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## Sports venues pay for district

In a rare setup, the teams pay \$1 million yearly, the sole support of the Sports Complex Special Services District.

By Murray Dubin  
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This month, a \$28,000 project - new fences, dugouts, clubhouse roof, sprinklers and baseball equipment - will be completed on an athletic field just a long home run away from Citizens Bank Park.

If you look closely inside the field at 18th and Bigler Streets, one side wall has a what is that? logo resembling a house with an orange slice inside.

You'll be seeing more of that logo in South Philadelphia, as the **Sports Complex Special Services District (SCSSD)** spends the \$1 million that it receives annually from the Phillies, Eagles, Flyers and 76ers.

In addition to being the only sports services district in town, the SCSSD is also the only such district in the nation financed entirely by sports venues.

That logo, by the way, is supposed to depict the stadiums and the homes of the district. Design choices aside, the district, representing 4,200 households near the stadium complex, began its life contentiously. It was born as part of the \$1 billion city-state-sports teams agreement in 2001 to fund new football and baseball stadiums. Its choice of Shawn Jalosinski, a former city streets engineer without South Philadelphia ties, as executive director 17 months ago added even more conflict.

But people who were at each other's throats last year seem to have made peace today. Interviews with each of the district's seven voting members found not a harsh word. Praise, not potshots, is the order of the day. For now, the good times may have begun.

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Back in the mid-1990s, when the Phillies and the Eagles both made noises about wanting new stadiums, Barbara Capozzi knew that South Philadelphia was going to get hit with another ton of bricks.

Capozzi, who heads the Packer Park Civic Association and District 2 of the SCSSD, said it was clear then that neighbors had to fight to make a community services district part of any city deal for stadiums.

"We weren't going to support one more stadium unless we got some protection," she said. She credits Mayor Street for making the special services district part of the city's negotiations with the Phillies and the Eagles.

In fact, the city paid the first - and its only - \$1 million to the district in 2002. Beginning in 2003 and this year, and for the next 30 years, the Eagles and Phillies each pay \$375,000 annually, and Comcast-Spectacor, which owns the Flyers and the Sixers, pays \$250,000 a year.

The district has seven voting members - one representative each from the Phillies, Eagles and Comcast-Spectacor, and one each elected from the four community districts near the stadiums. The community representatives are not paid.

SCSSD meetings began in the spring of 2002.

"Those meetings were horrible at the beginning," said State Rep. William F. Keller, an ex-officio board member.

"I do think they are going smoother now," said Phillies representative Michael Stiles, the team's vice president of operations and administration.

Those meetings, according to participants, saw community members acting more like rivals than partners. And everyone was frustrated at the slow pace of starting a nonprofit without a staff. There was more talk about liability than litter.

"I try and not get involved, but, yes, there was a whole slew of politics," said Fran Dougherty, special assistant to the city managing director. "There were those who didn't want Shawn." John Sfrisi, representing District 3, was against the choice. "I was not sure he knew the neighborhoods. Yes, there was trouble early because the districts didn't trust one another." Today, Jalosinski, 31, a Roxborough resident, receives nothing but praise. Sfrisi said "he's learned a lot," and credits him with "standing for all of us" with city agencies.

Ted Scairato, the District 4 representative who also was against Jalosinski's selection, said he was "doing very well in a thankless job. He works nights, mornings. He gets hit from the Phillies and Eagles and from me, too."

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Jalosinski uses his car as an office, his cell phone as a secretary. It's been a tough first year. "We're going now from being reactive to being proactive," Jalosinski said - executive director-speak for the implosion is over and now we can do some of our own stuff.

He took over about a year before the March 24 implosion of Veterans Stadium. He hired lawyers to go over the insurance provisions of the implosion plans and soil experts to double-check what the teams were saying about its likely impact. He held the hands of nervous neighbors and pushed the Phillies to make carefully drawn safety plans even safer.

Now, he and the district can look ahead. Already, the district has worked with PennDot to make a design change to a traffic ramp in the community; spent \$25,000 on maintenance of landscaping for a traffic-calming project on Hartranft Street; hired a design firm to create a district logo, Web site and newsletter; created and distributed a monthly sports-venue events calendar for the residents; and worked with the teams, city police and traffic and parking offices to minimize congestion. Jalosinski estimated that the district had spent 30 percent of its funds so far.

"It's easy to spend money real quick," he said. "We're trying to be efficient over the long term." So while the district last month paid for a one-time pilot street- and sidewalk-cleaning program, it's also working hard to complete a five-year plan.

Not all four components of the SCSSD want to spend money the same way - one wants fencing on an athletic field while another wants its five common driveways repaved.

These are not the concerns of most special services districts.

Such districts are begun by "private sector property owners, typically, to fund and enhance the level of services," said Paul Steinke, founding executive director of the University City Special Services District and now the Reading Terminal's general manager. "To my knowledge, the stadium area is the first where government, not the private sector, took the initiative."

Dave Feehan, head of the International Downtown Association, an advocacy organization of business improvement districts, said he knows of no other special services district funded by sports teams.

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Judy Cerrone, District 1 representative, said some neighbors still wonder what the SCSSD is doing with that million dollars.

"People don't know we're getting bids from contractors. I tell them to have patience, that I know you can't see it, but things are happening.

"So much red tape. Need a permit for this, a lawyer for that. It's a lot of stuff people don't think about."

Said District 2's Capozzi: "I'm in business and I know these things take time. But no money has been wasted, and I'm proud of that."

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