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By Joe Piette
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No slam dunk for 76ers arena

Philadelphia

When the billionaires who own the Philadelphia 76ers basketball team made their announcement on July 21, 2022, that they intend to build a new arena — 76 Place — on the edge of the city’s Chinatown community, they didn’t expect the opposition pushback to last this long. Now, 18 months later, the No Arena Coalition is stronger and larger than ever and shows no sign of going away.

When the Philadelphia City Council held their first 2024 session on Jan. 25, which included all the newly elected council members, Chinatown community members and their supporters held a packed press conference in the rain behind a large banner reading: “No Arena in the Heart of our City!”



Hundreds of Chinatown supporters under tent awnings to escape rain as speakers denounce the proposed 76ers arena, Philadelphia, Jan. 25, 2024. (WW Photo: Joe Piette)

Speakers emphasized that Council member Mark Squilla, in whose district the proposed arena would fall, promised to oppose any public funds being squandered on the unneeded sports arena. Many participants entered City Hall after the press conference to personally tell each council member that a large majority of city residents oppose the \$1.5 billion project. Activists are being asked to turn out every Thursday to keep pressure on the City Council.

Fight against predatory developers

What started a year and a half ago as Chinatown's battle for survival has grown into a citywide fight against predatory development. People across the region who cherish Chinatown and will fight to defend it are linked with everyone who wants a say in the future of the city.

A favorable impact study on 76Place, conducted by economic consultant CSI, was commissioned and paid for by the sports team. CSI has been the go-to consultant used to justify arenas and other big development projects around the U.S. But several other studies, which use more recent data, conclude that arenas provide little to no benefit to cities, and can result in loss of revenue and jobs for existing businesses.

Timothy Kellison's "Studies on Sports Stadiums and Environmental Justice," found, among other concerns, that: "Stadium development catalyzes gentrification and contributes to the displacement of marginalized populations." (tinyurl.com/4y9vvcpy)



Numerous banners hanging from the balcony help explain why hundreds of community activists filled the Arch Street United Methodist Church, Philadelphia, Feb. 3, 2024. (WW Photo: Joe Piette)

Hundreds of activists from many of Philadelphia’s neighborhoods, also threatened by gentrification and displacement, converged on the Arch Street United Methodist Church on Feb. 3 to meet in person and discuss strategy, tactics and mobilization. No Arena Washington Square West, a neighborhood group opposed to the proposed arena on Market Street just north of their community, attended the event and brought their own fact sheet citing recent research that disputes the CSI study.

The displacement-for-profit model is all over Philadelphia. No neighborhood should have to step aside and get out of the way when a project poses an existential threat to the neighbors, businesses, and families that make our city special. The people deserve a say in our city’s future!

No Arena in Chinatown!

Workers World 24.02.2024