

Washington Square West Civic Association
Community Meeting on the Proposed 76er Arena
Minutes

December 7, 2023

A community meeting to discuss the proposed 76 Place arena was held on the campus of Jefferson University Hospital on Dec. 7, 2023. It began at 6:01 with Marisa Shaaban introducing herself as Vice President of the Washington Square West Civic Association (the “Association”) and moderator for the evening. She also introduced Tami Sortman, President of the Association. There were approximately 70-80 people in attendance including additional Association Board members Leigh Ann Campbell, Peter Coe, Andrew Ferrarelli, Andrew Jones, Katie Low, Drew Moyer, Russell Richie and Deborah Sweeney,

Ms. Shaaban reviewed the agenda for the evening and made a brief slide presentation that is attached to these minutes as Exhibit A. The presentation covered rules of engagement for the meeting and a summary of each meeting held previously by the Association regarding the proposed arena. Ms. Shaaban explained the format for the rest of the meeting would be to break out into small groups and discuss 4 topics relating to the proposed project. A representative from each group will then report the top concerns of each small group to the full audience.

The topics for small group discussion were:

1. **ECONOMIC IMPACT**
2. **SAFETY:** people density, crime, trash
3. **TRANSIT:** traffic (traffic patterns, access to Jefferson Emergency Dept, construction); transportation (parking, SEPTA/PATCO, Uber/Lyft)
4. **COMMUNITY BENEFIT**

Ms. Shaaban addressed questions from the audience regarding the previous

presentations and the process for the meeting. Questions were raised regarding the authority of RCOs in the arena proposal process; whether the Association will take an official position on the project; whether any person or organization specifically requested input or a position from the Association; and other matters. Ms. Shaaban reiterated that the meeting was not a Board meeting. She confirmed that summary comments from each small group's report will be included in the report from the meeting. Ms. Sortman also noted that a survey to solicit direct input will be sent out to residents following the meeting. Approximately 10 people left the meeting before the break-out into small groups proceeded.

Following the extended small group discussions, participants reconvened at approximately 7:25pm. Ms. Shaaban invited representatives from each group to provide a summary of their group's discussion and top concerns which follow below:

Group 1

1. There were approximately 8 group members opposed to the arena and 2 in favor.
2. The desire for an independent empirical study was expressed, noting that the study should be holistic and reflect indirect costs and seasonality.
3. A concern surrounded the consequences of the space being frequently unused was expressed. Alternative uses as apartments or other higher-utilization alternatives were discussed.
4. Additional concerns were gridlock; skepticism regarding the use of SEPTA; and restricted access to hospitals.

Group 2

1. All group members were against the arena.
2. There was great skepticism about suggested positive economic benefits;
Gallery 3.0
3. The group was not against development in general but against this specific development with the primary reason being the historical nature of the city.

Commercialization (chain eateries, etc.) will make Philadelphia look like every other city.

4. Safety concerns were expressed due to it being dark 60% of the time. At the other extreme, large crowds bring trash, public urination and other issues. Compounding this concern is that there is no enforcement of criminal laws and regulations in the city right now.
5. The city has narrow roads which have been made even narrower by the addition of bike lanes. The group doesn't believe people will take SEPTA. The parking garage solution is not viewed favorably.
6. Community benefit dollars should be split as a percentage to Chinatown and a percentage to Washington Square West in order to control the spending on benefits.
7. Consider congestion pricing (like New York City).

Group 3

1. The group was completely against the arena.
2. Nothing positive to report on any topic.
3. There are better ways to build the economy starting with small business.
4. Drinking crowds will bring to the community what South Street used to be.
5. Whatever problems we have now will be 10x.
6. The construction will create a disaster situation for years.
7. NIMBY – Those in favor of the area are outside the community.
8. Ensure community benefits are in a legally binding contract. Possible benefits include jobs for residents, trash removal, homelessness assistance, traffic lights, streetlights, trees.

Group 4

1. Three group participants are undecided, and the rest opposed.
2. Concern about negative economic impact during construction.
3. Cyclist and pedestrian safety.
4. Jefferson station will need to be shut down periodically during construction

(electrical work, for example).

5. Why not create an RFP for East Market Street investments instead of simply reacting to this inbound development proposal?

Group 5

1. All group members are against the project.
2. Everything comes back to the economic impact, and they believe it will be negative.
3. This section of town will get a reputation for crowds, crime, etc.
4. People will stop going to Jefferson University Hospital.
5. If SEPTA improvements are made, it would be very good. But this is doubtful.
6. Could the arena be used as a community center during unused times?

Group 6

1. All points have been made by previous group reports.
2. The arena will only be used for a minority portion of days.
3. Concerned about business lease renewals in the interim and during construction. Businesses will leave due to uncertainty and risk.
4. The group included a Jefferson doctor who said that hospital access is already impaired. Looking forward to hearing from Jefferson.
5. The group had a difficult time discussing community benefits since they oppose the project.
6. The existing sports complex in South Philadelphia is a model for the rest of the country.

Group 7

1. Most comments have been covered by previous groups.
2. The positive economic impact would be for stadium owners and the 76ers.
3. Sporadic use is a concern.
4. Need to support small business.

5. Uncertainty and construction will drive people away from the neighborhood.
6. The transient nature of arena visitors will contribute to it becoming a party area.
7. Noise pollution from crowds.
8. Regarding transit, more business for SEPTA would be positive since the system needs ridership and investment.
9. Hospital access is a concern.
10. The absence of a city-wide traffic light control system in Philly is a concern.
11. It would change the character of being a world heritage city with historical character. It would become generic with no special vibe.
12. Streets are already in disrepair – potholes and the need for repaving.
13. Need support for homelessness.

Following the group reports, Ms. Shaaban and Ms. Sortman answered questions on the timing of the remaining process.

The meeting was adjourned at 8:10pm.

Respectfully submitted,

Drew A. Moyer
Secretary