

Make way for change

Comcast-Spectacor unveiled the early stages of its plan to develop Philly Live! at the stadium complex, possibly leveling the Wachovia Spectrum for a hotel.

By [Caitlin Meals](#)

January 24, 2008

When Ed Snider envisioned what the Wachovia Center would someday be, he pictured a state-of-the-art arena that would change the way people enjoyed entertainment in Philadelphia. More than a decade later, the chairman of Comcast-Spectacor — the company that owns the center along with the Wachovia Spectrum, the Flyers and the 76ers — is one giant step closer to seeing that dream fulfilled.



Comcast-Spectacor Chairman Ed Snider, left, and developer David Cordish unveiled preliminary plans for what lies ahead at the space between the Wachovia Spectrum and Wachovia Center. (Staff Photo By John Taggart)

From behind a podium at a press briefing Tuesday at the center's Cadillac Grille, Snider unveiled plans — albeit without many specifics — his company is making with Baltimore-based The Cordish Co. to build the 300,000-square-foot retail, dining and entertainment district Philly Live! in the space adjacent to the center, connecting it and the Spectrum. The latter's fate, however, is still undetermined, as part of the proposal may include a 300-room hotel that would take the place of the Spectrum, a long-standing South Philly facility rich in history.

Comcast-Spectacor has been looking to further develop the sports complex area for some time, Snider said. It was just about finding a developer that met their need of creating the ultimate destination place, affording people the year-round use of every potential Comcast-Spectacor has to offer. The Cordish Co., apparently, stepped up to the plate in 2006.

Though its future remains to be seen, Snider's take on the 40-year-old arena nestled near the center, Lincoln Financial Field and Citizens Bank Park was brief, but heartfelt.

"Let me be clear about one thing, I'm very, very proud of the Spectrum. It's my baby. In its heyday it was called America's showplace. For me to even consider replacing the Spectrum with something new, it would have to be a very, very special opportunity — one that's good for all of us who work and live and come to events here in Philadelphia," he said.

After the briefing, where artists' renditions of Philly Live! were shown to the 50 or so present, Snider said if plans, which are still in the early stages, necessitate the Spectrum being leveled, it will be bittersweet.

"If it comes down, I ain't gonna be here. I'm not gonna watch it because it is my baby. I've had all kinds of fans write me and stop me and say, 'Please don't tear this building down,' and believe me it's not something I'd like to do, but it's something that makes sense."

City Council President Anna Verna — whose 2nd District includes the sports complex — was ecstatic about the proposal.

"Personally, I think it's fabulous," she said by phone prior to the briefing she also attended. "Comcast-Spectacor came in about a month-and-a-half ago and showed me the preliminary plans and emphasized 'preliminary.' They looked absolutely wonderful to me; However, I told [Comcast-Spectacor] I felt it very important they meet with the

community. On Dec. 6, they did meet with leaders of the Stadium District, stressing the fact again that they were preliminary plans, and assured them they would have input if they had any concerns. To my knowledge, [Stadium District leaders] were very, very impressed."

Shawn Jalosinski, executive director of the Sports Complex Special Services District (SCSSD) — a nonprofit funded by the Sports Venue operators with a mission to protect community interests, improve quality of life and promote efficient operation of the venues — was at the press conference, and said SCSSD directors remain open-minded.

"This expansion project is exciting on many levels, but SCSSD has a responsibility to make sure that neighbors are protected from any negative impacts and hopefully we will all continue to work together effectively to make sure this is the case," the Roxborough resident said in an e-mail after the briefing. "Traffic congestion, parking availability, construction impacts, security and event scheduling will all be important details to discuss as specific development decisions are considered and made."

Although nothing is official — except that development plans are under way — Cordish Chairman David Cordish, along with Comcast-Spectacor President/Chief Operating Officer Peter Luukko, both said Philly Live! — whose construction and daily operations could bring thousands of jobs to the area — will be very beneficial to the surrounding community.



"It reminds us all of where South Philly has evolved. It's incredible for those of us who've been down here for so many years. If you look back just a decade ago, it was just the Spectrum," Luukko said, adding the center, the Eagles' NovaCare Complex and Citizens Bank Park to the list of recent developments.

"But what's really neat I think is it's going to be part of the community and that's very important. So really I think as South Philly evolves, I think we're evolving right along with it.

"The ultimate for any of us in the sports and entertainment business ... is you want to create a situation where people say, 'Hey, what's going on down at the complex?' and they might just want to come down and hang out. This is an amenity that we don't have right now and it's an amenity as South Philly grows."

As the third generation to take the reins of the family-run business, Cordish's company has experience building similar developments in Baltimore, Atlantic City, N.J., Houston, Texas, and Tampa, Fla. The chairman could not nail down a specific cost for the Philly version, only that the price tag was "a lot" and it would be a multimillion-dollar project.

One other thing he was sure of: "There's not going to be a traffic problem."

Luukko echoed, "We'll have our event traffic, so that won't change. Then on the off-nights when other people come, we're so used to dealing with a high volume of traffic that I don't see us ever having close to bad volume. We're going to deal with it and meet with it. We'll do a traffic analysis. We're not just going to put it off to the side."

And if the fate of the Spectrum is similar to long-gone Veterans Stadium, Comcast-Spectacor will take appropriate measures to accommodate minor league sports teams the Philadelphia Phantoms and the Kixx, who call the space home, as well as the entertainment acts that come through, mainly by moving them to the center, although Luukko reiterated nothing has been set in stone.

"We purposely have left no timetable," he said of the Spectrum. "We put no deadline on it. If something like a hotel makes sense, great. If it doesn't, we love the Spectrum, we'll keep the Spectrum for another 40 years."

Luukko said it will most likely be at least a year until ground-breaking, pending meetings with city and local officials. From there, he was unsure of the timeline.

"The retail and restaurants could be Phase One. Phase Two could be a hotel 10 years from now. We're going to do what makes sense," he said. "We wanted to announce the concept, then we get to talk to people and make it official that we're doing this."
