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## Getting in the games

City officials met with the U.S. Olympic Committee to discuss if Philly - and, possibly, the stadium district - has what it takes to host the 2016 Summer Games.

By [Lorraine Gennaro](#)

May 11, 2006



Two hours. That's how long city officials spent with the U.S. Olympic Committee May 9, when it came to gauge Philadelphia's potential to host the 2016 Summer Games.

"Essentially, it's an opportunity for the U.S. Olympic Committee to come to Philadelphia, meet with the mayor and members of the community - business, government, private, nonprofit - to talk about what they would be looking for and what is expected of a host city," Ted Qualli, director of communications for the mayor's office, said.

Along with Philly, Houston, Chicago, Los Angeles and San Francisco also are in the running, with each allotted two hours with the USOC.

After the meeting, Mayor John Street held a press conference at Love Park.

Street called the meeting "refreshing," before quickly turning things over to USOC Chairman Peter V. Ueberroth who said, "This is a city on the move in the right direction and you have a lot to be proud about."

The chairman also said he wanted to make it clear the bidding is an international process and the USOC, after visiting all five U.S. sites, may decide not to offer a bid to the International Olympic Committee to have the Summer Games held in this country. The USOC will reach a decision later this year. If it chooses to submit a bid, the deadline is March 2007.

In a statement issued to the press earlier this month, the mayor said the stadiums "would serve as the foundation for hosting the Games."

Should the city win the bid and the stadiums are the chosen location, South Philadelphians will have front-row seats.

Based in Colorado Springs, Colo., USOC Chief of Communications Darryl Siebel did not return repeated calls by press time.

First District Councilman Frank DiCicco said it's an honor for Philadelphians that the city is one of the five contenders.

"I think it's exciting that we're even being considered on the world stage. This is not a local media event. This is something that millions and millions of people all around the globe see," DiCicco said.

**BARBARA CAPOZZI, PRESIDENT** of the Packer Park Civic Association, isn't surprised the USOC is eyeing Philadelphia. After all, what other city boasts four side-by-side stadiums that can accommodate roughly 150,000 people?, the South Philly native posed.

According to Capozzi, if Philly did host the Games, "USOC would throw millions at the city" for capital and beautification improvements, many of which could benefit South Philly directly if the games take place at the stadiums.

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"The upside is there are infrastructure and capital improvements that neither the state, city or federal government has the money for, but should we get the Olympics, that money would materialize for all those improvements," she said.

While Capozzi completely supports the Games being in her backyard, others, like Bill McGehrin of the 2700 block of South Darien Street, which is near the stadiums, are against the idea.

"What are they going to do for the people down here? What are they going to put down here that would beautify our neighborhood, build a boulevard? Parking and traffic are already impossible," McGehrin said.

DiCicco said traffic serves as an excuse every time the city tries to do something on a grand scale.

"I would not dismiss the possibility of this occurring in town just because some people have traffic and congestion concerns. No matter what we do in the city, traffic seems to be the primary concern. We just can't turn our backs [on the Olympics because of traffic]," the councilman said.

Since the Summer Olympics only last slightly more than two weeks, Capozzi thinks residents can put up with a little inconvenience if it means improvements and beautification.

Any new construction or upgrades - to the existing stadiums, for example - would stay behind long after the closing ceremonies.

"They don't tear that stuff down when they leave. All that stuff stays behind. The long-term gain that we would see far outweighs the short-term pain of those two weeks," she said.

But Qualli said it's far too early to talk about funding and capital improvements.

"The reality is it's just too premature to talk about. If and when those items come up, they will be discussed," he said.

One of those "items" would be dormitory housing for the athletes, commonly referred to as the Olympic Village.

Any number of universities in the city would fight to utilize that space after the Games have left town, Capozzi said.

Citing a local newspaper article from last winter, McGehrin said the golf course at FDR Park was mentioned as a proposed site for the Village, which concerns him. McGehrin opposes any project posing a threat to the Fairmount Park Commission's 330-acre green space at Broad Street and Pattison Avenue.

"FDR Park is in bad enough shape," McGehrin said. "The Lakes are the same place the city had no money to fix the tidal gates two years ago - which is now drying up the fishable areas. The city just spent \$6 million for the fountain on [Ben Franklin Parkway] and \$4 million for trees. How much does South Philly have to be dumped on, year after year?" he asked.

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**SINCE 2016 IS** still a decade away, Capozzi feels there is more than sufficient time to perfect plans, should the Games come to the area.



"It's not like they're calling us and saying they want the Olympics here in four days," she said.

But even if Philadelphia was selected, McGehrin said residents would not reap any financial rewards.

"The South Philly people won't see the money, the city would. The everyday working guy in South Philly isn't going to get anything out of this," he said.

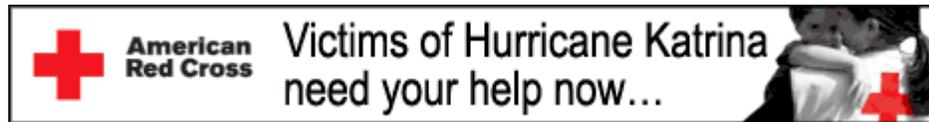
DiCicco maintains the city's bid should not be viewed in terms of what community stands to profit the most. Philadelphia, as a whole, turns up the victor, because the Olympics would improve The City of Brotherly Love's image on a national and international level, he said.

"Philadelphians have been traditionally hard on themselves. We have to get past this thing and recognize that we are a world-class city and nurture that to the fullest extent," the councilman said.

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