

No Chance for Casino in Willets Point, Queens, City Says

Written by Administrator

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A crumbling industrial area near Citi Field in Queens has been viewed by Las Vegas gambling companies, an Indian tribe, developers and even some elected officials as a likely location for a casino resort, if the state legalizes full-scale gambling.

But the [Bloomberg administration](#) on Tuesday tried to put an end to the speculation, insisting that there will never be a casino at the Willets Point area, where it hopes instead to develop new housing, shopping and entertainment venues.

Last June, [the city selected the Queens Development Group](#) — a joint venture of Related Companies and Sterling Equities, the developer and the owners of the Mets — to build a 1.4-million-square-foot retail and entertainment mall, a 200-room hotel and shops next to the Citi Field stadium, at Willets Point.

“There is no casino being built at Willets Point, period,” said Julie Wood, a spokeswoman for Mayor Michael R. Bloomberg.

Officials also said that the current zoning at Willets Point, as well as an environmental review, would not permit a casino.

“The agreement with the Queens Development Group to clean up and transform this long blighted area into a dynamic, mixed-use district expressly prohibits any gaming uses,” said Nick Kelly, a spokesman for the city’s Economic Development Corporation.

After Mr. Bloomberg leaves office at year’s end, his successor could move in favor of a casino project. But it would require a lengthy public review and an environmental assessment.

In any case, [the city has been awash with speculation](#) about potential casino sites every since [Gov. Andrew M. Cuomo](#) [announced plans a year ago](#) to legalize full-scale casinos in New York. Currently, the state has five Indian-run casinos, all

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upstate, and limited electronic gambling at nine racetracks, including Aqueduct in Queens.

Last month, the Assembly speaker, [Sheldon Silver, said for the first time](#) that he would consider a Las Vegas-style casino in New York City, citing possible locations at Willets Point, Coney Island and Aqueduct.

In recent months, [MGM Resorts and Las Vegas Sands have explored Willets Point](#) as a possible location for a multibillion-dollar casino-resort.

At the same time, the recently created Don't Gamble on Our Community coalition, which includes elected officials and some community groups, planned a rally Wednesday to oppose a casino development at Willets Point.

The city's "no casino" declaration came on the heels of reports that Related, Sterling Equities, a casino operator (Gateway Casino Resorts) and the [Shinnecock Indian Nation](#) had submitted a lengthy proposal to the city in September 2011 to build "a world-class casino, hotel, retail and entertainment destination" at Willets Point. The developers offered to pay \$100 million for 61.4 acres of city-owned land.

The proposal was given to reporters by opponents to the city's project, Willets Point United and NYC Park Advocates. City officials and the Queens Development Group say that the proposal was immediately rejected by the Bloomberg administration.

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