



9 June 2010

Ms. Mary Conturo, Executive Director  
Sports & Exhibition Authority  
The Regional Enterprise Tower  
425 Sixth Avenue, Suite 2750  
Pittsburgh, PA 15219

Subject: Arena Interested Parties Process

Dear Mary,

Thank you for meeting with me on 13 May 2010. I appreciate the time that you and Christen Cieslak of Chronicle Consulting allocated in your schedules. As a follow-up to our meeting, please review the following which further documents my ideas and concerns.

#### **Preservation**

While recognizing the mixed public opinion about the history, significance, and symbolism of the Civic Arena, Preservation Pittsburgh has long been a proponent of finding a re-use for the structure. Preservation is a resource, not a roadblock, to great economic development. Sometimes Preservation is misunderstood to mean only historic restoration. We are not advocating that the Civic Arena be restored to its original 1961 state. Instead, we are suggesting that it could be re-purposed through adaptive re-use. This is a special type of Preservation which keeps the architecturally significant portion of a structure and then allows for a new economic use. Some excellent examples in Pittsburgh are:

- P&LE railroad station → Grand Concourse restaurant;
- Fulton Building → Renaissance Hotel;
- Ice house → Heinz History Center;
- Heinz factory → Heinz loft.

There are many more examples. This is what makes our city great!

#### **Historic Status**

Whether we agree or not, the fact is that the Civic Arena is eligible to be listed on the National Register of Historic Places because of its unusual characteristics, unique architecture, and engineering innovations. With this status, certain state and federal procedures must be followed when discussing any change to the building or site.

### **Memorandum of Understanding (MOU)**

Three years ago, the SEA announced its MOU with the Pittsburgh Penguins regarding the construction of a new arena. Among other things, one of the terms listed in the MOU states, "Upon the opening of the new arena, the SEA, at its expense, shall promptly demolish Mellon Arena and pave, stripe and in all respects prepare the land under Mellon Arena for use as a parking lot. This use shall continue until the land under the Mellon Arena is developed. Upon completion of this work, the Penguins shall pay an additional \$200,000/year over the life of the lease."

We believe that this assumption of demolition is a violation of federal and state law. The SEA essentially turned over a public asset to a private interest without having had any public input, especially given the Civic Arena's historic status.

### **The SEA Process**

On 4 June 2007 at the Civic Arena, Don Carter from Urban Design Associates (UDA) led the first public meeting about the new arena (Consol Center). At that time, he was asked about the future of the Civic Arena and the 28-acre site. He told the crowd that these meetings were about the new arena and that there were to be no discussions about the Civic Arena until *later*. He told us that there would be a separate process to discuss the Civic Arena, even though the land was adjacent to the new arena.

Preservation Pittsburgh objected to this compartmentalization of the planning process because we believe the relationship between the new and old sites are intertwined. We encouraged the SEA to discuss both sites and to make a master plan that would complement the Hill District and downtown. This would have given us plenty of time to generate thoughtful ideas about the Civic Arena and the 28-acres. Instead, the SEA followed its own plan. It acquired additional land for the new arena, demolition began, and the construction of the new arena was started. In that same time, the Hill District worked out its Community Benefits Agreement with the Penguins.

*Later* finally arrived in January of 2010. Because of the Civic Arena's historic status, the SEA was required to start an "interested parties" process to discuss alternative uses for the building. The SEA chose to closely align the process to the Federal guidelines established in Section 106. At that time, I was optimistic that the SEA was ready to explore and collect ideas about a re-use for the building. So far, this process has fallen short in a number of areas:

- It has isolated the planning of the 28 acre Arena site instead of incorporating it into the Hill Master Plan and the new Hill Green Print.
- It has not fostered deeper dialogue between residents of the Hill District and other Interested Parties to discuss the failures of urban renewal in the past and what we can do today to reconcile the injustices with future plans.
- It has not successfully gathered adequate public input about creative re-uses for the Arena by conducting design competitions.
- It has closely examined only two ideas: 1) The Penguins' plan designed nearly 10 years ago by Urban Design Associates; 2) A conceptual framework proposed by local architect, Rob Pfaffmann.
- It has not conducted an objective study about the true costs and regional benefits of re-use compared to demolition and re-grading – and the impact the development will have on Downtown retail and office space and the Hill District.

While we have wanted to discuss the future of the Civic Arena for more than three years, there now seems to be a rush to conclude the current process without adequate time. We feel the SEA's timeline is much too short and will not allow for thoughtful consideration of alternatives and real public participation. This rushed timeline will defeat the open process that you say you are in favor of. To be blunt, all of this leads me to wonder if the SEA has a predetermined outcome for this process.

### **The Penguins' Plan**

I believe that the initial reason that the Penguins called for the demolition of the Civic Arena is that they did not want a competing venue and it is costly to maintain the current Mellon Arena. Perhaps they could not imagine another use for the building. In addition, because the Penguins were given the development rights to the Civic Arena site and are trying to maximize their own interests, they have stated the benefits of having a "development ready" site.

The Penguins claim that there has never been an effective re-use of an arena is simply not true. They neglect to mention the Pepsi Center (Forum) in Montreal or the plans for the Memorial Coliseum in Portland. Even if there were no other examples, I would say that there has never been a more unique arena than the Civic Arena. We are in Pittsburgh – let's lead the way again. As the Penguins would say, "Defy Ordinary!"

The Penguins/UDA plan:

1. Is being developed in isolation from the Hill Master Plan and the Green Print
2. Was developed by Urban Design Associates (UDA) in conjunction with the failed Isle of Capri casino proposal
3. Has not been updated to account for today's new economic reality (locally and nationally) – changes in the real estate development
4. Does not consider the negative effect that additional housing, office, and retail will have on downtown office space, retail, and restaurants
5. Has no special appeal – could be developed in Anywhere, USA
6. Has no consideration for the value and draw that a re-purposed Civic Arena could have

The plan also calls for tax payer funding for:

1. Demolition of the Mellon Arena
2. Elimination of the existing terraces – re-grading of the 28-acre site
3. Installation of a new street grid
4. Installation of new infrastructure (power, water, sewage)
5. Paving of the "temporary" parking until new development can occur

A quick review of the above points may show that the Penguins' plan is, in fact, best for them. But what is best for Pittsburgh? From this, I will let you draw your own conclusion as to why the Penguins support demolition, re-grading, new infrastructure, and new parking – all at our expense.

### **Green and Sustainable**

Pittsburgh claims to be among the most "green" cities in America. And yet, with an incredible opportunity to re-purpose an existing building, we are falling back on our "tear it down" mentality. By re-using existing structures, like the Civic Arena, we are helping the environment more than by demolishing and building new eco-friendly buildings. Let's lead by example!

## **Portland**

A situation in Portland, Oregon regarding the re-use of their old arena has amazing parallels (see attached). The Memorial Coliseum opened in 1960. A modern design, it eventually housed the Portland Trailblazers until 1995 when a new arena was built. For the last 15 years, the Coliseum continued to be used as a secondary arena (an idea that we are not embracing for our Civic Arena). The Trailblazers have the development rights for the old arena and the 25-acres it sits on. They considered many options. Coincidentally, Urban Design Associates of Pittsburgh proposed demolition of the arena so that a restored street grid could be put into place that would “reconnect” the Rose Quarter with Portland. Lively streets with a mix of housing, offices, and retail would re-invigorate the area (see attached – does it look/sound familiar?). The mayor of Portland was in favor of demolition.

But there are also some significant differences. Unlike the Penguins, the Trailblazers privately financed their new arena. They also assumed that they would re-use their old building, rather than tearing it down. In addition, there is a very strong community benefits component that gives the neighboring community a percent of ticket revenue through a special surcharge.

Through an engaging public process to generate a variety of ideas, Portland decided to keep their arena. A new area called “Jumptown” will incorporate indoor sports, music, and arts into a re-purposed center. Portland flatly rejected the UDA plan. And now, their mayor is embracing the new plan. If Portland can do this, why can't we? I would encourage you to examine Portland's model to better understand how the SEA could play a pivotal role in our region's future.

## **SEA/Michael Baker/Oxford Analysis**

The SEA analysis that compared the UDA plan to a plan presented by Rob Pfaffmann was flawed from its inception. First, the objective of the “interested parties” process was to determine a re-use of the arena; not to compare a re-use plan to demolition. Second, the framework that Rob proposed is just that – a framework. In his plan, as an academic exercise, Rob showed that we could include all of the housing, office, retail, and parking from the UDA plan, while keeping the arena. This was done to illustrate that we could re-use the arena and accomplish the Penguin's development objectives. The most important aspect of Rob's framework is the idea of re-using the building for any new purpose – not necessarily for a hotel or a even an indoor/outdoor park. The SEA has unfairly used Rob's framework to counter that the only proposed plan for re-use is not viable. The reality is that neither plan is practical, given today's economic climate. The Penguin's acknowledged that they have not found a developer for their plan either. An appropriate use of Rob's framework would have been to analyze the costs of interior demolition and the benefits of the re-purposed arena as a magnet for other development. This, of course, was never examined.

## **Another Syria Mosque**

Preservation Pittsburgh was founded in 1991 after the demolition of the Syria Mosque in Oakland. UPMC and the University of Pittsburgh were inadvertently bidding against each other to buy the property. Today, 19 years later, the land remains undeveloped as a surface parking lot.

We do not want another outcome like the Syria Mosque. We also don't want to see the building “moth-balled” for years and years. (Although, I might point out that several Pittsburgh buildings – such as the cork factory – found their new lease on life after a significant waiting period.) The difference when comparing the Civic Arena to the Syria Mosque is that the Syria Mosque was a private transaction with a private seller and a private buyer. The Civic Arena is a public asset and must have proper public input!

### **“Righting a Wrong” – How to handle “Burdened Sites”**

Preservation Pittsburgh is certainly not oblivious to the history of the Civic Arena. The urban renewal that built the arena, demolished a huge portion of the Hill District, displaced 8,000 residents, and erased the business district is still having a negative impact on the Hill today. To many people, the arena is a symbol of failed urban planning and racial segregation. So, what do we do with this building? Tearing it down will not restore what was there before. And, for many people, keeping it will be a constant reminder of social injustice and the pain they endured. How can we give this building new meaning?

Buildings with a troubled past association can be reborn. There are many examples of this in other cities (and in other countries). These kinds of “burdened site” have been transformed into meaningful places. An example is the Reichstag in Berlin, Germany which is now the German Parliament. A burdened site can remind people of what once was so that we can learn from our past.

The past cannot, nor should not be forgotten or erased. We already made that mistake in the 1950’s. Tearing down the Civic Arena won’t right the wrongs. Sensitive historical displays in a re-purposed arena could highlight the failure of this urban renewal project and the lives that were wrecked – both to document and to educate future generations.

We believe, through additional dialogue with Hill Residents, that we can find common ground to transform the Civic Arena into a true community asset. As it stands now, we all agree that the Arena is a barrier between the Hill and Downtown. It sits alone, surrounded by parking and a fence. Besides demolition, there are many other ways to start healing. Many of these ideas have yet to be discovered!

The issue of the Civic Arena has been discussed at length in the Hill. It has also been discussed thoroughly by Preservationists. What has not occurred is the bringing together of these groups for deeper discussions about the rationale behind various ideas. In the end, through all of the passion and emotion, I think we all want to see a thriving Hill District, city of Pittsburgh, and region. Preservation Pittsburgh is talking with Hill residents and is planning an open forum so that we can have these kinds of discussions.

### **Summary**

We all want to avoid repeating past mistakes with regard to neighborhood and city planning. We believe this can be avoided by following a process; having real public input – professionals and non-professionals alike; seeking alternatives; and giving ample time to consider the options and weigh costs. This will ensure a development that is appropriate to Pittsburgh and its residents as well as its national image.

It is incumbent upon the SEA to embrace a process that appropriately examines alternative uses for the Civic Arena. It is a one-of-a-kind structure that should not be discarded without due process. I hope you will do the right thing by opening up conversations and exploring new ideas.

I will conclude by providing some words from Jean Cutler of the Pennsylvania Historical and Museum Commission:

*"One outcome of the public participation process should be to assist the public in understanding how seemingly disparate components of community development are not just compatible, but dependent upon each other for success..."*

*...A development project that includes adaptive re-use of the Arena could be a true monument to the people of the Hill district, to Pittsburgh's history as an industrial giant and to the future development of both the lower Hill and the city at large as we move into a more sustainable and thoughtful era of development."*

Once the arena is gone, it will be gone forever and will never be rebuilt. Alternatives to demolition need to be seriously considered. A re-purposing of the Civic Arena is sustainable and green. With necessary input from diverse communities, we can create a unique, stunning, economically viable destination that will serve our region well into the future.

Best regards,

Preservation Pittsburgh



Scott D. Leib, President

c.

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Jake Wheatley  
Chris Cieslak  
Arthur Ziegler  
Dan Holland  
Rob Pfaffmann  
Todd Poole

## Portland and Pittsburgh: Parallels and Differences\*

### Parallels

Portland	Pittsburgh
1960 – Memorial Coliseum Modern design, built in a lower economic neighborhood along with Interstate highway in the name of urban renewal	1961 – Civic Arena Modern design, built in a lower economic neighborhood along with Interstate highway in the name of urban renewal
1995 – New arena built	2010 – New arena built
Public sentiment to keep or demolish the old arena is mixed	Public sentiment to keep or demolish the old arena is mixed
Portland Trailblazers have development rights to 25 acres including site of old arena	Pittsburgh Penguins have development rights to 28 acres including site of old arena
Urban Design Associates (UDA) proposes demolition of old arena with restoration of street grid to reconnect Rose Quarter	Urban Design Associates (UDA) proposes demolition of old arena with restoration of street grid to reconnect Hill District

### Differences

Portland	Pittsburgh
New arena privately financed	New arena publicly financed
Old arena – assumption of re-use	Old arena – assumption of demolition
The process: Thorough public process gathers creative ideas with follow-up economic analysis on impact of surrounding neighborhoods.	The process: Cursory public process; little or no analysis on how new development will effect downtown office and retail or how it would directly benefit the Hill District.
The plan: A combination of the various ideas collected through the public process. Plan encompasses long-term view of Rose Quarter.	The plan: 10-year old plan that was created for the Penguins with little public input. Planning for 28-acres is being done separately from Hill Master Plan.
Philosophy: Green, sustainable, innovative	Philosophy: Same old story – tear it down, build new
UDA proposal rejected by Trailblazers	UDA proposal embraced by Penguins
Result: “Jumptown” development is planned which will be a unique destination of sports, arts, and music for locals and tourists.	Result: Generic development is proposed that could be Anywhere, USA.

\*Not intended to be a comprehensive analysis – just a summary overview.

U R B A N   D E S I G N   A S S O C I A T E S

# Rose Quarter

**PORTLAND, OREGON**

[Urban Design Associates](#) produced an urban design plan and development strategy for the Rose Quarter in Portland, Oregon.

The study focuses on the area around the Rose Garden arena and recommends two alternative strategies for creating a mixed-use district of housing, commercial, and entertainment uses. The alternatives focus on the re-use or demolition of Veteran's Memorial Coliseum. The planning process involved authentic public participation, involvement of major stakeholders, a focus on implementation, and design as a tool for decision making.

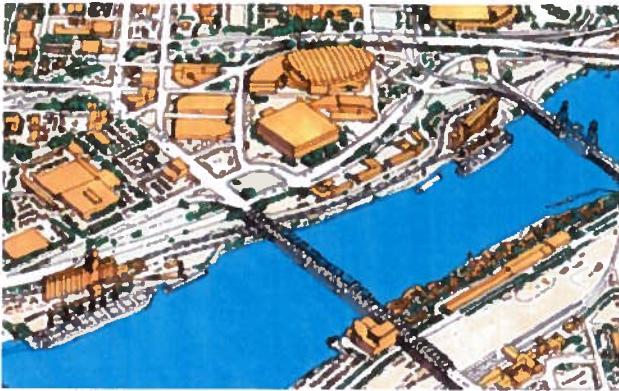


# Rose Quarter

## TRANSFORMATION

As seen in the before aerial perspective, large-scale public facilities like the Rose Garden arena (top, center) and the Veteran's Memorial Coliseum (below arena), are surrounded by parking lots and garages, and are separated from nearby neighborhoods by the expressway. In the preferred vision (after, preferred alternative) the sports and entertainment facilities are the focus of a new mixed-use residential quarter, linked to adjacent neighborhoods.

The proposed framework of streets and open space can accommodate a number of alternative uses including a plan for a new ball park as shown in the baseball alternative plan.



BEFORE



AFTER (PREFERRED ALTERNATIVE)

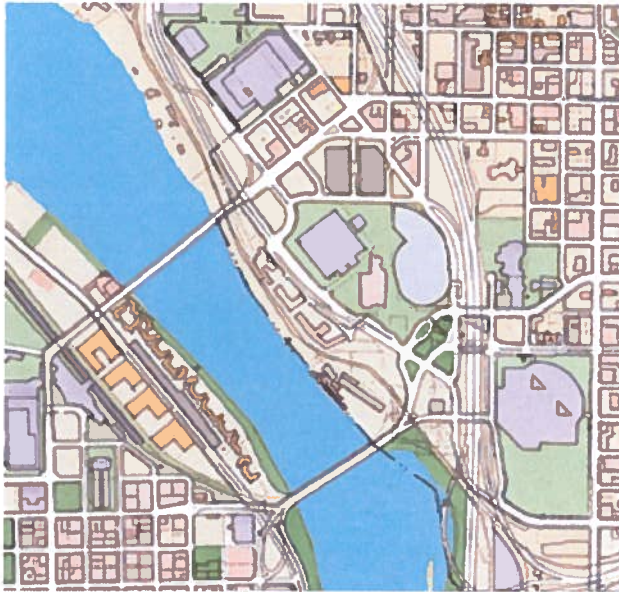


AFTER (BASEBALL ALTERNATIVE)

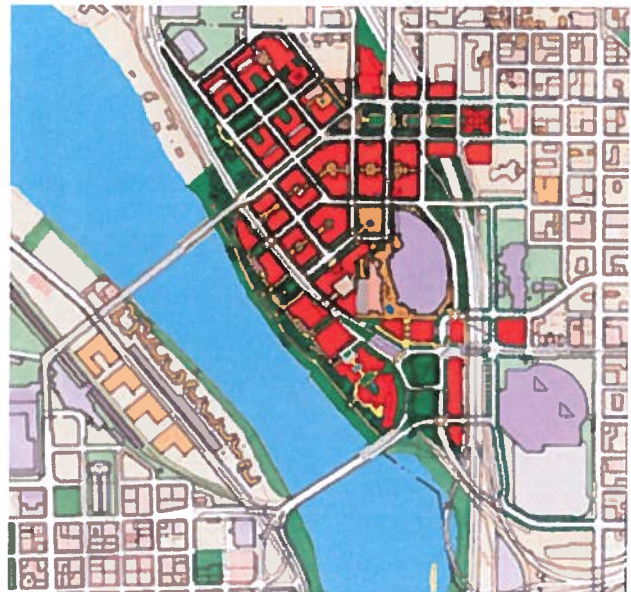
# Rose Quarter

## MASTER PLAN

In the before plan, large public facilities like the Rose Garden arena and the Veteran's Memorial Coliseum (center) are surrounded by parking lots. In the preferred vision, a new square with an improved memorial will be the focus of the Rose Quarter with mixed-use structures creating a series of lively streets.



BEFORE PLAN



PREFERRED VISION



PREFERRED ALTERNATIVE—A NEW MIXED-USE DISTRICT



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