

April 3, 2024

## STATEMENT ON THE CONCEPTUAL STADIUM DISTRICT DEVELOPMENT PROPOSAL

The Design Advocacy Group (DAG) Steering Committee had the opportunity to meet with representatives of Comcast Spectacor to review and discuss their development proposal for the Stadium District. The aspirational, conceptual plan is laudable in its proposed uses. Converting surface parking to any of the proposed uses, represents significant opportunity as Comcast Spectacor, now joined by the Philadelphia Phillies, embarks upon what will be a long and arduous design and development process.

We applaud their acknowledgement of the proposal's conceptual nature, and offer the following suggestions rather than issue, or withhold, support of the project.

Six critical elements require significant thought and design consideration, as we feel they are missing, underdeveloped, or require further study as the planning of the Stadium District progresses.

### **Edges Matter**

When it comes to defining the ways in which the Stadium District meets its boundaries, more is required to integrate the development into the overall street grid of the city.

Whether it is the trailing end of a mixed-use building or the flat, substantial elevation of a tower, the scale, orientation and connection to the sidewalk and street matter. Serious work is required on this front to determine how the project engages with the street and sidewalk; how it greets both visitors and passersby; and where the access and entry points are to the site. The development needs to feel open and inclusive instead of feeling like an inward facing entertainment district with its back turned on the city.

### **Think Bigger**

As shown, the Stadium District project stays rigidly within its site boundaries. Instead, it should both enhance, and take advantage of, connections to its neighbors.

Sculptural bridges over Broad Street and Pattison Avenue are not only unrealistic, but also fail to address the real issue of organizing and improving the pedestrian and vehicular experience on those two roadways. This project can, and should, help to calm both of these roads, Broad Street in particular, such that it no longer behaves as an extended high speed on/off ramp.

To achieve these, and other goals for local connections, building meaningful early relationships with the Navy Yard and FDR Park will be critical not only in improving the circulation patterns for the entire community and creating a more integrated South Philadelphia, but also unlocking state and federal infrastructure dollars to help fund the work. With PennDOT planning alterations to I95 and its exit at the Stadium District, the time to evaluate the entire roadway infrastructure of this area is now. As plans develop, getting these partners engaged and incorporated into the planning for the Stadium District project is essential.

In addition, connecting to off-site locations for parking, truck parking and staging, and other uses that can be non-adjacent, or are not time-sensitive, would leave more of the site available for public space.

### **Limit Parking**

The criterion of 20,000 parking spaces is an awful lot.

Adding another 2,000 new spaces, on top of that seems, at least initially, to be overkill.

With the stated focus of developing towards NRG Station, a worthy goal, and increasing ridership to and from the Stadium District, it seems unnecessary to increase the site's total parking capacity, especially given the capped maximum number of patrons who can be onsite at any given moment. Hopefully, as the plan evolves, traffic and parking studies will be carefully considered, in close collaboration with SEPTA and other transit and mobility planning agencies, in a way that maintains the same number of spaces across the site (if they must be maintained at all).

### **Don't Neglect the Southern Edge**

Building towers over parking is as American as apple pie and auto-centric development.

Adding towers to the unarticulated, enormous parking structure shown at the southern edge of the project site would help shape one of the most nebulous pieces of the plan and would allow uses, likely residential or office to benefit from amazing 360-degree views. Additionally, this programmatic shift brings the Wells Fargo Center into a more central, prominent location. As shown in the current plan, the arena sits uncomfortably close to the parking structure, and appears peripheral to the action.

Furthermore, programming the southern edge with more than just parking would better activate the space around the Wells Fargo Center, and the future arena development site, in a manner that would increase access, allow for better open space design, and improve gameday circulation and experience.

### **Focus on the Pedestrian Scale**

Not all sidewalks in an entertainment district must be designed for a large-scale impromptu event, some are just for walking.

The current plan is stuffed with significantly oversized walkways that appear to represent the maximum imaginable amount of paving. With further study, the scale of these passages, connectors, shopping streets and gathering spaces should be refined with the goal of both developing an ideal pedestrian network and returning as much square footage as possible to thoughtfully planned green and public amenity space. Given the potential reduction in paving, these spaces should be sizable enough to program them with more than plantings.

Consider filling these spaces with the types of outdoor amenities, such as, parks, playgrounds, picnic areas, splash pads, recreational fields and courts, and food and drink kiosks, that not only keep paying guests staying longer, but also attract new visitors who may come for those amenities on their own. This is an opportunity to take even greater advantage of the site's size to create public spaces that are usable and meaningful both before and after each event and hopefully all day long. It also brands the district as an outdoor venue complementary uses, such as pop-up events, celebrations, and outdoor specialty markets.

There is also an opportunity to introduce a distinctive streetscape design, materials, colors, street furniture, that reinforces the district's special sense of place.

## Master Plan

The documents we saw are conceptual; and the overall project team, which includes the project client, development partners, and consultant team members, are not yet finalized. That is a very good thing.

DAG strongly advocates for the creation of a comprehensive master plan, which is a framework for development over time, providing certainty for public spaces and market adaptability for the development of individual parcels.

The key to the quality and implementation of any master plan is a well-defined client entity that can ensure consistency over decades, not just election cycles. The client entity is not a tenant or a site developer; it should be an entity, such as PIDC, that has large-scale, public-private development experience, can receive and manage public funding, such as federal infrastructure and environmental dollars, and won't be going away.

A master plan is all-inclusive, yet flexible. To achieve this, a master plan sets out overall design principles for the site and public spaces, and design guidelines, not building designs, for parcels. For example, the five suggestions above are all design principles, which can be illustrated in many ways. Design guidelines take these principles, add constraints (whether physical or regulatory), and make them into master plan guidelines. Guidelines for the individual development parcels address massing (square footage, height, setbacks), materials, special features, and maybe different uses; how these are applied to a design is up to the parcel developer. So, the master plan has both rules, the guidelines, and flexibility. This is also how a master plan creates certainty, and that creates value.

Because master plans are comprehensive, an experienced client entity is needed. The client's team will include building and landscape designers, engineers of every discipline, economic and development feasibility analysts, cost estimators, traffic and transportation consultants, special-use (sports, hotel, parking, etc.) consultants, legal and zoning experts, and community outreach consultants, for a start. The project team also includes collaborators and stakeholders, such as every government agency, community group, nonprofit, and union that has an interest.

Phasing is a critical element of a master plan, and a successful first phase is essential. The work that Comcast Spectacor has already put into concepts for their parcels can help accelerate the development of the comprehensive master plan, as well as identify public spaces and infrastructure needed for the best possible Phase One.

*The DAG Steering Committee*

*The Design Advocacy Group (DAG) is a public forum and advocate for design quality and equity in the planning, architecture, preservation and physical development of Philadelphia. <https://designadvocacy.org/>*