

OPINION

Our great city is not for sale, even for a casino



Rendering of the Metropolitan Park casino project. (Courtesy Metropolitan Park)



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In recent months, progressive Democratic leaders like the incoming mayor, Zohran Mamdani, and Rep. Alexandria Ocasio-Cortez have proclaimed, “New York City is not for sale,” claiming to fight the oligarchy. As Queens residents, we beg to differ. Local officials have sold us out by giving away public parkland for billionaire Mets owner Steve Cohen’s casino complex, misleadingly called “Metropolitan Park.”

With just three bids remaining, the Gaming Facility Location Board and the Gaming Commission will decide on up to three casino licenses by the end of the year.

Cohen has waged an expensive, relentless campaign, spending [more than \\$9 million](#) across 18 lobbying firms, far more than any other downstate bid. He uses public relations, nonprofit donations, and paid neighborhood consultants to manufacture the illusion of community support.

On Queens Community Board 3, Councilmember-elect Shanel Thomas-Henry and Tammy Rose were paid Cohen consultants in 2024, disclosing it only at a November meeting on city map amendments. Though they abstained from voting, they downplayed their financial ties while promoting the project. Assembly Member Larinda Hooks, chair of the “Community Advisory Committee” that voted in favor of the casino, has benefited from [Cohen-hosted fundraisers](#).



The casino’s “community support” is clearly manufactured. On Sunday, nearly a thousand [rallied against the casino](#) in Flushing; last month, hundreds [marched](#) in Corona. A community-organized [town hall drew overwhelming opposition](#), and thousands have [written to state officials](#) rejecting the plan. Surveys by [state Sen. Jessica Ramos](#), the [Asian American Legal Defense and Education Fund](#) and the [MinKwon Center for Community Action](#) show that 70-75% of local residents oppose a casino in their neighborhood.

Local politicians (except Ramos, who has opposed the project) largely look the other way. So-called “progressive” officials, including Assemblywoman Jessica González-Rojas, state Sen. John Liu (in a stunning [reversal](#)), and City Council Parks Committee Chair Shekar Krishnan, voted to alienate 78 acres of parkland for a Vegas-style casino in a neighborhood where [more than 80% of residents are renters](#).

Disappointingly, Mamdani missed the state Assembly vote that allowed Cohen’s proposal to advance. Both Mamdani and Ocasio-Cortez have expressed personal opposition to casinos but have remained largely silent on the plan nearest to their districts.

At her May town hall, Ocasio-Cortez acknowledged local opposition but noted that “many are in support.” She [co-sponsored a bill](#) barring former officials from lobbying, yet Cohen’s campaign depends on exactly that: lead lobbyist Julissa Ferreras-Copeland is a former Queens Council member, and former Councilman Costa Constantinides, CEO of a nonprofit that received \$65,000 from [Cohen’s Amazin’ Mets Foundation](#) has also spoken in support.

If Ocasio-Cortez remains silent while a billionaire threatens to privatize public parkland in her district, her anti-revolving-door bill is purely performative.

Les Bernal, national director of Stop Predatory Gambling, has criticized Mamdani for failing to challenge the billionaires and unions pushing casinos. Bernal believes that if New York City held a binding vote on whether residents want casinos, voters would reject them.

Despite claims that casinos boost the economy, [studies show they drain wealth](#) from local communities, siphoning customers from nearby businesses.

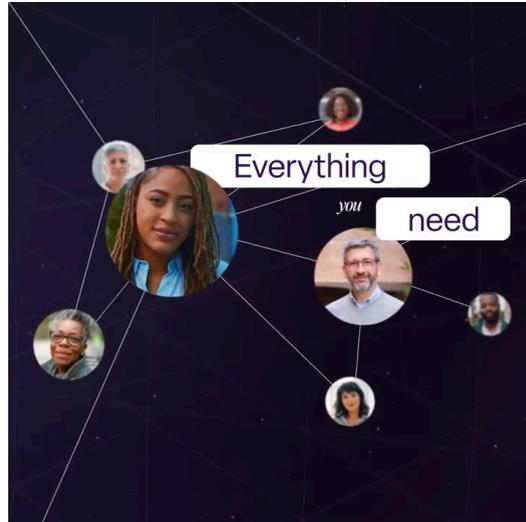
Can it really be that Queens residents want a casino while the rest of the city overwhelmingly says “not in my backyard”? No. An unelected billionaire (whose hedge fund, SAC Capital Advisors, was [fined \\$1.8 billion for insider trading](#)) has manipulated the process, pushing hard to privatize public land. Despite promises of jobs and amenities, Queens’ working-class residents will pay the price for decades. Democrats and self-styled progressive leaders are failing us. The story of Cohen’s casino is a story of democracy’s failure.

We, the residents of Queens, are fed up. This public land should not become a casino — or remain a Mets parking lot. We can and must do better.

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