

Party Promotes Huge Meadowlands

By RONALD SMOTHERS

EAST RUTHERFORD, N.J., Oct. 5 — As developers unveiled plans on Tuesday for a \$1.3 billion sports and entertainment complex in the Meadowlands, critics raised questions about access to jobs and the potential impact on traffic and on air and water quality.

The project, known as Meadowlands Xanadu, is billed by its developers as the "ultimate sports, leisure, family entertainment and shopping complex in the United States." To celebrate the project's groundbreaking, the developers staged a celebrity-studded party on Tuesday to preview some of Xanadu's planned attractions, including an indoor ski slope.

The event drew politicians and business leaders from Bergen County, where the project will be adjacent to the Continental Airlines Arena on land leased from the New Jersey Sports and Exposition Authority.

But officials from neighboring Hudson County, though invited, stayed away from the event and later complained that the project's developers had ignored their suggestion to extend the Hudson-Bergen Light Rail line to the site. Without that rail line, they said, the county's poor and immigrant populations would have a difficult time getting to the Meadowlands and competing for some of the 20,000 permanent jobs that are expected to result.

Current plans call for a 1.5-mile heavy-rail spur into the site from the Pascack Valley line of New Jersey Transit as the commuter line skirts the western edge of the Meadowlands on the way to the Secaucus transfer station. By contrast, the light rail line runs east of the Meadowlands through most of the Hudson County towns that line the Hudson River.

Assembly Speaker Albio Sires, who is also the mayor of West New York in Hudson County, said county officials had agreed to support the project despite concerns about its economic impact on their downtowns after state officials said they would seriously consider extending the light rail system.

"I'm not against the heavy rail," Mr. Sires said. "But it seems that in running this publicity machine for Xanadu they have lost sight of the need for light rail. A lot of us feel that we are getting nothing but lip service."

State officials say they are still considering a light rail extension to Xanadu but have no current plans to do so.

Mr. Sires observed that the project's developers and the sports authority may still need help from the State Legislature to finance road and sewer improvements. "There

Project as Critics Raise Concerns

Local officials complain of 'nothing but lip service.'

are a lot of things they still have to do," he said. "They have to come to the Assembly for a lot of things, and I have learned a lot in the last year or so."

Another critic, Jeff Tittel, the director of the New Jersey chapter of the Sierra Club, said Tuesday that a coalition of groups that had challenged the project as it sought state and federal permits would ratchet up their opposition and go to court to block it. He said the project would increase traffic congestion and pollute the air and water.

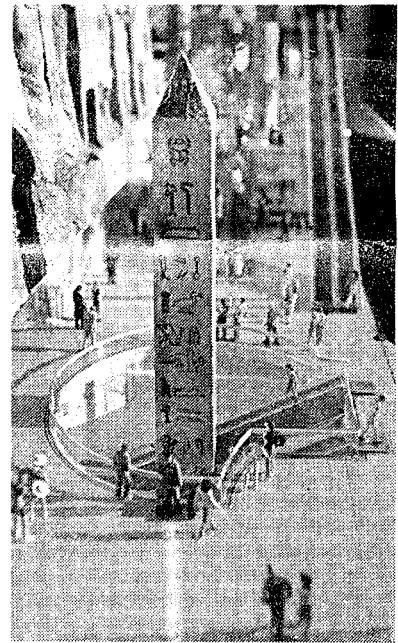
"This is what I call a snow job," he said, adding that another lawsuit to stop the project, brought by an unsuccessful bidder for development rights at the site, is pending.

But William Sheehan, the Hackensack River keeper, said 600 acres of

wetlands would be preserved as part of the project. "The land is in the hands of the conservation trust now, and so we never have to worry about it being developed," he said.

The sports authority agreed on Monday to a 175-year lease with the developers. Under the deal, the developers will pay the state \$160 million in nine installments, and the state will pay one of the developers, the Mills Corporation, \$26 million for 600 acres of wetlands it had acquired to build a mall. The developers — Mills, of Arlington, Va.; Mack-Cali Realty of Cranford, N.J.; and KanAm, based in Germany — also agreed to pay \$65 million for road improvements and the rail extension, and to pay 14 towns \$12 million a year in lieu of taxes.

To celebrate the agreement and preview Xanadu, the chief executives of the joint venture that will develop the complex gathered with celebrities including the model Christie Brinkley and the television personality Chris Harrison in the parking lot of the Continental Airlines Arena.



A model of the multiplex movie theater in the \$1.3 billion complex reveals an Egyptian theme.

Under large white tents, they said the complex would be built around five themes — sports, education, food and home, entertainment and fashion.

They stood on a high platform next to a snow-covered ski jump. An acrobatic skier and a snowboarder, schussed down, did a flip in the air and stopped in a spray of snow.

One of the features of the complex's sports-themed section will be the Snowdome, permitting year-round indoor skiing, a ski-lodge setting and stores selling ski equipment. The entertainment section will offer programs arranged by Entertainment Weekly magazine. The fashion area will be supervised by Elle magazine, and the food and home area will include a cooking school and other activities arranged by Viking, the appliance manufacturer.

Gov. James E. McGreevey, who had championed the development, waxed poetic at the ceremony, invoking Coleridge's poem "Xanadu," which describes a "stately pleasure-dome" decreed by Kubla Kahn.