

# The pitch: A 460,000 sq. ft. facility in Meadowlands for conventions, exhibitions and amateur sports festivals

*Meadowlands 2040 Foundation to present study of facility it says would enhance MetLife Stadium, American Dream and racetrack while serving as economic driver of area*

By **Tom Bergeron** (Meadowlands) - October 19, 2021 – ROI-NJ



A facility at the Meadowlands featuring 460,000 square feet of flexible space — one that could host major conventions, exhibitions and amateur sports festivals while supporting 150,000 hotel stays annually — will be presented Tuesday morning at an in-person event sponsored by the [Meadowlands 2040 Foundation](#).

The facility represents a dream scenario, [Meadowlands Chamber](#) CEO Jim Kirkos said. But it's a scenario based on facts and statistics from a study completed by a highly reputable firm, Chicago-based [Hunden Strategic Partners](#).

Kirkos said the study validates the concept.

Consider this: The New York City metropolitan area ranks 13<sup>th</sup> in the country for exhibition and convention space — well behind area leaders such as Orlando, Florida; Dallas; Chicago; and Las Vegas — and easily could handle 2 million more square feet of space.

Kirkos' goal is to use the land at the Meadowlands that has the now-closed Meadowlands Arena and its parking lot to help fill that void.

Here's how the proposed 460,000-square-foot facility would break down:

- 300,000 square feet of flexible exhibition space, which could be used for a large convention/exhibition or a sporting event;
- 100,000 square feet of meeting space, which includes room for smaller breakout and meeting rooms;
- 60,000 square feet of banquet space, which could host events of up to 2,500 people.

"We don't have any of those facilities in this region," Kirkos said.

The proposed facility, he said, could stand on its own.

Kirkos said there already are enough conventions and exhibitions to fill more than 250 dates a year. And the study indicated that 86% of all conventions and exhibitions need 500,000 square feet or fewer.

Kirkos also said the flexible space is intended to appeal to a wide variety of indoor events and entertainment that are too small for arenas.

But Kirkos, who has long pushed for a convention center to come to the area, said the biggest benefit of the proposed facility is how it would support all three major tenants

in the Meadowlands: [MetLife Stadium](#), [American Dream](#) and the [Meadowlands harness racing track](#).

Kirkos explains it this way:

- MetLife Stadium: The flexible exhibition space could be used as a fan fest location for major events such as Wrestlemania or the X Games, to global events such as the Super Bowl or the World Cup.
- American Dream: It would capture the families drawn to youth and amateur sporting events — think everything from state and NCAA wrestling events, volleyball and basketball youth tournaments with up to 60 courts, regional and national cheerleading competitions.
- Meadowlands racetrack: It would provide the entertainment that could serve the thousands who would attend conventions and exhibitions.

“It’s a facility that’s going to complement all of our other assets,” he said. “It’s a powerhouse because it’s not only capturing and recapturing business for the Meadowlands, it’s feeding the existing businesses.

“That’s what we call a win-win-win scenario.”

The wins would extend well into the local community. Kirkos said the study indicates the facility could generate an additional 150,000 room nights a year.

“Just think about the economic impact from 150,000 room nights,” he said. “It’s not just the hotel surcharges and the sales tax; think of all the meals those people will eat and places they will go.”

The plan will be discussed at 9 a.m. Tuesday at the Hilton Meadowlands Hotel by a panel featuring Rob Hunden, CEO of Hunden Strategy Partners; David DuBois, CEO of the International Association of Exhibitions and Events; and Brad Mayne, the former head of MetLife Stadium who is now the CEO of the International Association of Venue Managers. [See more info here.](#)

Kirkos, however, is determined to make sure the study leads to more than just talk — or more than the Chamber’s 2040 Vision plan, which was unveiled in 2017.

“When we launched the Vision plan, I got a lot of ‘attaboys’ and ‘that’s a great idea,’” Kirkos said. “Everyone bought into it, even the local political leaders, but there was no action — nobody taking it to the next level.

“That’s when I went to my trustees and said: ‘Let’s get some data. Let’s do a competitive analysis of what this facility could bring and then say, “We can’t wait on this anymore.””

Kirkos said the study is just Phase 1. He’s eager for Phase 2, when they can put out a Request for Proposals.

“Let’s see who would step up and build it,” he said. “Let’s get into the decision-making implementation stage.”

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