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New Stadiums Slip Far Down On the List Of Priorities

By RICHARD SANDOMIR

Last week's terrorist attacks are expected to delay any planning for new Yankees and Mets stadiums for the foreseeable future, according to sports finance experts and current and former government officials.

Mayor Rudolph W. Giuliani had been the driving force in seeking local aid for the stadiums, but he has not completed a plan to finance the city's estimated half-share of the estimated \$1.6 billion in construction costs.

Charles A. Gargano, chairman of the Empire State Development Corporation, would not directly say that the stadium plans would be embargoed indefinitely. But he said the terror attack had pushed the stadium project to a back burner of development priorities.

"We will focus on the most important needs," he said. "It's not that we want to forget the stadiums, but for the immediate future we're focused on the disaster downtown, because it can have such a huge impact on our economy."

Mr. Gargano's state agency had been discussing with the teams and with city officials \$300 million in highway, subway and parking improvements that would go along with new stadiums, but no agreement had been reached.

Those who have been critical of the plans for new stadiums before the terrorist attacks were even more outspoken now. Fernando Ferrer, the Bronx Borough president who is one of four major Democratic candidates in next Tuesday's mayoral primary, was blunt.

"I don't think stadiums are even in our vocabulary at this point," Mr. Ferrer said. "Not when there's a place where thousands of people who work and contribute to the economy is crumbling and needs immediate attention."

The Yankees were seeking a new stadium in Macombs Dam Park, on the north side of Yankee Stadium, and the Mets wanted a new home in the parking lot next to Shea Stadium.

"I don't know if the new stadiums are doomed, but major delays are appropriate," said John Moag, a managing director and head of the sports practice at Legg Mason Wood Walker, the investment bank, in Baltimore. "Certain things, by their nature, have to go on the back burner."

Still, some said a delay would not necessarily mean that the stadiums would never be built.

"Will the disaster make things more difficult? Yes," said Salvatore Galatioto, who runs the sports practice at Lehman Brothers. "But I absolutely think these stadiums have to be built. They'll be good for the city's pride. It will be risky for any politician who brings it up now, but the projects will need someone to take that risk."

Financing two new baseball stadiums — and possibly a football stadium for the Jets — will be nearly impossible while 20 million square feet of office space need to be built to replace what was destroyed when the twin towers collapsed.

"These projects had the same priorities problems that stadiums always face, but never in a city that's just been attacked by terrorists," said Sam Katz, a sports finance expert. "You can't say, 'Let's spend a big chunk of money on stadiums.'"

Mets and Yankees officials would not comment. And Sunny Mindel, a spokeswoman for Mr. Giuliani, did not comment.

Even before the World Trade Center attacks, the candidates for the Democratic and Republican nominations for mayor were less enthusiastic than Mr. Giuliani about a large public subsidy for the stadiums, especially with the city facing a budget deficit estimated at \$3 billion.

"I never heard anyone but Giuliani say it was doable," said Edward I. Koch, the former mayor. "It was dead before, and what happens only puts more nails in its coffin. It can't be done. There'll be a need for local money for more important things than stadiums."

Mario M. Cuomo, the former governor, who was the first to propose using the Long Island Rail Road storage yards on the west side of Manhattan for a Yankee ball park, added, "The argument to use government money now becomes more difficult for Mr. Wilpon and Mr. Steinbrenner as you get into this kind of calamity."

Fred Wilpon is a co-owner of the Mets, and George Steinbrenner is the principal owner of the Yankees.

Some of the experts said that Mr. Giuliani, or his successor, should push for renovations to Yankee and Shea Stadiums, or let the projects fade into the municipal woodwork. How long the stadium issue remains unresolved hinges on factors like the city's future financial condition.

"New York will bounce back unless we're mired in a war," said Mark S. Rosentraub, dean of the college of urban affairs at Cleveland State University. "The debate may be postponed for a year. In that context, Wilpon and Steinbrenner will talk about new stadiums and we'll play the same old game."

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