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New move for MSG? Exec surprises neighbors by suggesting the arena could move across the street

CRAIN'S NICK GARBER



Buck Ennis

A Madison Square Garden executive made a startling claim during a public hearing on the arena's operating permit: the company might be willing to move the Garden after all.

The remark came as MSG owner James Dolan continues to [repeat](#) that he has no intention of moving, and as the city is considering the Garden's application for another operating permit. New York granted MSG a 10-year special license in 2013 with the understanding that the Garden would relocate.

The statement, by MSG Executive Vice President Joel Fisher, came toward the end of Wednesday's [four-hour Community Board 5 meeting](#) in which neighbors grilled the company about why they should get another permit to keep the arena perched atop Penn Station in perpetuity. Many board members seemed inclined to reject MSG's request, saying the arena should be compelled to move to make way for an expanded Penn Station.

But Fisher, trying to reframe the discussion, [said](#) renewing the permit would not preclude an eventual move. A suggestion raised earlier in the meeting, which called for moving MSG right across Seventh Avenue, "probably would satisfy us," Fisher said.

"That would satisfy being right on top of a transportation hub," Fisher said, though he added that such a proposal would need to account for the costs of new construction.

No such plan has ever been presented to MSG, Fisher said. Still, after hours of debate, the comments came as a shock to board members, said CB5 chair Layla Law-Gisiko.

"This was certainly, for us, the first time that we've heard MSG express that they would consider this option," Law-Gisiko said. "It really calls for great optimism and hope that we can reach an agreement that would be satisfactory for all parties."

Fisher appeared to be referencing comments made minutes earlier by Stephen Marmon, a member of the public, who proposed moving MSG to the two blocks along Seventh Avenue between 32nd and 34th streets—"that provide the exact same, heart-of-the-city location," he said.

A plan to move MSG there would thrust the arena into the middle of Vornado Realty Trust's Penn Station-area redevelopment plan, which calls for building high-rise office towers—and [potentially a casino](#)—on the same blocks. As of now, the site is home to aging office buildings and the soon-to-be-demolished Hotel Pennsylvania.

But with [Vornado's plans put on hold](#) amid financial turmoil, Law-Gisiko said a new Garden could be a welcome addition to the block—given the desire to avoid being stuck with an empty lot once the Hotel Pennsylvania is gone.

“If it were deemed, given the destruction that is being inflicted to our district by Vornado, that this particular superblock becomes a desirable site for MSG, I think it is a conversation that should be had,” she told Crain’s.

Reached for comment, an MSG Entertainment spokesperson put the move in hypothetical terms.

“If there was a realistic plan presented to us, that was centrally-located, in close proximity to mass transit, and that addressed the \$8.5 billion in public funding that Empire State Development has estimated it would cost to move the Garden, we would of course listen – but this just hasn’t happened,” the spokesperson said.

The location discussed Wednesday is not brand-new: for years, the architect Vishaan Chakrabarti has [proposed moving MSG](#) to the same Seventh Avenue site as part of his firm’s proposals for a new Penn district.

And MSG itself has given thought to relocating. Earlier this year, the company [held talks about relocating the Garden to Hudson Yards](#), and nearly agreed years ago to move across Eighth Avenue and build a new arena at the Farley Post Office, now the site of Moynihan Train Hall.

Madison Square Garden needs the city to grant it a new permit to continue holding events with more than 2,500 spectators, once the 10-year renewal of its initial 50-year permit expires in July. The monthslong process will include an advisory vote by CB5 next month, and culminate in a vote by the City Council.