necessitates an arena - in fact, an arena may be a drag on the project – creating an infrastructure headache, requiring the expensive relocation of the rail yards, and necessitating the use of eminent domain and the delays associated with its application.

9 Strong Community Support. The Coney Island community has a tremendous history of supporting the location of major sports venues in its midst. Borough President Marty Markowitz, local Councilmember Dominic Recchia and Community Board 13 have been long time supporters of a Coney Island arena – beginning with the “Sportsplex” proposal detailed in the 1994 Development Study and continuing until as recently as 2002 for Borough President Markowitz. Councilmember Recchia reiterated his desire for the arena to be located on Coney Island in his comments at the August 23, 2006 public hearing for Atlantic Yards. This support is in sharp contrast to the opposition in the communities immediately surrounding the Prospect Heights arena site. While significant part of the local community is in favor of affordable housing and supports bringing major league sports back to Brooklyn, it cannot be claimed that the Prospect Height, Park Slope, and Fort Greene neighborhoods are “strongly supportive “ of a new arena - especially when compared to Coney Island. The local Councilmember, Letitia James, is the most vocal opponent of the arena and over two dozen local community and civic organizations have endorsed design principles that preclude an arena on the site. In addition, State Senator Velmanette Montgomery and Congressman Major Owens are also opposed to an arena in Prospect Heights.

CONCLUSION

This preliminary assessment of the two Coney Island sites and the Prospect Heights site using nine criteria taken from the DEIS and the 1984 *Locational Analysis* indicates that a Coney Island arena for the Brooklyn Nets is not only a viable alternative to ESDC's proposal, it is preferable - meeting and exceeding more siting criteria than the current option under consideration by ESDC. ESDC must produce a comprehensive comparison of potential Brooklyn arena sites in order to prove that the Coney Island location – so long the focus of Brooklyn's major league sports aspirations – is no longer the best place for such an arena.

Proper planning demands that such a comparison:

- expand on the cursory treatment of arena locational analysis in the DEIS;
- update the potential site survey and analysis so that it does not rely on the information in a three decade old study;
- include an assessment of the results of more recent studies on the location of a Brooklyn arena (e.g. the 1984 and 1994 reports identified in this report);
- include a current feasibility analysis of viable arena sites in Brooklyn – Coney Island and others;
- develop a comprehensive cross-location comparison of all realistic alternatives; and
- use a refined set of siting criteria to ensure that the best site for an arena is identified (i.e. do not include unrelated and arbitrary criteria like adjacency to a Central Business District).