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Franklin Park Coalition's Recommendations for the City of Boston/BPS/BUSP Proposal to Redevelop White Stadium in Franklin Park

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[Franklin Park Coalition](#) (FPC) conducted a community survey to learn more about park users' attitudes regarding the City of Boston's proposal to redevelop White Stadium as a collaboration between Boston Public Schools (BPS) and Boston Unity Soccer Partners (BUSP), investors in a professional women's soccer team. In this survey, over 700 regular park users and residents of surrounding neighborhoods provided their perspectives on the potential benefits of the project; their concerns about the project; and their suggestions to improve the project. While 31% of respondents said they were "all for" the proposal; 49% of respondents indicated that they had concerns that would need to be addressed before they could fully support it. (20% of respondents said they were against it.) The methods and findings of the survey were presented in a public "report back" on March 19, 2024, and the report is posted [here](#).

Based on the survey responses, FPC's Board of Directors have identified a series of concrete recommendations for how to improve the BPS/BUSP proposal to better meet the needs of park users and address concerns about the project. These recommendations are based on FPC's analysis of the survey data, information gleaned from the City's public meetings, public discussion of the proposal, the written proposal plans, and engagement with park advocates and neighborhood groups. We hope this document offers a roadmap to the City, BPS, and BUSP to align this proposal with community needs and consolidate support for this project.

Key Action Items:

- Develop a parking / traffic plan and infrastructure that directs and enables people to take public transit, ride share, or park private vehicles offsite for Stadium events
- Hold Saturday soccer games in the evenings to reduce conflict with existing park uses including community festivals and events
- Fully integrate the Stadium redevelopment with the Franklin Park Action Plan; explain to community how it is aligned with the Action Plan
- Major commitments to invest in rehabilitating surrounding park areas – Playstead, Overlook, Bear Dens, woodlands – and integration of Stadium with those areas as per Action Plan
- Commitment to public access to Stadium and Grove and how community will be able to use facilities for concerts, cultural events, etc.
- Reduce the size of the project including number of seats and its footprint, especially the East Grandstand
- Commitment to a fan experience at the stadium that minimizes pumped in noise and effects and respects its location in Franklin Park
- Create economic opportunities for local businesses, esp. run by BIPOC
- Create clear governance structures to enforce commitments and manage the different active use areas, and ensure accountability to community and Franklin Park.

- 1. Traffic and Parking.** Park users are concerned that soccer games, increased BPS use, and other events at the renovated stadium will exacerbate congestion and parking scarcity, making access to the park and surrounding neighborhoods more difficult. Some fear that gated roadways inside the park will be opened to more vehicles, posing a danger to pedestrians and causing air and noise pollution in the park.

Solutions:

- A park-wide traffic management and parking plan, with provisions for stadium events (including BPS events) (ESSENTIAL), with specific suggestions as follows...
- Direct spectators to take public transit, ride share, or park private vehicles in offsite lots for Stadium events, including large BPS events. Transportation & parking options should be communicated with tickets to all events, and should be posted publicly.
- Close Park Lane/Walnut park entrance to Franklin Park to private vehicles and shuttles from off-site parking lot on event days/times;
- Prohibit event parking in the Playstead parking area at giraffe entrance to zoo on event days/times and in the golf clubhouse parking lot
- Limit traffic of non-residents on Walnut Avenue and abutting neighborhood streets on event days/times; (e.g. close walnut Ave to non-resident traffic)
- In addition to remote parking sites, add off-site parking closer to the stadium (e.g. Roxbury Community College, Forest Hills MBTA lots); signage at park entrances with directions to off sight parking.
- Enable permit-only parking in neighborhoods surrounding the entire park for game days.
- Shuttle from Jackson Sq / RCC down the bus lane, to drop at Walnut/Seaver bus stop or at Humboldt/Seaver lot; bus turn around at Humboldt/Seaver; improve access path from Humboldt/Seaver to Stadium to ensure ADA compliance and accommodate crowds.
- Shuttle from Forest Hills to Valley Gates/gravel lot turn-around. Improved pedestrian paths from Valley gates to stadium to ensure ADA compliance and accommodate crowds.
- Shuttles should be electric to avoid bringing noise and air pollution into the park.
- Ride share drop off at Refectory Hill, with a shuttle that goes back and forth to Valley Gates and Humboldt.
- Bike lanes from SW corridor to the Park. Safe sidewalks from Stony Brook to the Park.
- Connect “4-corners/Geneva” stop on the Fairmount Line to the Park with safe bike lanes and shuttles.
- Improved pedestrian and bike access on all sides of the park, including improved pedestrian crossings. Improved pedestrian crossings at Circuit and Pierpont Drive
- Free public transit for game days/times on bus lines that bring people to the park.
- Enable pedestrian / bicycle access to the “main entrance” of the stadium (at the top of School St) by: broadening the pedestrian pathway from Walnut/Seaver St to School St entrance; improve the Walnut/Seaver bus stop and crossings to accommodate more people (coming on the bus / shuttle from Jackson Sq T station); fixing/widening the

sidewalks on School St & adding a bike lane, as this is the primary pedestrian / bicycle access road from Stony Brook T station. Add signage directing people from Stony Brook, Green Street and Forest Hills T stations.

- 2. Impact on Existing Park Activities and Events.** Franklin Park is already packed all summer long, with community events in the Playstead nearly every warm-weather Saturday. Large events at White Stadium should not displace these community events. Additionally, there is a concern that traffic and overcrowding could limit access to the park for general recreational use during the park's high season, including recreational sports in the Playstead (e.g. cricket, softball, soccer), access to the zoo, golf course, and playgrounds.

Solutions:

- Soccer games and other major events should be held primarily in the evenings, between 6 and 10pm, and this should be written into the BUSP lease. Holding games any earlier presents a direct conflict with existing park activities on warm weather Saturdays. Evening games will enliven the park during a period when there is less use.
- If there are day games, they should be limited, and the schedule must be set AROUND existing annual community festivals and not the other way around.
- The traffic plan must enable people to reach the Zoo, golf course, and interior of the park itself for family gatherings, BBQs, etc., even on game days/times.

- 3. Investment in Park and Integration with Franklin Park Action Plan.** Park users want to see capital improvements to Franklin Park's infrastructure and landscaping in areas around the stadium, as well as improved ecological maintenance. Additionally, the stadium and Grove must be fully integrated into the Franklin Park Action Plan. The Action Plan, which went through a multi-year community engagement process and has been endorsed by Mayor Wu, provides a generational vision for reinvestment in the park while retaining the historical legacy of Olmsted's design. Respondents wanted to see the stadium renovation celebrate its location in Franklin Park by incorporating aspects of ecological design, integrating aesthetic motifs of the surrounding areas in landscaping and tree planting, and providing park visitor information and signage.

Solutions:

- The contract needs to include specific maintenance commitments and contributions to capital improvements in the areas around the stadium. The woodlands, Overlook, paths, Bear Dens, Playstead are in major disrepair and need revitalization. BUSP is benefiting from the park and needs to contribute to the maintenance and improvement of areas around the stadium, guided by the Action Plan.
- BUSP should fund the restoration of the Playstead to address drainage issues; improved pathways to ensure access to the stadium; and should contribute to the restoration of the Overlook's crumbling masonry and integration of the Overlook with the Grove;

ecological restoration and access paths in the woodlands around the stadium, especially Long Crouch Woods; and rehabilitation of the Elma Lewis Playhouse at the Overlook.

- We recommend a “Boston Unity Franklin Park Preservation Fund”, which can raise money for the City to implement capital improvements and ecological restoration for the northern section of the park outlined in the Action Plan. Contributions can be solicited from attendees of Boston Unity soccer games.
- City must demonstrate the entire project conforms with the Action Plan, particularly the plans for the northern corner of Franklin Park.
- The tennis courts and basketball courts adjacent to the stadium should be kept and renovated.
- Landscaping, tree planting, and pathways around the stadium should be integrated into the surrounding park, with investments in tree planting, invasive removal, native species, and environment for wildlife.
- Integration, circulation, and eliminating redundancies between the Grove and Overlook need to be addressed.
- Employ landscape architecture tactics which do not simply use grass and asphalt paths, there are other options! (multi-stems, more natural groundcover, swales for drainage issues which happen so much near the tennis courts).

- 4. Public Access, Community Use, and Non-Athletic Events.** Park users are concerned about ensuring access to the stadium for community events, BPS athletics, and local residents. Many people object to what they perceive as “privatization” of public space and further carving up of the park for special restricted uses. All efforts should be made to make Stadium and Grove areas open to the public outside of ticketed Stadium events. Additionally, the Stadium and Grove should be made available for community programming beyond athletics. While use of the stadium for large concerts by a commercial promoter should be avoided, the stadium should be available for use by community festivals.

Solutions

- Ensure community access to stadium facilities (*e.g.* the track) when not being used for an event; and publicly post schedule for public access
- Make White Stadium more than a sports stadium: ice skating, concerts, and more. And ensure that some events are held at the stadium that are free to the public.
- Make the renovated White Stadium easily available to local communities for cultural events, concerts, and festivals. One survey respondent wrote: “We always read about the awesome concerts at White in the ‘60s-70s, let’s bring those back.”
- Prohibit commercial use of the stadium for events that are not community initiated, and include Franklin Park Coalition in governance structures to issue permits for stadium use
- Community engagement from BUSP, *e.g.*: youth programs, soccer clinics, etc.
- Ensure inclusive opportunities for local groups from neighborhoods around Franklin Park to use the Grove; and create clear systems of governance for the Grove that include Franklin Park Coalition and community members

- Celebrate the identity of Franklin Park as a “public asset” and “historical landmark”:
 - (a) Prohibit sale of any corporate or private donor naming rights for the stadium, the park, and sections of the park. This would be perceived as an affront to park users in the communities that have worked for decades to maintain and revitalize the park.
 - (b) Create a permanent exhibit in the Stadium or Grove that provides a narrative history of the park, indigenous stewards of the landscape, Frederick Law Olmsted, Elma Lewis, and the rehabilitation of the park by surrounding communities.

- 5. Environmental and Green Space Preservation:** There's apprehension about the potential loss of green space, trees, and the natural beauty of the park, especially with the expanded perimeter of the East side grandstand. Respondents emphasize the importance of preserving wildlife habitats, maintaining the park's serenity, and ensuring that construction and renovations do not harm the environment.

Solutions

- Reduce the size (footprint) of the project and minimize loss of green space and trees.
- Reduce capacity of stadium so that it is appropriate for BPS & community uses and is not oversized. Temporary, movable grandstands in the end-zones and on the track can be used to increase capacity at soccer games; but BPS will never use a 10K stadium. (Boston Breakers drew 3000 fans per game; NWSL average in 2019 was 7,400 per game: https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/National_Women%27s_Soccer_League_attendance) This is a concern because the long-term viability of the women's soccer team is unknown.
- Reduce size of Stadium mass and footprint by excluding unnecessary office space, function halls, etc., which can be located elsewhere. (*E.g.*, City could locate BPS offices in the Egleston Square Library redevelopment or purchase a new parcel near the Park.)
- Limit additional paving and hardscape outside the stadium. No new parking lots in park.
- Limit number of trees lost by reducing the overall footprint and incorporating the mature oaks on the East grandstand wall into the project.
- Plant new trees and ensure ecological continuity with the surrounding landscape. *E.g.*, do not plant “street trees” or a bamboo stand or birch grove; use the ecological palette of the park.

- 6. Noise, Light Pollution, Litter and Disruption:** The potential for increased noise, light pollution, litter and general disruption from stadium events and construction is a concern, with worries about the impact on local residents' quality of life, wildlife, zoo animals and the tranquil park experience.

Solutions

- Limit amplified music and fake crowd noise during soccer games in the stadium. Directional speakers to limit noise pollution outside of stadium. Create a stadium experience that is commensurate with the Stadium's location in a public park. This is not

Gillette/Foxboro (which is surrounded by parking lots), nor Fenway Park (which is surrounded by commercial businesses for several blocks), nor TD Garden (which is indoors). There need to be strict and enforceable agreements in place to ensure that the fan experience at the Stadium does not infringe on the experience of other park users and neighbors. Further, there need to be clear structures for community oversight including mechanisms to register complaints and ensuring complaints are addressed.

- Clear plans regarding directional “dark sky/downward” lighting and hours when lights will be on to minimize light pollution and disruption of wildlife. High efficiency / low energy lighting.
- Clear plans (with ongoing funding and clear responsibility) for maintenance in the area around the Stadium, to keep the park clean and safe and to clean up any litter in surrounding neighborhoods and park after events.

- 7. Equity, Inclusion, and Justice:** The renovated stadium and park must remain inclusive and accessible to all community members, particularly marginalized groups, and the benefits of the renovation must be equitably distributed, including the economic benefits for local businesses.

Solutions

- Host events at the stadium that are targeted to the communities of color that use Franklin Park. (There is a perception that professional soccer is likely to draw many White families from the suburbs into Franklin Park. The stadium must be used for other events that cater to the surrounding communities.)
- Make sure jobs generated by the Stadium (e.g. jobs in construction, trades, landscaping, security, maintenance, operations, concessions, ecological restoration, management, etc.) employ people from the neighborhoods surrounding the park, and that there is job training to ensure access. BUSP should provide internships and jobs training for various positions within their organization.
- Have signage around the Stadium that affirms the history of the community and the Park, and the culture of the events that have happened there.
- Plans to ensure increased security associated with stadium do not result in inappropriate over-policing of the black and brown populations who use the park. Incidents should be tracked and monitored by the stadium governing board.
- Ensure that the economic benefits flow to the people who are already here and who have endured dis-investments for decades. That could take a lot of forms, *e.g.* actually helping to develop local BIPOC-owned businesses so they can bid on contracts (in addition to the 50% goal of M/WBE).

- 8. Governance and Community Oversight.** A single governing entity for Franklin Park, including White Stadium, is needed to facilitate management and coordination of the stadium with adjacent park areas. Community must have a role in this governance

structure. Agreements developed during the proposal process must be legally binding and community members must have recourse if promises are not kept.

- The park needs a governing board with significant community participation that can enforce commitments made by BUSP and BPS; make ongoing adjustments to transportation and stadium use plans; and a management entity that can oversee all the new park components. It will be a royal mess if permissions and permitting and coordination is with: BPS for the stadium, BUSP for the Grove, Boston Parks and Recreation Department (BPRD) for the Playhouse etc. This management entity needs to be accountable to BPRD and have community oversight.
- A legal document that ensures BUSP does what they say they are going to do, with specific maintenance commitments and contributions to capital improvements in the areas around the stadium, as well as restrictions on noise and games at specific times of day. This needs to be transparent and available for comment by community. And there need to be accountability mechanisms / recourse if the agreement is not honored.
- The City needs to articulate a Plan for governance and maintenance of the stadium if the soccer team fails.

9. **Transparency and Community Engagement.** The City has moved quite quickly with this proposal, with formal review processes occurring before critical details of the plans are in place. This has led to a sense of distrust among many park users and community members, who feel that the project is being imposed on them from above without being transparent about the project; and due a fair and transparent process for engagement.

Solutions

- Further community engagement, in particular to solicit perspectives of residents on the park's Eastern side (Roxbury, Dorchester, Mattapan). Meetings should be advertised using posters located at park entrances and pushed out via city councilor mailing lists.
- Careful and deliberate alignment with the Franklin Park Action Plan, which already went through a detailed community process. This would mean engagement with the Action plan principles; articulation of how the stadium project fits within that plan; full integration of the stadium and grove with the surrounding park areas included in the action plan, including: Overlook, Bear Dens, Playstead
- Clear governance structures for the stadium that delineate a role for oversight by Franklin Park Coalition and community members during the redevelopment process and once development is complete. These governance structures must have decision-making power and decisions must be enforceable.
- Make efforts to build trust. *E.g.* There were many survey comments like this one: "This plan being rushed through is a major threat to the purpose and function of Boston's largest park, and to an Action Plan that thousands of us helped craft."