



Philly Chinatown Activists Voice Concerns Over Proposed 76ers Arena

Description

A contentious proposal involving the Philadelphia 76ers is under consideration, aimed at erecting a state-of-the-art arena on the periphery of Chinatown in Philadelphia.

Vivian Chang occupies a modest space along a narrow Philadelphia street that would have been submerged beneath a colossal Phillies stadium, had it not been for the staunch resistance from Chinatown advocates in the early 2000s. In lieu of a raucous crowd of 40,000 enthusiastic fans, the sounds of joyous children now resonate in the playground of Folk Arts-Cultural Treasures Charter [School](#), which began operations in 2007.

"We are positioned precisely where the baseball stadium would have stood," Chang remarked in late September. "Now, this space accommodates 480 students, a significant number of whom are immigrants and students of color hailing from various parts of the city."

At 33, Chang spearheads Asian Americans United, an organization that previously wielded significant political influence during the stadium conflict and now confronts an eerily familiar scenario as it endeavors to thwart a proposed \$1.3 billion basketball arena for the 76ers at the fringes of Chinatown.

Mayor Cherelle Parker envisions the creation of an opulent, 18,500-seat arena as a potential linchpin in revitalizing the beleaguered Market East retail corridor, extending for eight blocks from City Hall to the Liberty Bell. The proposal is advancing to City Council for deliberation this autumn. The franchise ownership emphasizes the need for the council's endorsement of '76 Place' by year-end to facilitate relocation to their new venue by 2031.

"I am unwavering in my belief that this represents the optimal deal for the residents of Philadelphia," Parker declared in her September endorsement, while asserting her commitment to safeguarding what she termed "the finest Chinatown in the United States."

While few contest the urgent need for revitalization of Market East, skepticism abounds regarding the suitability of the Sixers as its saviors. Critics express apprehension about potential congestion on game days, the underutilization of the arena outside events, and the specter of gentrification accompanied by escalating rents. Chinatown is perched above Market East, with the vibrant 'Gayborhood' a few blocks south.

Revitalization Needs

"The proposed arena epitomizes a profoundly inappropriate utilization of that land," asserted local activist Jackson Morgan, who fears the potential erosion of identity within the Gayborhood. "It would render Center City virtually unlivable for extended periods."

Victor Matheson, an economics professor at the College of the Holy Cross who specializes in stadium economics, indicated that while arenas can inject ephemeral economic vitality into downtown districts, their impact dissipates beyond a few blocks.



“Their influence dwindles significantly as distance increases,” he noted.

Market East, once a vibrant thoroughfare steeped in history, has languished over the past half-century, beleaguered by cultural and economic shifts, including the rise of suburban shopping complexes in the 1960s and '70s, urban financial crises during the 1980s, and, more recently, the confluence of online retail and the pandemic.

Despite the overall vibrancy of Philadelphia, particularly as young demographics gravitate toward downtown living, Market East has resisted revitalization efforts. With all but one of its iconic department stores shuttered, the area is in urgent need of rejuvenation.

The 76ers, under the ownership of Harris Blitzer Sports & Entertainment, are seeking to divest from their lease at Wells Fargo Center and transition from Philadelphia's South Philadelphia sports complex to a dedicated facility. The owners, who also hold stakes in the NHL's New Jersey Devils and the NFL's Washington Commanders, assert that the venture will be privately financed and is projected to generate thousands of jobs and over \$2 billion in economic uplift for downtown. Additionally, plans include constructing a \$250 million apartment tower adjacent to the arena.

Financial Opportunities

“I view the arena as a beneficial development,” stated Dante Sisofo, a 28-year-old local resident. “It could foster community gatherings, where families enjoy exquisite Vietnamese pho — my personal favorite — before heading to the game.”

Parker echoes this optimistic viewpoint, having attempted to address critics' concerns by highlighting the \$50 million in proposed local benefits, which includes a \$3 million loan fund aimed at supporting Chinatown enterprises.

However, skepticism remains regarding the likelihood that sports enthusiasts would frequent local establishments. Detractors argue that arenas are primarily engineered to keep patrons within their confines, compelling expenditure on increasingly upscale food and amenities.

“The financial model for the Sixers’ owners relies on in-stadium profits, not on patrons visiting the charming neighborhood establishments,” Matheson explained.

While the ownership has vowed to forgo any request for municipal funding for construction, they retain the option of accessing state and federal resources. Instead of standard property taxes, they would contribute approximately \$6 million annually in Payments in Lieu of Taxes. Over the proposed 30-year period, the potential fiscal implications could encompass tens of millions of dollars in savings for the team, translating into significant revenue losses for the city and its underfunded educational institutions, as analyzed by various economists.

“Historically, municipal officials have exhibited considerable naivety when engaging in negotiations with billionaire sports franchise owners,” Matheson elucidated.



"This, undoubtedly, elucidates the recent overtures from Camden," he continued, referencing New Jersey's flirtation with luring the Sixers across the Delaware River through a \$400 million tax concession.

A Double-Edged Deal

Nevertheless, Mayor Parker characterized the proposed agreement as the most advantageous ever forged with a city sports entity, particularly when contrasted with the substantial public subsidies bestowed upon the trio of venues in South Philadelphia — the Wells Fargo Center, Citizens Bank Park, and Lincoln Financial Field.

In Center City, the specter of escalating rents is already a grim reality for Debbie Law's family, who ran a varied goods store at the heart of Philadelphia's Chinatown for 35 years until the landlord tripled the rent in 2022, coinciding with the emergence of the arena proposal. The family has since vacated to a smaller, less conspicuous location around the corner, facing the rear entrance of the Pennsylvania Convention Center, another economic development initiative that encroaches upon Chinatown.

"I grew up in that shop. It served as a community hub of sorts," reflected Law, 42, as her aunt managed the register in their new establishment just a few weeks ago. Local residents depend on these stores for essential Chinese-language publications and cultural artifacts that would be onerous to procure should they face displacement once more.

The Chinatown community, established in 1871, has continuously fought against speculative developments since at least the 1960s, standing firm against proposals ranging from casinos to prisons, stadiums to highways. They have triumphed in some instances, while faced defeats in others. The six-lane, sunken Vine Street Expressway, completed in 1991, severed a significant portion of Chinatown, where the charter school now stands, and only recently have pedestrian overpasses begun to emerge to mend the fragmented neighborhood.

"Each and every time Chinatown has been targeted for a project of this nature, it is proclaimed that the community will endure," Chang asserted. "But does this truly reflect the respect we deserve as a community?"

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Vocabulary List:

1. **Contentious** /kən'ten.ʃəs/ (adjective): Causing or likely to cause an argument; controversial.
2. **Erosion** /ɪ'roʊ.ʒən/ (noun): The process of gradually destroying or being destroyed by natural forces.
3. **Revitalization** /riː.vəɪ.tʃəl.ɪ'zeɪ.ʃən/ (noun): The act of bringing new life or vigor to something.
4. **Congestion** /kən'dʒes.tʃən/ (noun): The state of being too full or blocked; overcrowding.



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5. **Speculative** /ˈspɛkjʊlətɪv/ (adjective): Involving a risk of loss or damage; based on conjecture rather than knowledge.
6. **Accommodate** /əˈkɑː.mə.dert/ (verb): To provide space for; to adapt to.

Comprehension Questions

Multiple Choice

1. Where is the proposed state-of-the-art arena intended to be erected?
- Option: Downtown Philadelphia
 - Option: In the heart of Market East
 - Option: On the periphery of Chinatown
 - Option: Adjacent to the Liberty Bell
2. Who occupies the space that would have been submerged beneath a colossal Phillies stadium?
- Option: Victor Matheson
 - Option: Mayor Cherelle Parker
 - Option: Debbie Law
 - Option: Vivian Chang
3. What organization does Vivian Chang spearhead?
- Option: Asian Americans United
 - Option: Camden Commission
 - Option: Gayborhood Alliance
 - Option: Market East Revitalization Group
4. What is the proposed name for the new arena endorsed by Mayor Parker?
- Option: Chinatown Center
 - Option: Market East Arena
 - Option: Liberty Bell Pavilion
 - Option: '76 Place'
5. What is one of the concerns expressed by critics regarding the proposed arena?
- Option: Excessive ticket prices
 - Option: Congestion on game days
 - Option: Lack of parking spaces
 - Option: Inadequate seating capacity



6. What economic impact do arenas have on downtown districts according to Victor Matheson?

Option: Long-lasting economic growth

Option: Limited impact beyond a few blocks

Option: Decrease in property values

Option: Increased employment opportunities

True-False

7. Mayor Parker supports the proposed \$1.3 billion basketball arena for the Philadelphia 76ers.

8. Market East has been successfully revitalized over the past half-century.

9. The proposed arena could lead to gentrification and escalating rents in the area.

10. The Sixers owners plan to seek municipal funding for the construction of the new arena.

11. The Chinatown community has historically embraced speculative developments in the neighborhood.

12. The proposed arena is expected to bring significant financial benefits to the city of Camden.

Gap-Fill

13. Victor Matheson, an economics professor, specializes in stadium economics and indicated that while arenas can inject ephemeral economic vitality into downtown districts, their impact dissipates beyond a few _____.

15. Debbie Law ran a varied goods store in the heart of Philadelphia's Chinatown for 35 years until the landlord tripled the rent in _____, coinciding with the emergence of the arena proposal.

16. The Chinatown community, established in _____, has continuously fought against speculative developments since at least the 1960s.

17. The ownership of the 76ers intends to privately finance the new arena and is projected to generate over \$2 billion in economic uplift for the downtown area over the proposed 30-year period, contributing



approximately \$6 million annually in Payments in Lieu of _____.

18. Victor Matheson elucidated that municipal officials have exhibited considerable _____
when engaging in negotiations with billionaire sports franchise owners.

Answer

Multiple Choice: 1. On the periphery of Chinatown 2. Vivian Chang 3. Asian Americans United 4. '76 Place'
5. Congestion on game days 6. Limited impact beyond a few blocks

True-False: 7. False 8. False 9. True 10. False 11. False 12. False

Gap-Fill: 13. blocks 15. 2022 16. 1871 17. Taxes 18. naivety

Vocabulary quizzes

Multiple Choice (Select the Correct answer for each question.)

1. Which term best describes a topic that is likely to cause disagreement or argument?

Option: Revitalization

Option: Proactive

Option: Contentious

Option: Resilience

2. Which word means causing great damage or harm?

Option: Nonchalant

Option: Devastating

Option: Compulsion

Option: Collaboration

3. What term is used to describe something based on conjecture rather than knowledge?

Option: Derision

Option: Speculative

Option: Agility

Option: Productivity

4. A _____ is an event causing great and often sudden damage or distress.

Option: Revitalization

Option: Derision

Option: Calamity



Option: Compulsion

5. Which term refers to the capacity to recover quickly from difficulties?

Option: Erosion

Option: Congested

Option: Resilience

Option: Collaborative

6. If something is _____ it suggests that something bad is going to happen.

Option: Proactive

Option: Congested

Option: Acerbic

Option: Ominous

7. What term refers to the ability to move quickly and easily?

Option: Evacuation

Option: Inherent

Option: Agility

Option: Prevalent

8. Which word means the action of working with someone to produce something?

Option: Adulation

Option: Collaboration

Option: Precipitate

Option: Delineates

9. A _____ is a strong usually irresistible impulse to perform an act.

Option: Congregated

Option: Ramifications

Option: Capricious

Option: Compulsion

10. Which term refers to the action of imbuing something with new life and vitality?

Option: Erosion

Option: Revitalization

Option: Nonchalant

Option: Reevaluating

Gap-Fill (Fill in the blanks with the correct word from the vocabulary list.)



11. _____ is the process of eroding or being eroded by wind water or other natural agents.
12. _____ in urban areas is often caused by high population density and a high number of vehicles.
13. The hotel can _____ up to 200 guests during the peak season.
14. Stress-related illnesses are becoming more _____ in today's fast-paced world.
15. His ideas were met with _____ and ridicule by his peers.
16. The actor received widespread _____ for his outstanding performance in the movie.
17. His _____ behavior made it difficult for his friends to predict his actions.
18. She was surprisingly _____ about the news of her promotion not showing much excitement.
19. The fallen tree limb _____ the path making it difficult for hikers to pass through.
20. A _____ approach often involves anticipating and preventing problems before they occur.

Matching Sentences (Match each definition to the correct word from the vocabulary list.)

21. Investing in high-risk ventures without thorough research is considered irresponsible and .
22. During the religious festival thousands of people in the town square to witness the procession.
23. His rash decision to quit his job without a backup plan a period of uncertainty and financial instability.
24. Successful projects often result from effective and communication among team members.
25. The government's initiative to promote the of the downtown area led to new businesses opening up.
26. Athletes need to maintain their physical to excel in fast-paced sports like soccer or basketball.



27. The decision to cut funding for education had far-reaching on the quality of schooling.
28. The fallen debris continued to traffic flow on the highway causing long delays.
29. Her to check her phone every few minutes was a habit she found hard to break.
30. The seamless between the design and engineering teams resulted in a groundbreaking product.

Answer

Multiple Choice: 1. Contentious 2. Devastating 3. Speculative 4. Calamity 5. Resilience 6. Ominous 7. Agility 8. Collaboration 9. Compulsion 10. Revitalization
Gap-Fill: 11. Erosion 12. Congestion 13. accommodate 14. prevalent 15. derision 16. adulation 17. capricious 18. nonchalant 19. obstruct 20. proactive
Matching sentence: 1. speculative 2. congregated 3. precipitate 4. collaboration 5. revitalization 6. agility 7. ramifications 8. obstruct 9. compulsion 10. collaboration

CATEGORY

1. Business - LEVEL6

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