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"Stadium project similar to Gallery II"

Linn Washington

(abstract)

Nearly 30 years later, now Philadelphia Mayor John Street is pushing construction of a new baseball stadium at 12th & Vine Streets in Center City. Cost estimates to construct this facility for the hapless Phillies is more than double the \$300-million-plus spent building the Gallery II project.

The Gallery II sucked up millions of public funds. The proposed downtown baseball stadium site would be more than quadruple that spent on Gallery II.

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"People of color should support the Asian community's opposition to this site."

Stadium project similar to Gallery II

By Linn Washington Jr.

Controversy swirls around City Hall plans to pour hundreds of millions of public dollars into a private project in Center City.

A Black elected official blasts this plan, castigating both City Hall spending on downtown development while neighborhoods deteriorate and its failure to guarantee Black workers jobs on this project.

"Local funds should not be spent and the business opportunities and jobs created go to out-of-county persons not committed to the City of Philadelphia," the Black official perceptively notes in an article he authored for a local daily newspaper.

The year of this controversy is 1981.

The project is the Gallery II mall on Market Street East in Center City.

The Black elected official questioning the propriety of City Hall spending mega-bucks on the Gallery II project without at least ensuring employment opportunities for minorities was a first-term Philadelphia City Councilman named John Street.

"A dose inspection reveals that



there are no guarantees that minorities or Philadelphia residents will get any jobs," noted Street, who rode into political office as a critic of discriminatory city spending policies.

"Philadelphians - Black, Puerto Rican and white - need those jobs," Street declared in a commentary published in the July 13, 1981 edition of the old *Philadelphia Evening Bulletin* newspaper.

Nearly 30 years later, now Philadelphia Mayor John Street is pushing construction of a new baseball stadium at 12th & Vine Streets in Center City. Cost estimates to construct this facility for the hapless Phillies is more than double the \$300-million-plus spent building the Gallery II project.

Many comparisons exist between the controversies surrounding construction of the Gallery II and the new downtown baseball stadium.

The Gallery II sucked up millions of public funds. The proposed downtown baseball stadium site would be more than quadruple that spent on Gallery II.

Councilman Street's *Bulletin* commentary pointedly questioned spending public funds on a private project "particularly in view of the strong existing sentiment that this money could be better spent on neighborhood economic development..."

A new downtown ballpark is essential to the economic revitalization of Center City according to claims of power brokers.

Three decades ago, power brokers employed similar arguments to secure construction of the Gallery II.

History shows that the Gallery II did not miraculously revitalize Market Street East as power brokers professed.

The new baseball stadium will not be the big economic bonanza for the city as professed according to two economists that testified during a City Council hearing last week.

If Mayor Street's stadium plan is such a great economic engine,

why doesn't he build it in a blighted section of North Philadelphia such that this long neglected area can reap the financial/developmental benefits?

This is a question asked by veteran activist Dr. Walter Palmer, an opponent of the 12th & Vine site favored by Street.

"Street will not put the stadium in North Philadelphia so Black people can benefit from business opportunities because this project is about white corporate interests," answers Palmer, who testified at last week's Council hearing.

The 12th & Vine site is the most expensive of the locations considered by Street for the new baseball stadium. Just preparing this site to get it ready for building a stadium is projected to cost over \$120-million - nearly half the \$250-million Street says he wants to spend on blight removal around the city.

"This will make wealthy people wealthier and make poor people pay for it," continued Palmer, an African-American who is working with Asian-American opponents of Street's prime stadium site.

Another comparison between the stadium and Gallery II is the impact on Chinatown. Gallery II barricaded Chinatown

on the south.

Mayor Street's stadium plan calls for barricading Chinatown on the north.

Seemingly, City Hall is renegeing on pledges to foster Chinatown's development when it barricaded that area on the west with the Convention Center.

"Building at 12th & Vine will destroy Chinatown," Palmer said comparing harm to Chinatown with college and corporate expansions decades ago that decimated Black neighborhoods in Philadelphia. "People of color should support the Asian community's opposition to this site."

Despite comparisons between the Gallery II and baseball stadium controversies, there is one significant difference.

On the Gallery II project, then Councilman Street demanded jobs for minorities.

Today, Mayor Street is publicly silent on ensuring equitable minority participation on the billion-dollar-plus projects to build separate baseball and football stadiums.

In that 1981 article, Councilman Street stated that the mayor and Council needed "to make certain that unemployed/underemployed neighborhood Philadelphians get

those jobs."

What a difference three decades make?

Contrasting the Councilman Street of 1981 with today's Mayor Street is not casting aspersions on Street or his current positions.

Street has a history of working diligently - quietly and loudly - to effect fairness for those historically excluded from the benefits of public expenditures.

However, given this history, it is logical to expect more sensitivity from Street on issues like the impact of a 12th & Vine stadium on Chinatown and the need for meaningful minority participation in the two stadium projects... where ever they are built.

"Firm commitments for jobs to Philadelphia minorities and minority participation in all phases of the Gallery should be guaranteed before any contracts or leases are consummated," Street stated in concluding that 1981 commentary.

Councilman Streets point is relevant to the current stadium controversy.

Linn Washington Jr. is an award-winning writer who teaches journalism at Temple University.

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"Men's group working to snuff out racism; 'Social workers' launch campaign for \$10 million"

Darren Williams

A group of concerned African-American men has launched an initiative to raise \$10 million to create an institutional endowment for the research and study of American racism and social change through social action.

The Black Men at Penn School of Social Work Inc., founded last year by Walter Palmer, at a reception earlier this week said the focus of the endowment will be to create a research facility that will be designed to study, record, publish and teach about the history and practices of American racism as it applies to indigenous, native, African and Asian people, and the subtle and subliminal ways it is practiced today.

Palmer, an activist against racism in Philadelphia for more than 30 years, was considered a rebel in his early years and battled against Penn's expansion during the 1950s and '60s that consumed much of the neighborhood where he grew up - known as the "Black Bottom."