

QUEENS NEWS EDITORIAL

New life for the bay

It was welcome news that the city, state, feds and leading environmental organizations have agreed on how to improve the water quality in Jamaica Bay.

The 39-square-mile bay is cleaner than it used to be, but far from the pre-urban state, in which it was a cornucopia of fish, fowl and plant life.

For centuries, it was the center of a commercial fishing industry that harvested oysters and other shellfish, but the intense development of Brooklyn and Queens in the past 100 years brought an end to that.

The bay is still rich in natural gifts. It is no accident that there is a federal wildlife preserve within it, but because of its location almost entirely within the limits of the nation's biggest city, the battle against pollution never ends.

The city is putting its money where its mouth is. It plans to invest more than \$200 million to reduce nitrogen discharges from the four wastewater treatment plants on the bay and to restore shrinking marshlands.

This reclamation and protection effort is important. Jamaica Bay is one of the region's great resources, and it is a good sign that everyone is now on the same page about its future.

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Saving Old Stadium's Gate 2 is preserving piece of history

Sometime in the fall of 2011, people will visit the newly opened Heritage Field on the site of the old Yankee Stadium.

And while some will think, "What a wonderful job they did creating the new park," many others will conclude it's hard to believe Yankee Stadium once stood there.

The sad thing is, it doesn't have to be this way.

The Parks Department plan incorporates visual elements within the park to present the stadium's history.

But none of these come anywhere close to conveying the sheer size and majesty of the most famous sporting venue of modern times.

And they certainly don't offer any physical element from the 1920s structure.

An effort to preserve the most meaningful section, Gate 2 (mostly untouched during the 1970s renovation), began more than a year ago.

While its primary purpose was to preserve the best of the Stadium's exterior, it had the additional benefits of creating a grand entrance into the new park while creating a symbolic transition from the old to the new Stadium directly across 161st St.

The Parks Department raised the cost

of preserving Gate 2 as a major stumbling block, with estimates from \$10 million to \$16 million.

The preservationists tried several times to gain access to the gate area for an independent estimate, but were denied each time by the mayor's office, while filmmakers, other media and dignitaries were continuously allowed access.

In any event, a commemorative brick drive to offset, if not fully cover, the preservation costs was completely ignored.

No real attempt was ever made by the Parks Department to discuss design modifications or other alternatives.

The Stadium's lower decks are long gone, and the upper deck is now being removed.

After that, all that will be left to do is to tear down the historic 1920s exterior wall, including Gate 2.

The House That Ruth Built will then be nothing more than a memory.

How did we get to this point?

The bottom line is the city, starting with the mayor's office, wanted nothing of the original Stadium to remain. Hence, the flat response of "We have no plans to incorporate Gate 2 into Heritage Field."

No maybes. No "Let's see what we can

do."

In fact, the city wants it gone so badly that somehow, the independent Public Design Commission did a complete about-face between its October 2009 plan review (which rejected the plan as uninspiring) to the subsequent February 2010 review, which essentially gave the same plan the thumbs up.

So is this the end? Technically, as long as Gate 2 stands, no, Nevertheless, with literally days left, time is just about up.

The city can still do the right thing if it really wants to. But its actions to date say otherwise.

But even if the entire Gate 2 can't be saved, the three decorative balconies and two terra cotta motifs could be tracked and easily incorporated into the park as works of art. Works from the Babe's house itself.

It is two outs in the bottom of the ninth.

The city and the Parks Department have one more turn at bat to do something really special.

Or, they can just take three pitches, tear the gate down quickly, and let the game end.

We know what the Babe would do.

Mark Costello, John Trush, Richard Lillard, Matt Visco, from the Save the Yankee Gate 2 Committee

(www.savetheyankееgate2.com)

VOICE OF THE PEOPLE

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