DEPARTMENT OF CITY PLANNING
TECHNICAL REVIEW DIVISION

POLLING LETTER
Queens Future Map Change and Amendment

250047 MMQ

August 8th, 2024

SUBJECT

Queens Future LLC (the "QF Applicant") and the City of New York (the "City;" collectively, the "Applicants") are seeking certain land use actions to facilitate development of the asphalt surface parking lots adjacent to Citi Field (Queens Block 1787, Lot 20 and p/o 1; Block 2018, 1500) (the "Development Site"). The proposed land use actions include City Map amendments to:

a. Demap parkland corresponding to the area of a proposed entertainment and commercial development, which would be leased to the QF Applicant, and a relocated highway ramp;

b. Demap portions of streets corresponding to site access improvements and park improvements within the existing boundary of Grand Central Parkway;

c. Map new streets corresponding to a relocated ramp to the westbound Grand Central Parkway; and

d. Map new parkland corresponding to park improvements within the existing boundary of Grand Central Parkway.

Additionally, the Applicants are seeking a zoning map amendment to map a portion of the Development Site as a C8-4 commercial zoning district.

These land use actions would facilitate the redevelopment of the underutilized surface parking lots into a new recreational, commercial and entertainment hub on the Development Site (the "Proposed Development"). In order to achieve this, the QF Applicant is seeking a gaming facility license pursuant to the state-led competitive application process for the award of casino licenses in downstate New York. The proposed land use actions, in conjunction with the recently adopted Gaming Facility Text Amendment, would allow the New York State Gaming Facility Location Board to consider an application by the QF Applicant for a gaming facility on the Development Site. Approval is proposed to be contingent upon issuance of a gaming license for the proposed

development.

BACKGROUND AND PROJECT DESCRIPTION

For most of the late nineteenth and early twentieth century, the Development Site was an industrial dumping ground and landfill. The Site was later paved and served as a parking lot for the 1938 World's Fair. Afterwards, the Development Site continued to operate as a parking lot.

In 1961, the City of New York and the New York Mets entered into an agreement providing for the development and operation of a 56,000-seat stadium on the site. The site was leased to the Metropolitan Baseball Club, Inc., and William A. Shea Municipal Stadium opened on April 17, 1964. Also in 1964, the World's Fair was again held on the site to the south. In 1967, both the Development Site and fairgrounds were established as Flushing Meadows-Corona Park.

In 2006, the City and the Mets (acting through Queens Ballpark Company, L.L.C.) undertook the redevelopment of the stadium site. The Mets constructed a new 42,000-seat stadium named Citi Field in the parking lot adjacent to Shea Stadium and demolished Shea Stadium. The parking spaces on the remaining western, northern and southern portions of the stadium site, as well as on the parking lot south of Roosevelt Avenue, constitute the Development Site.

There is a long history of redevelopment efforts of Willets Point east of the Development Site by the City. In 2008, the City approved the Willets Point Development Plan and established the Special Willets Point District. In 2013, the City's designated developer proposed changes to the plan in conjunction with a proposal to develop an entertainment and retail center on the Development Site. In 2017, the New York Court of Appeals determined that the 2013 proposal could not proceed without the adoption of additional parkland alienation legislation by the state legislature. It did not move forward, and the City proceeded with revising plans for the original redevelopment area. In 2018, the City announced the commencement of an initial as-of-right phase of the Willets Point development referred to as Phase 1. On April 11, 2024, the City Council voted to approve a number of land use actions to facilitate the development of a Phase 2 project.

In 2022, the state legislature passed legislation authorizing the award of up to three licenses for casinos in downstate New York. On January 3, 2023, the New York State Gaming Facility

Location Board issued a Request for Applications to develop and operate a gaming facility.

On April 18, 2024, the City Council adopted a zoning text amendment referred to as the Gaming Facility Text Amendment. Before the text amendment was adopted, the Zoning Resolution did not include a gaming facility as a permitted use in any zoning district. The text amendment allows a gaming facility as a permitted use in C4 through C8 commercial districts and manufacturing districts if operating under a gaming license issued by the New York State Gaming Commission. It further provides that a gaming facility, as licensed by the Gaming Commission, shall be deemed to have satisfied all applicable regulations of the Zoning Resolution.

The Proposed Development would be a major new entertainment, commercial and recreational complex. It would have a maximum of approximately 3.7 million gross square feet, including a hotel with up to 2,300 rooms, a gaming facility, a music hall with over 5,000 seats, convention and meeting space, restaurant and retail space, office, and community facility space. The Proposed Development is anticipated to include two buildings—Development A on the western portion of the Development Site, and Development B just south of Citi Field. The Proposed Development would also include structured parking facilities with up to 13,750 spaces. There would be at least 20 acres of public park space. The QF Applicant is also proposing a suite of improvements to transit—including making the Mets-Willets Point subway station fully ADA accessible with new elevators and other improvements—pedestrian and bicycle facilities, and the surrounding roadways.

To facilitate this development, the Applicants are requesting several amendments to the City Map as follows:

1.) *Demapping of parkland corresponding to the area of the proposed entertainment and commercial development and a relocated highway ramp*:

    The large majority of the Development Site is mapped parkland. To allow for the proposed commercial uses, its footprint would be demapped as park. The demapping area would extend to include driveways and ramps that access Development A. This demapped area would remain owned by the City and be ground leased to the QF Applicant.

For utility service, Development A will require sub-surface lateral connections to utility and sewer lines located in Shea Road and the surrounding streets. The alteration map identifies an area within which the City may grant one or more easements for the purpose of locating subsurface utility connections.

The Proposed Development includes the relocation of a ramp to the Grand Central Parkway. A portion of the relocated ramp extends into current mapped parkland directly north and south of Northern Boulevard; these areas would be demapped as park and mapped as street per item 3 below. These areas would remain owned by the City and would be brought under the jurisdiction of the NYSDOT as part of the state arterial system.

Altogether, approximately 25 acres of parkland would be demapped. As a matter of state law, the state legislature must authorize the alienation of parkland.

2.) *Demapping of street corresponding to site access improvements and park improvements within the existing boundary of Grand Central Parkway:*

As part of the site access improvements, a ramp would extend from Shea Road to a primary entrance to Development A located on its western facade. A portion of this ramp would extend into the current boundary of Grand Central Parkway and would be demapped as street. The area occupied by this portion of the ramp would remain owned by the City and be ground leased to the QF Applicant.

In addition, the westernmost portion of the park area planned at the northwest corner of the Development Site extends into the current boundary of Grand Central Parkway. This portion would be demapped as street. It would remain owned by the City; the City would terminate the existing lease to Queens Ballpark Company, L.L.C. for this area.

Altogether, approximately 1.2 acres of street would be demapped.

3.) *Mapping of street corresponding to a relocated ramp to the westbound Grand Central Parkway:*

A ramp to the westbound Grand Central Parkway would be relocated and the portions extending into existing mapped parkland would be demapped as park and mapped as street. The ramp would remain owned by the City and would be brought under the jurisdiction of the NYSDOT as part of the state arterial system.

4.) *Mapping of parkland corresponding to park improvements within the existing boundary of Grand Central Parkway*:

A portion of the park area extending into existing mapped street (Grand Central Parkway) would be demapped as street and mapped as park to facilitate its improvement as part of the public park space. It would remain owned by the City; the City would terminate the existing lease to Queens Ballpark Company, L.L.C. for this area.

SURROUNDING AREA AND PROJECT SITE

The area within a 600-foot radius of the Project Area (the "Surrounding Area") is located in Willets Point in Queens. A substantial portion of the Surrounding Area is occupied by several major roadways and transportation and utility-related uses.

The Development Site is bordered to the north by Northern Boulevard and the Whitestone Expressway and ramps. Northern Boulevard is the name of a portion of NY 25A, a NYSDOT maintained state highway that runs east-west starting near the Queens-Midtown Tunnel and running along a portion of the North Shore of Long Island. The Whitestone Expressway connects at the eastern end of the Willets Point peninsula with I-678, which runs north-south from John F. Kennedy International Airport to the Bruckner Interchange in the Bronx.

North of the elevated roadways are open space and parking uses adjacent to Flushing Bay—as well as a portion of Flushing Bay itself at the northern tip of the Surrounding Area. There are more than 1,000 parking spaces located to the east and west of the marina, which are partially used for Mets parking on game days and are otherwise available for marina permit holders.

The Development Site surrounds and is directly adjacent to Citi Field.

The Willets Point development is east of the Development Site. It is mapped in a C4-4 commercial district in the Willets Point Special District. The area has long been improved with a mix of small, low-scale auto-related and light industrial uses. The Willets Point area is planned for redevelopment into a multi-phase mixed-use development. Construction of Phase 1 of the development began in December 2023; Phase 1 will include 1,100 units of affordable housing, a new public school, and retail and supporting community facility space. Phase 2 will include a 25,000-seat soccer stadium for New York City FC, 1,400 units of affordable housing, a 250 room hotel, and 2.8 acres of publicly accessible open space. The soccer stadium is expected to open in time for the 2027 Major League Soccer season.

South of the Development Site are large lots occupied by the MTA Corona Rail Yard and Casey Stengel Bus Depot. These lots are mapped in a M1-1 district. The Olmsted Center is located in the southwestern corner of the Surrounding Area in mapped parkland; it includes several buildings used as office space for the Department of Parks and Recreation (DPR) and parking areas used by DPR staff. The Rail Yard, Bus Depot and Olmsted Center separate the Development Site from the recreationally active portions of Flushing Meadows Corona Park located further south, outside of the Surrounding Area boundary. A pedestrian walkway, known as the Passerelle Bridge, spans the Rail Yard and Bus Depot connecting this southern portion of Flushing Meadows Corona Park to the MTA No. 7 line station at Roosevelt Avenue and Citi Field.

The Grand Central Parkway borders the western boundary of the Development Site. The Grand Central Parkway is a NYSDOT-maintained parkway that stretches from the Triborough Bridge to Nassau County and runs adjacent to LaGuardia Airport and along the western edge of Flushing Meadows-Corona Park.

The Corona neighborhood is located on the other side of the Grand Central Parkway from the Development Site. The Surrounding Area includes a roughly one-half-block wide stretch of Corona west of 114th Street from 37th Avenue to 43rd Avenue. This area is mapped with a R6 district along 114th Street, a R5A district mapped further west at the western boundary of the Surrounding Area, and a R6B/C2-4 district along Roosevelt Avenue. This area predominantly consists of a mix of residential buildings, both one- and two-family buildings as well as multifamily buildings. The portion along Roosevelt Avenue has a mix of uses, including an office building, a hotel, auto-related uses, a church, a construction materials store, and other commercial

uses.

There are a number of public transit options serving the Development Site. The No. 7 subway line has a stop at the Mets-Willets Point station and the Port Washington Branch of the Long Island Rail Road has a stop at Mets-Willets Point. The Q48 bus runs from LaGuardia Airport to Flushing and has several stops adjacent to the Development Site. The Q19 bus connects Astoria to Flushing and has a stop one block from the Development Site. The Q66 bus connects Long Island City to Flushing and also has a stop at Northern Boulevard/126th Place.

The Development Site is approximately 78 acres of land bounded by Seaver Way to the east, the Metropolitan Transportation Authority Corona Yard to the south, Grand Central Parkway to the west, and Northern Boulevard to the north. The Development Site contains surface parking lots with 7,423 spaces for visitors to Citi Field, which is located east of the Development Site. The Development Site is bisected by the MTA 7 subway line along Roosevelt Avenue. The portion south of Roosevelt Avenue contains, in addition to the parking lots, three small MTA structures associated with the subway line. Vehicles accessing the surface parking lots on the Development Site arrive from the surrounding roadways from all directions. The Development Site encompasses Shea Road, a park road, which runs around the perimeter of the parking lots, connecting to Roosevelt Avenue and Seaver Way.

The large majority of the Development Site is part of Flushing Meadows Corona Park and is mapped parkland. A small portion is located within the boundary of Grand Central Parkway and another small portion is located within the boundary of Northern Boulevard. By virtue of its status as parkland and street, the Development Site is currently not subject to zoning.

The City of New York owns the Development Site. State legislation enacted in 1961 authorized the City to enter into agreements with private parties for the use of a stadium and parking lots on the Development Site and the site of Citi Field. As authorized by the legislation, Queens Ballpark Company, L.L.C. leases the Development Site and operates the parking lots.

The surface parking surrounding Citi Field is used only on game days during baseball season (generally April through October), for other private events held at Citi Field, and for certain other scheduled events in Flushing Meadows Corona Park, including the U.S. Open. Up to 1,795 spaces

are designated for commuter parking on business days. Otherwise, this enormous asphalt parking lot is not available to the public and is left unused.

TO THE AFFECTED AGENCIES

The Technical Review Division requests that written comments from all concerned agencies be forwarded within four (4) weeks of receipt of this letter to:

Abraham Abreu, EIT
City Map Team Leader
New York City Department of City Planning
120 Broadway, 31st Floor
New York, NY 10271
212.720.3310
aabreu@planning.nyc.gov

With copies to:

Steven Lenard, AICP
Director, Technical Review Division
New York City Department of City Planning
120 Broadway, 31st Floor
New York, NY 10271
212.720.3226
slenard@planning.nyc.gov

Ellen Lehman
Associate
Fried, Frank, Harris, Shriver & Jacobson LLP
One New York Plaza
New York, NY 10004
212.859.8436
ellen.lehman@friedfrank.com

David Karnovsky
Partner
Fried, Frank, Harris, Shriver & Jacobson LLP
One New York Plaza
New York, NY 10004
212.859.8927
david.karnovsky@friedfrank.com

Comments issued by **email** are strongly preferred. If the Department of City Planning does not hear from any agency within the allotted time, it may be assumed that such agency has no

objections to the proposal, and a request for the preparation of the alteration map may be issued by the Department.