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Major-League Disrepair At Shea Stadium

Face-lift may scrap plans for new park

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In a sign that construction of a new Mets ballpark could be pushed years into the future, the city is planning a structural face-lift to shore up a "rapidly deteriorating" Shea Stadium, the Daily News has learned.

After 38 years as a site for everything from Beatles concerts to World Series games, Shea remains safe for fans, engineers say, but is suffering from the frailties of age — crumbling or cracked concrete, sagging ceilings, overtaxed wiring, water leaks, rusting steel.

Mayor Bloomberg cut off negotiations for new sports stadiums this year because of the city's projected \$5 billion deficit, and with a limping post-Sept. 11 economy, the city could be cash-starved for years.

Now, officials are talking with construction specialists, planning to restore and protect eroding concrete at Shea — a move that could prolong the stadium's life for up to 20 years, according to a city engineering report.

The same report documents scores of problems at Shea — with more than a dozen identified as requiring "immediate corrective action." At one point, engineers slap the city for doing nothing to repair "severe conditions" found in structural supports in several areas under the field seats.

Mets Senior Vice President Dave Howard said the team is pressing the Parks Department, which oversees the city-owned stadium, to pay for an array of maintenance projects — some long overdue. The team's lease for the stadium requires the city to keep the park "in a state of good repair."



Hands Schuh NEWS

Engineers found 'severe conditions' in several locations of the field seats at Shea Stadium.



Sipkin NEWS

**Ramps:
Consultant found
every ramp 'has
evidence of
corrosion.'**

"Now that we don't anticipate a deal on a new stadium in the near future, it's time to address many of the issues ... in the engineering report," Howard said.

The cost of the proposed maintenance projects — more than \$11 million — is nearly half what it cost to build Shea in the early 1960s, \$28.5 million.

Howard called the repair estimate too low. "There are major systems here, the electrical in particular — once a facility is 40 years old, there are a lot of systems that need to be addressed," he said.

Shea is "not in the condition we would like to see it in," Howard added. "We feel there are issues that perhaps were put off while we were discussing a new facility, but we feel now is the time to address many of these issues.

"Fans would be more inclined to return if they find a facility that is well-maintained and comfortable," he said.

Electrical, mechanical and structural problems have plagued Shea for years. The Jets fled the stadium nearly two decades ago, grumbling about its condition and bathrooms, among other problems.

During the Subway Series, city officials were so concerned that jumping and stomping fans could jeopardize the stability of the "makeshift" center field bleachers that engineers were posted to monitor them — from above and below — throughout each game.

"Fans are safe because of the ongoing program of monitoring and inspections, ongoing maintenance," said Matthew Monahan, an assistant commissioner at the city Department of Design and Construction. "If there was an area of imminent risk, the public would not be provided access to it."

Cracks and Corrosion

A report submitted to the department by one potential contractor noted that company officials were told "Shea Stadium needed a program for extending the service life for another 10 to 15 years, this being a result of monetary spending shifts from stadiums to the Ground Zero rebuilding."

That report, prepared by concrete-treatment firm Surtreat Northeast after an inspection of Shea conditions with city officials in October, states that "every ramp and every section of every ramp has evidence of corrosion," and there are "massive cracks ... in dozens of places" in supports for the field seats.

The stadium is "rapidly deteriorating," the Parks Department concluded in a confidential document prepared late last year. "Garnering adequate funding to meet the increasing costs of maintenance at Shea" is a "key issue facing the agency."



Sipkin NEWS

Wiring: City proposes spending \$2.2 million to replace main feeder conductors; \$1.4 million to replace 4,160 volt transformers; \$1.4 million to relieve overloading for concessions.

The city began to monitor the physical condition of stadiums more closely in April 1998, after a 500-pound steel joint broke loose at Yankee Stadium and plunged 40 feet from the upper deck, smashing into the stands. No one was in the seats at the time.

Even with a greater emphasis on inspections and maintenance since that mishap, tight budgets have left the city playing catchup, documents suggest.

Concern for Safety

A city engineering report completed in March said that overall, the steel-and-concrete construction is "generally in good condition."

But the report also sketches an unsettling portrait of various parts of Shea's structural skeleton and the spider web of electrical and mechanical systems beneath its shell.

By the city's own account, some of those problems could raise safety issues.

The internal report targeted 16 repair jobs that required "immediate corrective action" because of potential "life safety" issues, from buckling asphalt to cracked or broken exterior bricks.

An additional 17 projects — from patching concrete to reviewing the fire alarm system to replacing the center field bleacher stands — were identified as essential to bringing the stadium into "a state of good repair" and "could fail ... or affect public safety."

More than a dozen other issues — including replacing various handrails and replacing joints in the field seats — were listed as "components nearing end of life cycle."

At one point, the report notes that engineers found sections of the field seat supports had "severe conditions," but "no steps have been taken by the city to address these conditions in a timely manner."

"Conditions under the field seats, the exterior ramps and traverse cracks in the upper level slab are of concern," the city inspectors said.

"Overhead pieces of loose concrete, tripping hazards on ramps and steps and the unsafe storage of materials are typical conditions," the report said.

The field seats are expected to be repaired after July 1.

In one potential legal problem, the report revealed there was "no handicapped access ... provided in public and office toilets" — possibly a violation of a federal law that requires bathroom facilities be accessible for the disabled.

Chemicals Play Role

In light of aging concrete at Shea, the city is considering hiring Pittsburgh-based Surtreat to apply a penetrating chemical treatment to deteriorating areas that the company says could extend its life for as much as 20 years.

A report submitted to the city said nearly 270,000 square feet of concrete should be treated to prevent further corrosion.

The city wants to "look at extending the life of the stadium as long as there is uncertainty when there will be another stadium — or if there will be another stadium," Roger Liebrum, president of Surtreat Northeast, said in an interview.

It takes only a casual glance around on a visit to Shea to notice problems.

The underside of concrete ramps that ring the stadium shows extensive cracks and patchwork. On an entrance ramp to the field level near Gate A, masonry surrounding cinder blocks has been extensively repaired.

Though there has been talk of a new stadium for years, not everyone wants to see Shea go.

"I feel it's fine," said Greg Massaro, who grew up in the shadow of the park and attended Wednesday's game against the San Francisco Giants with his nephew Michael Geoghan.

"I know every spot in this stadium. I grew up with this ballpark," he said.

Yankee Stadium was renovated in the mid-1970s, but it's suffering many of the same maintenance problems as Shea, officials say.

The Bombers — which, like the Mets, are receiving \$25 million over five years from taxpayers for stadium planning — hope to be in a new park by 2008-09.

"We are moving ahead for the planning of a new stadium. We understand there are big budget deficits," said Yankees President Randy Levine.