

Testimony of Andy Litsky, Chairman, ANC 6D

**Before the Zoning Commission of the District of Columbia
Application of
The District of Columbia Sports and Entertainment Commission for Review
of a Ballpark for Major League Sports and Entertainment and Related Uses
Square 702 through 706 and Reservation 247
June 26, 2006**

My name is Andy Litsky and I am Chairman of ANC-6D, representing the Southwest Waterfront and Near SE. I've lived at the Southwest Waterfront for 27 years. The stadium will be constructed four blocks from my home.

On Monday, June 12, ANC-6D, at a regularly scheduled meeting, where a quorum was present – with four of seven members comprising a quorum – voted unanimously (7-0) to oppose the application of the DC Sports and Entertainment Commission for review of a ballpark for a major league sports and entertainment complex and related uses on Squares 702 through 706 and Reservation 247. Our ANC vote, it should be noted, was held prior to the submission of the supplement to the application which we received – as you did – only this past Friday afternoon after 5pm.

The area where the stadium is now under construction is virtually at the geographic center of our ANC. Although the actual stadium will cover only 20 acres or so, there is no question that its impact will extend considerably beyond the site on which it sits. Its impact will be felt not only throughout our entire ANC, but – by virtue of ill-conceived parking and transportation plans – much of Capitol Hill as well as areas directly east to the Anacostia River.

Parking Garages

One of the greatest concerns that we have as an ANC and as a community is the location of above grade parking on the stadium district site. ANC-6D, for a wide variety of reasons, opposed locating the stadium on this site from the very beginning – but by a one vote on the City Council, that debate was settled. One of the main reasons why it was settled was the promise by the Mayor and his economic development team that the stadium site would create a dynamic mixed-use environment of apartments, restaurants, shops, and public spaces that would contribute not only to our city's tax base, but to the expedited redevelopment of this emerging neighborhood. If a zoning plan for this stadium is approved that allows two above-grade parking lots as the applicant proposed

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in the originally filed application, there is little hope of achieving anywhere near the level of positive social and economic benefits coming out of this stadium project that we've been led to believe will occur.

We are very grateful that Western Development has stepped up to the plate with a plan that ameliorates some of our concerns on this issue. Clearly, their foresight and civic-minded approach is something that we hope will eventually be rubbed off on the Lerner Organization. I hope that they will take heed.

However, since my ANC was presented with only the original parking option to publicly review, we can make no formal statement in support or opposition to the proposal of the compromise position presented in the supplement. However, we do strongly reject the notion that two parking options be approved – the original proposal and the new “preferred alternative,” with the wrap-around residential, retail and hotel components. We firmly believe that as much space as possible be devoted to such positive amenities. Above ground parking detracts from the space that can be devoted to them. We urge you to reject the request that the original above grade parking plan be approved, concurrently, as a fallback option to the revised plan.

Environmental design

ANC-6D is still troubled by the fact that when DCSEC came before our commission, other public bodies and the public at large, this city was promised an environmentally friendly stadium. The current plan is greatly lacking in that regard. This building may well be the largest single largest generator of run-off into the Anacostia River. Yet two weeks ago at our ANC meeting, the Sports Commission testified that the architects were “working on a plan for run-off that *might* include recycling, and were looking at making the stadium LEED-certified.” Two weeks before the Zoning Commission – “*Looking at making??*” Their General Counsel added, in later comments, that although they were complying with Health Department standards – certainly an encouraging sign – that they were not legally obligated to make this a green building. Lawyers!

It seems to us that the stadium planned virtually on the banks of the Anacostia River, ought to have a clearly articulated plan that is environmentally appropriate. So, where is the plan for run-off? Recycling? Where is the green roof? According to what I've read, we really don't even have on-site parking for bicycles. We urge the Commission to require that the applicant – after they insisted on this specific waterfront location – to present a clearly articulated environmental plan that respects the Anacostia watershed.

Taxi Operations are minimized in this report even though it is estimated that between 400 and 600 patrons may come by taxi when the stadium is full. There is no plan for pick-up drop-off of passengers. Contrary to what the preliminary TOP states, such a plan can be enforced with a proper Zoning and Taxi Commission regulations and MPD enforcement. And we should expect nothing less.

The On-Street Parking section of this preliminary TOP also boldly states that the "site is surrounded by thousands of on-street parking spaces," a fact that is very far from the truth unless we accept the fungible concept of a 'regulation zone' for the stadium district – and that seems to vary depending upon who is talking about what aspect of the build. At the bottom of the very same page 7 of that report, there is a call to examine current on-street parking inventories. Why is there a need, when we've had the declaration that thousands of spaces exist? Has this not already been done – or not?

The inconsistencies in the preliminary TOP are palpable. The report is less than instructive.

Stadium scoreboard & naming rights

We are concerned about the ultimate height of the stadium scoreboard and naming rights signage. Although heights of the naming rights signs along the southern façade and the N Street entrance have been clearly articulated in the supplemental application, the additional height intended for naming rights above the scoreboard sign is not delineated. It needs to be.

We are also concerned that although the supplemental application states that any naming rights signage as well as exterior signage visible from the stadium will be designed so as not to cause glare or otherwise impair the vision or distract drivers passing the stadium there is another concern. Plain and simple, the stadium is located on South Capitol Street, our grand entrance to the Nation's Capital. ANC-6D is greatly concerned that stadium signage may overwhelm what would otherwise be a world class view of the Capitol Dome from the South. Please examine closely precisely where this signage would be placed and at what height. Wouldn't it be a shame for the one of the great symbols of our democracy to be visually overwhelmed by a crass neon advertising sign for Coke, Marriott, or Cingular Wireless?

We're also concerned that the stadium has a name – and not a logo – unless, of course, Prince is purchasing the naming rights. We don't want to be the dot, dash and squiggle stadium. And, G-d help us, if Target is a winning bidder, Just what we need – a great big red bulls-eye on the side of a major structure in Washington, DC.

Traffic and Pedestrian Neighborhood Impacts

It is beyond comprehension why 21 months into this process a final traffic operations plan has not been developed. DCSEC shown no desire to illuminate the true impact that this stadium development will have on District traffic patterns and on my community on game days. And Gorove Slade appears complicitous by flooding their preliminary report with inconsistencies. Plain and simple, traffic is going to be a nightmare. Let me tell you why.

Gorove Slade makes a preposterous assumption that because off-site stadium parking will be located south, north, and east of the stadium that this will minimize vehicular traffic in adjacent neighborhoods to the west. Patrons driving from the west, including most Virginians, will come off of 395 to Maine Avenue/M Street, SW. People driving from the north will come through the 11th Street Tunnel, down 7th Street, and a newly reopened 4th Street and follow that same route. Where patrons park is not the same as how they get there, a fact that seems to have gone unnoticed. This is statement also directly in conflict with the preliminary TOP which, on page 11 states:

“Due to lack of alternative pathways to enter and exit the Ballpark area, it may be beneficial to identify and enhance the secondary roadway network. This would involve coordinating with the private sector on development plans and community residents, since some neighborhood roads may be required to be designated as secondary circulation paths.”

In other words: The neighborhood streets are going to be used. We're gonna get slammed.

The most stunning pronouncement in this preliminary TOP is that a final plan could not be completed until other decisions were made about infrastructure improvements along South Capitol Street and Potomac Avenues. Clearly, this had no impact on the applicant's reluctant embrace of a plan that requires access to stadium parking along South Capitol Street itself. Are we to expect that after the extraordinary plans developed by the multi-jurisdictional task force headed by John Deattrich for the South Capitol Street Gateway, that we are going to turn it into a parking lane 81 days a year? What sense does this make?

The Remote Parking section gives credence to our contention that parking on-site or close to the stadium is simply insufficient. It's jaw-dropping to now hear that the transportation plan suggest reliance on shuttling patrons to parking spots at RFK.

A Pedestrian Experience

The original plan states that “fans should have a pedestrian experience.” I’m curious what that means especially if patrons are going to be traveling by Metro or parking their cars in two garages. How can we assume that a pedestrian experience will meld with the neighborhoods west toward the SW Waterfront and north through Capitol Hill? Let me tell you, I went to graduate school in Boston. I lived in Kenmore Square right beside Fenway Park. I can tell you what a pedestrian experience meant to my neighborhood – especially after games let out. It wasn’t particularly. I ask the Zoning Commission to closely examine this larger concept of pedestrian experience – especially because the AWI Plan, because of Ft. McNair, calls for the Riverwalk to cut straight through the heart of Southwest along P Street. Additionally, since neither the Office of Economic Development, nor the Office of Planning, nor DDOT has followed through with Robert Bobb’s pledge to oversee development projects in SW/Near SE at the macro level, we are rightly concerned that this “pedestrian experience” my soon overwhelm our neighborhood once the Southwest Waterfront is redeveloped.

Conclusion

This plan presented our city with a rare opportunity to create a signature stadium for the Nation’s Capitol. It is located on extraordinarily valuable Waterfront land. It had an opportunity to provide a grand entrance that highlighted its relationship to the Anacostia – and to provide an environmentally friendly stadium as originally promised. It had an opportunity to provide sweeping views of the River and the Capitol Dome. It had an opportunity to provide fans entering from the Metro and N Street an unobstructed view of the stadium that they were about to enter. It had an opportunity to employ best practices.

Hoping against hope – and especially because we fought so hard against placing the stadium at this site – we wanted to be proven wrong. We wanted an architectural triumph. But, unfortunately, what we have is an opportunity lost. It’s not a disaster. It is simply a disappointment.

We understand the constraints that have been imposed upon this project in an attempt to cap what would have otherwise been astronomical cost over runs. And for that, we’re thankful. Still, we hope that the final result will minimize the negatives and maximize the positives and will truly provide our neighborhood, our city, and our region with a stadium of which we can be proud.

I appreciate the opportunity to testify and respectfully request that you give great weight to the concerns articulated by the Commission this evening. Thank you.