



May 6, 2024

First District Councilmember
Mark Squilla
City Hall, Room 332
Philadelphia, PA 19107-3290

**Re: Civic Design Review for Master Plan - 76 Place at Market East
(1001-19, 10125 Market Street and 1001-25 Filbert Street)**

Dear Councilmember,

The Civic Design Review Committee of the City Planning Commission has completed the requested review of the Master Plan for the proposed arena at 1001-19 and 1025 Market Street and 1001-25 Filbert Street.

This letter is a summary of the Civic Design Review (CDR) Committee's advisory recommendations. It is not an expression of any recommendation or opinion of the Philadelphia City Planning Commission (PCPC) regarding zoning variances, special exceptions, or other discretionary approvals associated with this proposal.

76 DevCo, a development partnership of Harris Blitzer Sports and Entertainment, the company that owns the Philadelphia 76ers, has proposed 76 Place, an arena with associated retail and residential development on a portion of the land bounded by 10th Street, Market Street, 11th Street, and Cuthbert Street inclusive of the Filbert Street right-of-way. The arena would require demolition of the western third of the Fashion District and the former intercity bus terminal. The Master Plan proposes a total of 1,605,000 sq. ft. including a 1,126,000 sq. ft. arena and a 465,000 sq. ft. residential tower. In addition, the existing 14,000 sq. ft. 10th Street bridge connecting to the Fashion District will be repurposed with 76 Place programming.

On September 12, 2023, the City Planning Commission received a request from your office to commence the CDR for Master Plans process for 76 Place.

There are two types of Civic Design Reviews. CDR for large buildings and CDR for Master Plans. While there can be overlap between the two types, CDR for Master Plans typically concerns the general size, shape, and impact of a project on its site and on the surrounding area. Topics discussed at CDR for Master Plans include movement of pedestrians, traffic, and public transportation in and around the site; public access; open spaces; and the overall sizes and shapes of buildings.

A first review meeting was held on December 18, 2023. At this meeting, the applicant team was asked to revise their proposal and directed to return for a second review. At the CDR Committee meeting held April 2, 2024, the applicant team returned and the Civic Design Review Committee completed the CDR for Master Plan process for 76 Place.

Outlined below are the CDR Committee's comments from the first meeting, changes made to the Master Plan proposal in response to those comments, and the CDR Committee's comments made at the second meeting. Also below are the comments

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presented by the coordinating Registered Community Organization (RCO), Philadelphia Chinatown Development Corporation (PCDC).

RCO Comments

At the December 18, 2023 CDR meeting, the coordinating RCO, PCDC, made comments organized under eight categories, as follows:

1. **Circulation:** The Master Plan does not show the flow of traffic and pedestrians between the arena and surrounding neighborhoods.
2. **Residential Tower:** Proposed residential tower overwhelms properties to the north, especially the businesses immediately to the north of Cuthbert Street.
3. **Impact on Businesses:** How will the arena impact adjacent businesses, particularly those businesses close to 11th and Filbert Streets?
4. **Sidewalks:** The sidewalks are too narrow, especially in comparison to the Wells Fargo Center. There does not appear to be enough space for queuing.
5. **Retail Concerns:** There is a concern about the arena being dark 200+ nights per year, when there are no events scheduled. The proposed retail program is not sufficient to engage pedestrians on non-event days. What is the minimum amount of retail space needed to engage pedestrians when the building is dark?
6. **Parking:** The loss of parking lanes on 10th and 11th Streets is a concern. The loss of on-street parking could increase double parking, hinder traffic flow, and harm small businesses in the area.
7. **Longevity:** The owners of the Wizards and Capitals have proposed moving their teams from Washington DC's Capital One Arena to Northern Virginia. What will happen to the 76 Place arena and this site at the end of the arena's useful life?
8. **Understanding Chinatown:** The RCO notes that there have been a lot of comments about the arena's relationship to Chinatown. It is important to understand the dynamics of the Chinatown neighborhood, which includes both small businesses and over 5,000 residents. Once Chinatown is better understood, this understanding can inform the project's design.
 - Chinatown is also a cultural hub, not just a destination for food and services.
 - Many residents have cars - on event nights they still need parking.
 - Delivery business has increased significantly, replacing business lost during the pandemic. A lot of businesses rely on delivery services.
 - Traffic and parking are at the top of Chinatown's concerns.

At the April 2, 2024 meeting, PCDC noted that they felt that the revised plans did not sufficiently address their comments and concerns. PCDC elaborated on the importance of Chinatown to the region and noted that traffic congestion could weaken Chinatown's draw as a regional hub of cultural activity and celebration.

CDR Committee Comments

Planning Commission staff has organized the CDR Committee's comments from the December 18, 2023, meeting into three categories: Site Circulation and Public Spaces, Transportation and Transit Access, and Building Design.

The following is a summary of Site Circulation and Public Space comments made at the December 18, 2023, CDR Meeting.

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Site Circulation and Public Spaces:

1. **Site Selection:** Concerns that the site is too small for the proposed program. Were other sites considered?
2. **Non-Event Activity:** The proposed arena does not seem to be a positive contributor to the vitality of the city when it is not hosting an event. On non-event days the arena is likely to have few visitors. Non-event activity will make or break a project of this scale.
3. **Ground Floor Design:** The interior of the ground floor shows great linkages but lacks intensity. There is no indication that the planned retail would support the density of use and activity normally associated with interior shopping streets.
4. **Pathways:** Public pathways in and around the arena could be improved by strengthening sight lines and connections to local destinations such as the Reading Terminal Market and Chinatown.
5. **Plazas:** The plazas at the principal points of entry are undersized. Consider less retail at the corner of 10th and Market Street to create a larger entry plaza.

In response to the Site Circulation and Public Spaces comments, the applicant team made modifications to the ground floor plan including increased retail focused on the internal promenade connecting Market Street to Filbert Street. The entrance at 11th and Filbert Streets was relocated further east and the 10th Street entrance was adjusted to align with the entrance to the Fashion District. In addition, the depth of the plaza at 10th and Market Streets was increased by 10 feet.

The following is a summary of Transportation and Transit Access comments made at the December 18, 2023, CDR Meeting.

Transportation and Transit Access:

1. **Jefferson Station:** Public transit connections are an excellent reason for placing an arena at this location. Make sure that light can still get down into SEPTA's Jefferson station.
2. **Market-Frankford Line headhouse relocation:** Carefully coordinate location and spacing of proposed subway entrance so that it does not hinder access to the Market Street entry of the Convention Center. Headhouse design should minimize obstruction of historic Reading Terminal building.
3. **Loading:** Reusing the existing service access for the Fashion District Mall allows the arena to function using a single, existing curb cut on Arch Street. Show truck turning motions and staging locations for TV trucks.
4. **Bus Transit:** Bus transit should be considered as part of a larger master plan for this district. Can the former intercity bus station at 10th and Filbert Streets be restored for short-term use?
5. **Bike Parking:** Bike commuting in Philadelphia is on the upswing. More bike parking is needed than is shown.
6. **Street Closures:** How would street closures affect traffic patterns and re-routing?

In response to the Transportation and Transit Access comments, the applicant team clarified major design updates to protect and enhance Jefferson Station, noting that they went to great lengths to modify the design in the interest of preserving and celebrating the station. These updates include raising the event floor above street level to minimize impact on the station, incorporating a new main entrance off Market Street, and making further refinements along Filbert Street.

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The applicant team also made changes to the proposed street closures on 10th and 11th Streets. The revised plan closes one lane of traffic to increase pedestrian space for one hour after events. The applicant team noted that leaving 10th and 11th Streets partially open works from a pedestrian perspective according to their pedestrian modelling. City Planning Commission staff notes that this partial closure concept has not been approved by any city agencies.

The following is a summary of Building Design comments made at the December 18, 2023 CDR Meeting.

Building Design

1. **Arena massing and bulk:** Will the entire perimeters of the upper concourse be able to fit within the property lines? Indicate the depths of any elements which will project past the property lines, including upper concourses and signage bands.
2. **Market Street Facade:** What will the Market Street facades look like during non-events days and hours? There are challenges with animating a glass-fronted building during non-event times, and the facade needs to be able to give life to the city even when people aren't in the spaces behind it.
3. **Arena Roof:** Pay more attention to the roofscape - what are the experiences of people in other buildings looking down. Opportunity for a big public space.
4. **10th Street bridge and connections to Chinatown:** Low bridge inhibits views to Chinatown Arch. With changes, the 10th Street bridge could create a gateway to the Chinatown Arch.
5. **Residential Tower:** The committee is in favor of housing being included in the proposal. The committee notes some scale differences between the tower and the surrounding community. Shadow studies and additional perspective views are encouraged to help understand the impacts.

Additional information was provided, but no revisions were made to the Master Plan in response to the Building Design comments.

CDR Committee comments made at the April 2, 2024 meeting focused on the lack of detail provided and a general disappointment in the sophistication of the plans presented. One Committee member noted that either there wasn't enough time dedicated to the design process or it wasn't presented clearly. Another noted that the streetscape is ordinary and lacking in detail and richness and that the residential tower design lacks details for how it will function. It was noted that providing a residential tower, increased transparency, and more retail is promising, but that the renderings do not show this promise. Rather, they show lots of concrete and signage and a lack of trees.

In addition, there was much conversation around the fear that 76 Place could repeat the planning and design mistakes of the past, further isolating Chinatown from the rest of Center City. It was noted that it was a mistake to get rid of the street facing retail and natural urbanism for an inwardly focused shopping mall on Market Street. The proposed 76 Place does not present as a vibrant, connected addition to the neighborhood, and the closure of Filbert Street makes for a new superblock.

Much of the Committee's focus was on the ground floor design. One Committee member noted that the real measure of success for this project will be how it contributes to the life of the community on non-game days or before games start. Another member stated that nothing can compensate for the ground floor not being fully optimized. Although it was noted that the increased retail was an improvement, the Committee encouraged the design team to aim for

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a world-class ground floor. One member stated that “if this is going to go forward, that ground floor needs to knock your socks off. It needs to revitalize the corridor as a joyous delightful element of the city of Philadelphia.”

Specific architectural critiques were limited as this CDR process is for a Master Plan review. It was noted that even though it is proposed to be more transparent, the 10th Street bridge should not be increased in overall height. The Committee also noted that the residential tower should be massed differently to improve views and lessen its impact on Chinatown.

The Committee encouraged the applicant team to further refine their proposal in light of the number and significance of the issues raised about the overall quality of the Master Plan. One Committee member asked the design team to think boldly in order to provide more amenities to the community, such as a rooftop park.

The Committee concluded by expressing appreciation for the development team’s commitment to the CDR process and their desire to hear and learn from the community. The Committee noted that this is just the beginning of the design process and that the team will need to continue to communicate with the community to improve the proposal if and when it moves forward.

This letter documents the completion of the Civic Design Review for Master Plans process for this project. Please contact me if you have any questions.

Sincerely,

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Interim Executive Director

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