

Codey's Plans Leave Project In Meadows In Doubt

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TRENTON, Nov. 18 — Acting Gov. Richard J. Codey's plan to revitalize the sports complex in the New Jersey Meadowlands has raised questions about the future of the huge shopping and entertainment development that former Gov. James E. McGreevey's administration approved for the site.

The \$1.3 billion development project, called Meadowlands Xanadu, has been under attack by environmentalists and local opponents who contend that it will be little more than a big shopping mall. The main developer, which has promoted similar projects around the nation as "shoppertainment," won approval for the project from the New Jersey Sports and Exposition Authority earlier this fall.

The project has significant support from important political figures, including United States Representative Robert Menendez and former State Senator John Lynch. At the groundbreaking Oct. 5, Mr. McGreevey spoke effusively about the entertainment and shopping "destination" that he said would bring crowds back to the site of the sagging sports complex.

But while Mr. McGreevey wanted the state to get out of the sports business, Mr. Codey wants to resuscitate it, using state money if necessary. Mr. Codey, who became acting governor on Tuesday, has asked the chairman of the sports authority, Carl Goldberg, to review the plan for the sports complex site. Mr. Codey "wants to be thoroughly debriefed within the next couple weeks," Mr. Goldberg said.

As for the Xanadu development team, the Mills Corporation and the Mack-Cali Realty Corporation, Mr. Goldberg said: "There are significant agreements in place, but that doesn't mean the land plan can't be refined going forward. If we have to go back to Mills and Mack-Cali and request some modifications to their land plan in order to accommodate what Governor Codey wants over the years, we will."

The sports complex includes Giants Stadium, where the New York Giants, the New York Jets and the MetroStars soccer team play, the Meadowlands Racetrack and the Continental Airlines Arena, shared by the New Jersey Nets and the New Jersey Devils. Of the five sports teams, four have proposed new homes: the Jets in a stadium on the West Side of Manhattan, the Nets in Brooklyn, the Devils in an arena in Newark and the MetroStars in Harrison, N.J.

What the sports-friendly Mr. Codey wants is a new stadium for the Giants, a separate arena for the MetroStars and video slot machines at the racetrack. He also wants to keep the Jets and the Nets. But some sports

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industry experts and environmental advocates say that the 400-acre site cannot accommodate all that and Xanadu, with 5 million square feet of retail, entertainment and office space.

The state chapter of the Sierra Club has sued the sports authority over Xanadu, arguing that the state failed to conduct the required environmental impact studies. Jeff Titte, the club president, said the project would bring 100,000 to 125,000 additional cars a day. If the sports complex is expanded as well, he said, "it's going to burst at the seams."

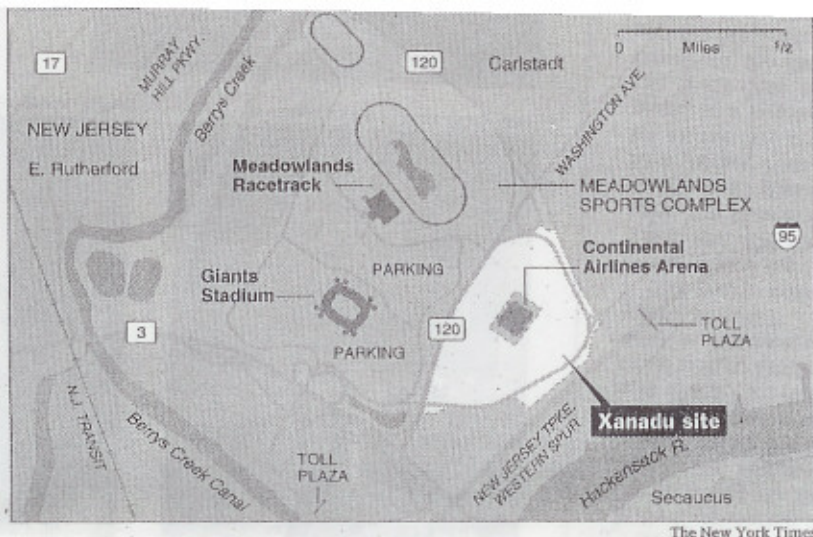
Michael Rowe, a sports industry consultant who is advising Mr. Codey on the sports complex, said, "I think everything is in play."

"To say we want to de-emphasize sports and look at making it a retail-entertainment-office-housing-sports complex, I believe he has earned the right to double-check whether that's the solution to what the Meadowlands needs to be in the 2000's," Mr. Rowe said.

Still, the site preparation for Xanadu is under way and the developers need just one more approval, from the Army Corps of Engineers.

"We've got our state permits and a contract with the state, and are looking forward to building this project," said Robert Sommer, a spokesman for Mills and Mack-Cali. "The new governor has lot of exciting proposals that would potentially enhance Meadowlands Xanadu."

George Zoffinger, the sports authority president, also says the projects are compatible. "We feel pretty strongly that the Xanadu project works well with the site," Mr. Zoffinger said. "It's going to take planning. It's going to take creativity. But I'm very pleased that the governor realizes we have real opportunities here."



Officials of at least some of the teams now at the Meadowlands are not so sure. The Giants, Jets and Devils all sent letters in recent weeks to the sports authority expressing concerns over how Xanadu would affect parking and traffic for their fans. The parking is a special concern to the football teams because garage parking is slower to empty out than surface parking, and makes tailgating all but impossible.

The Giants have been negotiating with the sports authority for several years, reaching an agreement last year for a \$375 million renovation of the 28-year-old stadium when what the team really wanted was a new stadium. While Mr. Zoffinger has a history of friction with the team management, Mr. Codey's statement last week that he favored a new stadium clearly encouraged the Giants.

"I think that Richard Codey has expressed to us that he wants to make a deal with us, and we're very optimistic that we will be able to accomplish that," said John Mara, the Giants' executive vice president and chief operating officer.

Mr. Mara said his team was conducting its own review of Xanadu's effects. "We're working with them to make sure it's possible to coexist," he said. "I'm not sure that it is, but we're keeping an open mind."

Lou Lamoriello, the Devils' chief executive and general manager, said, "It's about how our fans will be affected when they come to the game, whether it has to do with parking, or egress or entrance."

Mr. Lamoriello continued, "From what I can tell, none of the teams

have been satisfied to the point where they're comfortable."

Mr. Codey, while declining to discuss the Xanadu project, said in an interview that he was committed to improving relations with the teams. If the Jets, Nets and Devils leave, Mr. Codey said, "that leaves what is now an old football stadium but a good one, and a racetrack that like all other racetracks every year loses attendance."

He said he wanted to keep the complex's position as the premier sports center in the New York region. "It should still be a mecca for sports," not a center in decline, he said. Mr. Codey also voiced doubts about New York's succeeding in luring the Nets and Jets, despite Mayor Michael R. Bloomberg's fervent campaigning. "There's only so much Bloomberg can spend on sports teams," he said.

The courting of sports teams is also an issue with New Jersey voters however. Polls have shown that most supported Mr. McGreevey's refusal to spend any state money on the teams, and efforts to build an arena in Newark, which is to be financed by the Devils and the city, have barely moved in three years.

But Mr. Rowe said polls also showed that New Jersey residents are enthusiastic about the sport complex. "When New Jerseyans were polled in the 1980's about what they were most proud of in New Jersey, they listed the Meadowlands as the top thing," he said. "They were proud for the Meadowlands to be hosting in excess of seven or eight million people a year, and to have five professional sports teams."

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