



# Nascar's Plan for Staten Island Drawing Caution Flags

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Nearly two years ago, when promoters of stock-car racing first proposed a Nascar speedway for Staten Island, the notion of bringing one of the country's most popular spectator sports to New York City was met with a mix of curiosity and amusement.



The New York Times

A stock car track has been proposed near the Goethals Bridge.

But two events on Thursday— one involving a city councilman being roughed up, according to witnesses — drew attention to the intense opposition that the project has encountered in parts of Staten Island and signaled that the speedway may be quickly developing into one of the more contentious land-use proposals in recent memory.

Until last week, the project, which could cost up to \$600 million in private funds and take until 2010 to be completed, seemed to be inching forward. In May 2004, officials of the International Speedway Corporation, a Nascar affiliate based in Daytona Beach, Fla., confirmed their plans to build the race track. That December, they paid

\$100 million to buy 450 of the roughly 660 acres of the site, an abandoned petroleum tank farm near the Goethals Bridge. (A developer plans to build a shopping center on the remaining land.)

In March 2005, the company released a traffic study that proposed a complex network of ferries, charter buses and park-and-ride lots that would allow fans to reach the site during the three full racing weekends expected to be scheduled each year. The three-quarter-mile



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track would have 82,500 seats and 8,400 parking spaces, but Nascar promoters insisted that the traffic effects could be managed.

On Thursday, the Sierra Club, joined by a half-dozen local environmental groups, issued a report saying that the project would generate 30,000 vehicle trips for a typical Saturday race; worsen air quality during times when respiratory illnesses are most prevalent; require filling in 14 to 15 acres of fragile saltwater wetlands; and harm several wildlife species.

Several hours later, the Department of City Planning held its first public hearing on the project, which requires both a land-use review and an environmental-impact study. More than 1,000 people attended the meeting, at the Michael J. Petrides Educational Complex in Sunnyside, about half for and half against the project.

Less than an hour after it began, the meeting, according to people on both sides of the dispute who were present, degenerated into a shouting match. They said that a top union official who supports the development was involved in a scuffle with Councilman Andrew J. Lanza, a Republican who opposes it, as two planning officials tried unsuccessfully to calm the angry crowd.

Mr. Lanza said yesterday that he was trying to describe his views on the project when "a guy put a bearhug on me, threatening me while guys standing in front of him were urging him, 'Punch him in the face. Hit him.' "

Mr. Lanza identified the man as Christopher J. Wallace, president of Local 20 of the United Brotherhood of Carpenters and Joiners of America. Mr. Wallace, whose union has 630 members, said yesterday, "That's silliness."

"Clearly, the speedway and the benefits to Staten Island are what we should be talking about," he said.

In telephone interviews, two Staten Island residents who are volunteers for neighborhood environmental groups and oppose the project, Ronald M. Lauria and Charles E. Perry, and an International Speedway Corporation official, Michael P. Printup, all said yesterday that they saw Mr. Wallace place his arm around Mr. Lanza while trying to grab a microphone from him.

"It's a shame the elected officials couldn't speak and finish their thoughts," said Mr. Printup, who oversees the project and said it would generate \$200 million a year in economic activity and create 75 permanent jobs.

Police officers disbanded the meeting shortly afterward, saying that the auditorium's

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capacity had been exceeded. No arrests were made. A new hearing date has not been scheduled.

The speedway corporation has hired [Guy V. Molinari](#), a former borough president, to sway opponents.

"We're going to have to reconvene and hopefully start to answer their questions," Mr. Printup said.

Coincidentally, another land-use dispute involving auto racing has also generated high emotions.

On April 21, North American Motorsport Events, of Fleetwood, Pa., presented a proposal to bring an annual auto race involving single-seat, or open-wheel, racing cars, to Floyd Bennett Field in Brooklyn, which was the city's first municipal airport, built on 1,500 acres of reclaimed marshland, and is now part of the Gateway National Recreation Area.

[Representative Anthony D. Weiner](#), who represents parts of Queens and Brooklyn, sent an aide to the meeting and later said that the aide was berated by State Senator Carl Kruger of Brooklyn, who represents the area and has expressed tentative support for the project.

The acrimony between Mr. Weiner and Mr. Kruger, both Democrats, led to a loud argument at a fund-raising dinner on Thursday in Brooklyn, The Daily News reported.

Mr. Weiner said the project, which is backed by the actor (and race car driver) Paul Newman, would violate National Park Service regulations. "There is no doubt in my mind that when the senator learns how fervently his constituents oppose megadevelopment at Floyd Bennett Field, his position will either reverse or become awfully quiet," Mr. Weiner said.

Senator Kruger said of the project, "It's an exciting, unique opportunity to take what was the forgotten Floyd Bennett Field, energize it and bring a Grand Prix to Brooklyn. It will attract a very high-end, sophisticated clientele that will mean dollars coming into Brooklyn."

The National Park Service, which controls the site, has not taken a formal position on the proposal, which would not require permanent construction. It would cost an estimated \$15 million a year, provide some money for charity, and be affiliated with the Champ Car World Series.

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