

## **DAG'S STATEMENT ON THE PROPOSED SIXERS' STADIUM**

David Brownlee

Center City Philadelphia has some problems. The proposed Sixers arena is not the solution.

Despite the recent creation of the “Fashion District,” most agree that Market East is still more lifeless than a major street in Center City should be. At the same time, our vibrant Chinatown is beleaguered.

The proposal to replace part of our downtown shopping mall with a new sports venue will not solve these problems. In fact, it will make matters worse.

Many kinds of criticism have been leveled against the Sixers proposal--based on its negative social impact, economics, and politics. These are legitimate areas of concern, but this analysis focuses on questions of urban design.

What Market East needs is an influx of 24/7 street-oriented activity, preferably connecting with and amplifying the vibrancy of Chinatown. The published plans for the arena, although sketchy, suffice to show that the new structure will not generate what is required.

It will be a gigantic blank box on top of another indoor shopping mall, like the one we have. Except for the forty-some times a year that the Sixers play, the arena will not fill the surrounding streets with activity, and on those few busy nights, Sixers fans, who are not known to be devotees of public transportation, will clog the area in search of parking places. Moreover, rather than integrate itself into the fabric of the city, the project will abolish Filbert Street, bury SEPTA's Jefferson regional rail station, and wall off Chinatown.

Instructively, a model of what Market East needs is on display just across the street, in National Real Estate's prosaically named but imaginatively conceived “East Market.” Here, new and newly energized streetscapes are lined with shops and restaurants, above which rise new apartment buildings, a hotel in a meticulously restored historic landmark, and a glistening new in-patient care building for Thomas Jefferson hospital.

This kind of all-the-time mixed use development—not the once-in-a-while adrenalin jolt of a sports center—is what the rest of Market East needs. The last-minute addition of an apartment tower at a rear corner of the Sixers project is not enough to transform it into the kind of lively urban environment that we need and deserve.

For Center City to flourish, we must bring Market East to life and protect and make the most of Chinatown's unique energy. We do not require a new basketball arena, and, unfortunately, the Sixers project threatens to get in the way of our real needs.