

WHITE STADIUM REDEVELOPMENT

Article 80 input from the FRANKLIN PARK COALITION

January 31, 2024

The Franklin Park Coalition recognizes the significant need to restore and update the George Robert White Schoolboy Stadium in the northern corner of Franklin Park. Built in the 1940s the Stadium has a significant history, from football and track for generations of Boston Public School students to political rallies with the Black Panthers to nationally known performers from the 1960s and 70s.

Today White Stadium serves as a site for fall high school football games, track and field events in the spring, the August Caribbean Kiddie Carnival, and a hugely popular free sports camp for children throughout the summer. A lack of maintenance and capital investment, as well as a fire have ravaged the stands and resources within the Stadium's fence.

While FPC is eager to see the Stadium restored and are cautiously optimistic about what a renewed White Stadium will mean for young athletes and the park, we have the following concerns about both the development process and the proposed product and use.

Development and Community Engagement Process

First, the City of Boston has divided the project into two components with two developers and two processes: 1) the west grandstand and southern end adjacent to the Playstead field that will be developed by Boston Unity; and 2) the east grandstand that will house BPS athletics and be developed by Boston's Public Facilities Department. Yet park users, nearby community members, youth athletes and coaches, and other stakeholders see this as ONE Stadium and ONE project. The result of this artificial division is the need for two separate and parallel community input processes for meetings, design presentations, and logistical feedback related to transportation and public use. We urge the City to alter this process and present a unified design and details to the community.

Second, related to the first comment, please engage in a full article 80 and community process on the BPS side of the development project. Currently, stakeholders have much more information about the Boston Unity component of the project and much less about the east side of the Stadium.

Project Design and Use

1. *Transportation and parking* for a full season of professional soccer games with 11,000 fans continue to be a concern. We hope no approvals are given until a comprehensive traffic circulation plan and neighborhood parking restrictions program are developed and vetted. The traffic analysis in the Project Notification Form is a beginning, but its assumptions should be scrutinized, alternative circulation plans analyzed, the data better synthesized and summarized, and its conclusions on impacts spelled out more clearly. There are few viable entry and exit sites for buses and other game day traffic due to the narrowness of streets: Walnut Avenue, Sigourney St. and Glen Road. FPC stands with park neighbors who are deeply concerned about the impact of game days on residential streets. Use of Pierpont and Playstead Roads will significantly interfere with other park uses, whether Zoo visitation, Playstead games and picnics, or other community activities. Circuit Drive appears to be the only thoroughfare with size and capacity to handle many large and frequent shuttle buses arriving and departing on game days.
2. Designed as a *football stadium*, loss of this historical use for BPS high school teams is unfortunate. A clear remedy is needed before the project continues. Community members want to hear where BPS Friday night and Saturday football games will be played and that they will be in an equal or better facility.
3. The Boston Public School footprint in Franklin Park extends beyond the Stadium to the east and includes *grassy lawn areas, two tennis courts, and a parking area that is currently a heavily used basketball pick-up site* for local teens. FPC hopes the development project will ensure these resources are not removed and will not cause loss of trees, lawn, or courts. Indeed, these public use areas should be renovated as part of the redevelopment and should continue to be available for the public use.
4. On spring, summer and fall days, especially on weekends, *current* park user groups and events fill the park with people, families, activities, and cars. Zoo visitorship continues to increase and cross-country meets in the autumn bring thousands into the park; the Kite & Bike Festival, BAMS Fest, Elma Lewis Playhouse in the Park, Juneteenth, a full schedule of golf tee times, and hundreds of family barbecues and other gatherings make this a full-to-bursting park – without the addition of 11,000-fan soccer games. We are concerned that soccer games will have a negative impact on the many other community uses of the park during weekends when park use is highest. Indeed, we fear that park festivals may have to move elsewhere (a major loss for surrounding communities) and

that general usership of the park will decline substantially on game days. Presentations and public meetings have not addressed how the many different park uses will be managed. The Franklin Park Coalition seeks prioritization for community events and use of the park and detailed impact assessment of the stadium on existing park use patterns.

5. FPC has long advocated for *restoration of the neglected Overlook Shelter stone ruins* adjacent to the Stadium area. The site of the only building that park creator Frederick Law Olmsted ever designed and home to Elma Lewis' original Playhouse in the Park, the site holds huge historic significance to the City of Boston, nationally, and to the surrounding Black community. While "The Grove" proposed by Boston Unity offers an opportunity for community events and use, it does not replace the importance of the Overlook as a park landscape resource and meaningful site for so many in the Franklin Park community. The Stadium development must not overshadow the Overlook; FPC supports a restored, maintained, and lively park space at the original shelter footprint.
6. White stadium, including "The Grove," must be designed with an eye to integration and harmonization with the Franklin Park Action Plan, including the recommended improvements to the Overlook and Playstead. This would include: adding amenities such as public restrooms and water fountains; connecting the Grove and adjacent areas of the park; maintaining historical and ecological integrity with the park through landscape design, and ensuring that all components are integrated and not implemented as separate projects. Planning processes must therefore be conducted in a coordinated fashion with the Parks Department and with community input.
7. For many in the environmental justice communities of Roxbury, Dorchester, Mattapan, Jamaica Plain, and especially the adjacent Egleston, Grove Hall, and Parkside neighborhoods, Franklin Park's northern half is *a place for respite, health, recreation, family and social connections, and daily use*. As a park resource, a large, loud, crowded sports event is not compatible with these daily uses. We urge that every step possible be taken to protect the park experience in the woodlands, along Playstead Road (the place where so many children learn to ride a bike), at the old Bear Dens, and in El Parquécito and Tiffany Moore playgrounds. We would like to see a survey of existing uses, how those uses may be impacted on event days, and how impacts may be mitigated.
8. As a busy stadium and school athletic center with year-round use, we want to see specific plans for management of the stadium with respect to public and community use. This includes specific times for *public access* to the new track, field, stands, and indoor fitness areas: activities like the November Project (running in the stands), a pick

up soccer game, youth sports leagues, walking groups for older adults, and use of the fitness equipment after work for community members. Additionally, we need clarity and community input on event management plans for the stadium beyond soccer games. Will the stadium also be used for concerts (as it was in the past)? Will community groups be able to hold events in the stadium? Will private event promoters be able to plan events in the stadium that could (positively or negatively) impact surrounding communities and park users? How will this be managed?

Last, consistent with the Franklin Park Action Plan, the Franklin Park Coalition urges Boston Unity Soccer Partners and the City of Boston to include and implement the following improvements in Franklin Park adjacent to White Stadium in conjunction with the redevelopment of the Stadium, as recommended in a previous submittal from the FPC.

Park Maintenance

- Commit to general maintenance of areas surrounding the Stadium, including post-game trash clean up in Long Crouch Woods, and at entrances and in woods along Seaver, Walnut and Sigourney Streets.
- Repair or replace benches along pathways in the vicinity of Stadium.
- Repair existing pathways surrounding the stadium that are currently damaged or are damaged as a result of construction to ensure accessibility
- Maintain and repair, as needed, masonry stone wall along Seaver, Walnut and Sigourney Streets (Action Plan, pp. 212, 332). Contrary to the Action Plan recommendation, the FPC strongly opposes removal of granite blocks and bollards, except when necessary for improvements at specific locations, as they represent historic additions to the park edge that served (and still do) to improve security and prevent motor vehicle access.
- Control invasive vegetation along entrance paths (pp. 212-13).
- Add (and empty) new trash barrels around the park
- Consult community if building new paved paths around the park
- Take responsibility and pay to mitigate all damage to surrounding parkland resulting from construction, the physical facility, or use of the Stadium, including damage to the Playstead and other surrounding lawn areas and native growth that may suffer from the large increase in use.
- Mitigate / maintain the cross-country paths that create piles of gravel and debris along pathways and create accessibility problems for pedestrians and bicyclists.

Woodlands Restoration (as directed by the City's Urban Forestry Division of the Parks and Recreation Department)

- Care for the woodlands from the Robeson St. entrance on Sigourney east along Walnut Ave. to Seaver Street entrance at corner with Walnut and along Seaver St. to Bear Dens entrance at Parkview St.
- In these woodlands, implement long term invasives control and removal program (Action Plan, pp. 350, 354-55).
- Preserve and care for legacy trees (Action Plan, pp. 352, 364-67) and prevent removal of legacy trees as part of building the stadium.
- Reduce overgrown understory and porosity and views per the Franklin Park Action Plan (pp. 194, 198, 206-207, 350).
- Preserve new trees planted in recent years by the Emerald Necklace Conservancy on the west side of the Stadium.
- Preserve fallen tree sculpture in woods across from west side entrance to Stadium, created by neighborhood children during COVID lockdown years.
- Plant new trees to integrate stadium project (including Grove) into surrounding parkland, and use the existing ecological palette of the Park as a guide.

Supplement Capital Projects

- Contribute funds, as may be needed, to City's "make-safe" project at Bear Dens (Action Plan, pp. 306-308). Current City budget allocation is unlikely to suffice to restore all masonry and to improve park entrance from Seaver St. at intersection with Park View St. per Action Plan (pp. 198-99, 216).
- Contribute funds, as may be needed, to implement design and restoration of Overlook (Action Plan, pp. 302-03).
- Contribute funds, as may be needed, to implement improvements to the Playstead including improved drainage and paths, in consultation with Parks and community.
- Correct drainage problems to prevent standing water at the main entrance to Stadium at top of School St. intersection with Walnut Ave (Action Plan, p. 345) and at the boom gate on the West side of the stadium which is often a very muddy area.
- Fix / repave broken sidewalks and roads surrounding the stadium.

STADIUM DESIGN

- Install dark-sky compliant lighting and minimize, to maximum extent feasible, light spillage into surrounding woodlands and neighborhoods (Action Plan, p. 268).
- Preserve, to maximum extent feasible, existing large trees adjacent to Stadium.
- Design sound system to minimize noise impact outside of the stadium.

Thank you for considering our concerns, all of which come from our community of park users, stakeholders, and neighbors.

Franklin Park Coalition

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