

Stamp of approval

by Amanda Snyder

Community groups surrounding the stadium complex have concerns about Philly Live! and its impact and hope to air their issues at a meeting next month with the developer.

Not everyone is ecstatic about the new neighbor expected to come in after the Spectrum moves out.

"It is understood that Comcast-Spectacor reserves certain development rights and I think the SCSSD community directors remain open-minded, but are very concerned and committed to representing neighborhood interests as the process moves forward," Shawn Jalosinski, executive director of the Sports Complex Special Services District, said via e-mail Tuesday.

The "process" is the creation of Philly Live!, a retail/dining/entertainment district slated to replace the fabled arena, and link the stadiums in the complex. Some residents, Jalosinski added, were under the impression discussions about Philly Live! were complete after reading the July 30 Review's "Complex Makeover." The process, though, is far from over.

As with the creation of Citizens Bank Park and Lincoln Financial Field in 2003, the district, which serves neighborhoods south of Oregon Avenue to I-95 from Seventh Street to 20th and strives to maintain quality of life for neighborhoods surrounding the arenas, tackles issues of security, traffic and parking. With the pending development, the impact of demolishing the 40-something Spectrum and building Philly Live! have been added to the mix, Jalosinski said.

The City Planning Commission will consider all of the above factors when it comes time to vote on the plan and will make sure residents were consulted for the final design, which Bill Kramer, city planner and director of development planning, suspects could be voted on as early as Sept. 15 by the commission, although there may be some zoning requirements that need to pass through City Council first.

"What we're looking at is, as a planning commission, we're trying to get the best plan as we can get and that benefits the community and the city as a whole," Kramer said. "If it's going to work, it's not going to have a large negative impact on the community."

John Nacchio Jr., of the 3200 block of Sydenham Street, does not think what could be coming is an enhancement at all.



"I think South Philadelphia, with the three stadiums, was enough and something like that would be more appropriate somewhere else," he said of Philly Live! "Not that it shouldn't be in Philadelphia, but [the sports complex] might not be the right place for it."

The Cordish Co., developer behind the project, estimates Philly Live!, a 350,000-square-foot development that would span from where the Spectrum now sits to adjacent lots G and H, would cost about \$100 million and would break ground early next year. The project will take 12 to 18 months to complete plus six more for the building of a 300-room hotel.

A meeting scheduled for Aug. 4 with Cordish and the district's board of directors — Jalosinski; four community directors Barbara Capozzi, Judy Cerrone, John Sfrisi and Ted Scairato; the sports teams' representatives: COO for Global Spectrum John Page, Senior Vice President of Administration and Operations for the Phillies Mike Stiles and Senior Vice President/CFO for the Eagles Don Smolenski; and City officials — to address the latest plans was rescheduled for the first week of September to ensure all parties were available, Jalosinski said.

Following the meeting, future outreach could include newsletters, automated calls or public meetings through civic associations such as Packer Park, South Philadelphia Communities, Broad Street West, Stadium Community Council Inc. and Veterans Stadium Neighbors, but will be up to the four community directors, who were elected by the residents.

The meeting is extremely important, as the planning commission presentation July 21 was for informational purposes only and did not directly assess neighborhood impact, Jalosinski said. While a district representative regularly attends Comcast-Spectacor's quarterly meetings, where Philly Live! updates are reported, the last session with Cordish and district directors was December 2007, prior to the public announcement of Philly Live! No updates were available until recently when Cordish attended the planning commission meeting July 21, he said.

Although the final application has not yet been received, what was presented to the Planning Commission last month mostly involved "fine-tuning" the concept and the process will move along once it is formally submitted, Kramer said.

"No one was saying a whole lot to anyone because they didn't want to move on this until they were ready, to be perfectly honest," the city planner said of the July public meeting where Cordish Vice President Gary Block presented the designs.

The commission will inquire about the September meeting, as well as any others, regarding community input and take the feedback into consideration, Kramer said.

"We have told them they do have to certainly run it up the flag pole with the community," he said of Cordish.

Block did not return calls prior to press time.

The community is interested in having retail at the site, such as bookstores, but are concerned about bars coming into play. Residents also are curious as to what the development will offer that will be kid- and family-friendly, Jalosinski said.

"At the upcoming meeting [in September], SCSSD hopes to get project details to put appropriate perspective on how this development might impact the neighborhoods and to determine what specific questions and concerns need to be addressed," Jalosinski said.

The district directors declined to comment until after the September session.

The project should offer amenities not available in South Philly to avoid hindering local businesses, Nacchio said.

"It'll challenge all the family shops and the bars and restaurants that have been the namesake of South Philly for a long time," the resident said. "You'd be giving up character for something else."

Similar developments from Cordish have popped up in other cities: Power Plant Live! offers entertainment and office space across two blocks in downtown Baltimore; Fourth Street Live! provides two blocks of entertainment and retail spanning two blocks in downtown Louisville, Ky.; and KC Live! is a block of entertainment inside KC Power and Light District over eight blocks in Kansas City, Mo. All have attracted millions of visitors since their debuts, according to Cordish's Web site.

"My most sincere hope is that this development becomes a great community asset providing uses not otherwise available nearby, but there are many details that still need to be shared and discussed at the upcoming meeting with SCSSD community directors to gain appropriate perspective on Cordish's latest plans and ensure neighborhood quality of life is protected and hopefully enhanced," Jalosinski said.

Nacchio fears Philly Live! will serve people from outside the community more than those that live close by.

"Everyone talks about it being a vast wilderness along Pattison," he said. "Maybe that's appropriate for stadiums."