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## 76 PLACE IS STILL NOT THE SOLUTION FOR MARKET EAST

Center City Philadelphia has significant problems, including a lifeless Market Street and a precarious Chinatown. A year ago, the Steering Committee of the Design Advocacy Group (DAG) argued that the proposed Sixers arena would not solve these problems. In fact, we said, it would make them worse.

That's still true.

In the meantime, the design of 76 Place has been tweaked a little (although the details remain underdeveloped), and it has been subjected to public comment at two meetings of the Civic Design Review (CDR) Committee and analyzed by design consultants. Positive words were few and far between during the CDR sessions, and while the consultants judge that the proposal had been incrementally improved along the way, they still identify serious concerns.

There is no reason for us to be heartened by these developments. Thus, we feel it is now time for our city leaders to take this problem out of the hands of private interests and develop a comprehensive master plan for Market Street that satisfies the needs of all of us.

As we said last year, what Market East needs is an influx of round-the-clock, street-oriented activity, preferably connecting with, and amplifying, the vibrancy of Chinatown. The published plans for the arena don't demonstrate that it can accomplish this. They show a gigantic glass box, wrapped in a swirl of advertising like a carton of facial tissue, that sits on top of some indoor shopping with limited street frontage, which is rendered more like auxiliary concessions for gameday than anything that would be used by the public the rest of the time.

Except for Sixers' game nights, or when a concert is scheduled here instead of at the Wells Fargo Center (with its abundant parking), the arena will not bring the area to life. And when an event is booked, the streets will be filled to overflowing, for which no adequate provision for outdoor public space can be made on the hemmed-in site.

The apartment building at the back of the arena remains manifestly an understudied afterthought that is almost an affront to Chinatown, which lies just across Cuthbert Street. As currently presented, it is certainly not a lively contributor to the kind of mixed-use urban environment that we need and deserve.

In the nearby Convention Center, which is usually either closed, or visibly dark to passersby, we can already see what it is like to have a building that, most of the time, is a lifeless, dark mass in the middle of our city. Do we really want two adjacent blocks serving up inactivity for such a significant portion of the year?

The arena is not right for this area, and this is not the right area for the arena.

Doing better is not impossible. Indeed, a model of the kind of all-the-time, many-purposed development that Market East needs has already been created just across the street, in National Real Estate's imaginatively conceived "East Market." Here, new and newly re-energized streetscapes are lined with shops and restaurants, above which rise new apartment buildings, a hotel in a historic landmark, and a glistening new outpatient medical tower.

However, while private interests like National Real Estate can generate suggestive ideas, a project of this scale must belong to all of us. It is time for our Mayor and City Council to direct the City Planning Commission to lead a master plan for the future of Market Street that gives it the lift that it needs and generates durable good paying jobs, while enhancing its relationship with Chinatown.

And, while they're at it, let's ask them to identify some better, more appropriate, sites for a new arena—not including Camden.

*The DAG Steering Committee*

*The Design Advocacy Group (DAG) is a public forum and advocate for design quality and equity in the planning, architecture, preservation and physical development of Philadelphia.  
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