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APABA-PA Statement Demanding Transparency and Meaningful Community Engagement in Sports Arena Plans Impacting Philadelphia Chinatown

The Asian Pacific American Bar Association of Pennsylvania (APABA-PA) opposes any plan or proposal for the development of a sports arena impacting Philadelphia's Chinatown neighborhood which fails to directly and meaningfully engage the Chinatown community. APABA-PA supports justice, equity, and legal access, especially for all Asian Pacific American communities. APABA-PA calls for process transparency and meaningful dialogue with community members before moving forward with any development plans.

APABA-PA emphasizes that Chinatowns are not only vibrant places to gather, but are irreplaceable and irreplicable embodiments of Philadelphian and American values of pride, cultural legacy, and entrepreneurship. Philadelphia's Chinatown community has vigilantly fought to preserve itself against erasure over the past decades. We salute the resilience and perseverance of Philadelphia's Chinatown as Chinatowns around the country continue to be diminished, along with everything they stand for.¹

APABA-PA supports growth and enrichment throughout the Commonwealth we serve. However, we see students, families, visitors, Chinatown residents, and business owners opposing the development of the proposed arena in a unified voice.² A March 2023 study by the Philadelphia Chinatown Development Corporation found that 93% of business owners, 94% of residents, and 95% of visitors oppose the proposed arena,³ while over 15,000 petitioners have opposed the development as proposed.⁴ Developers promised to include stakeholders and consider feedback, yet the current process continues to deny a meaningful platform and has been characterized by secrecy,⁵ lack of transparency,⁶ and apparent bias.⁷ A fair and just process must be open, build trust, include language access that encourages dialogue, and truly give the community a voice in the future of its own neighborhood.

APABA-PA stands with the united voice of Philadelphia Chinatown. We, therefore, urge not only Philadelphians but all citizens who value the inhabitants and contributions of our nation's Chinatowns to demand transparency and meaningful engagement with all parties involved, especially those who would be directly impacted in the geographic vicinity of the proposed arena.⁸

¹ “Discover America's 11 Most Endangered Historic Places for 2023.” NATIONAL TRUST FOR HISTORIC PRESERVATION. May 9, 2023. Available online: <https://savingplaces.org/stories/11-most-endangered-historic-places-2023>.

² Gammage, Jeff and Massarah Mikati. “Major Chinatown business and community group announces its opposition to planned Sixers arena.” PHILADELPHIA INQUIRER. March 16, 2023. Available online: <https://www.inquirer.com/news/sixers-arena-chinatown-pcdc-opposition-20230316.html>; DiStefano, Joseph N. “Chinatown groups unite to protect the neighborhood as Sixers plan a new arena.” PHILADELPHIA INQUIRER. December 1, 2022. Available online: <https://www.inquirer.com/business/sixers-arena-development-chinatown-philadelphia-tsao-20221201.html>.

³ Moselle, Aaron. “Influential Chinatown group says a new Sixers arena would ‘imperil’ the neighborhood.” PHILADELPHIA INQUIRER. March 16, 2023. Available online: <https://why.org/articles/chinatown-development-corporation-sixers-arena-opposition/>.

⁴ Mikati, Massarah. “More than 15,000 petition signatures opposing the Sixers arena are delivered to City Hall.” PHILADELPHIA INQUIRER. April 27, 2023.. Available online: <https://www.inquirer.com/news/save-chinatown-petition-signatures-council-against-sixers-arena-20230427.html>.

⁵ Walsh, Sean. “How an under-the-radar parking garage bill sparked the first City Hall dust-up over the 76ers’ arena proposal.” PHILADELPHIA INQUIRER. December 27, 2022. Available online: <https://www.inquirer.com/politics/philadelphia/sixers-stadium-center-city-chinatown-mayor-jim-kenney-mark-squilla-20221207.html>.

⁶ Levy, Jordan. “‘Hands off Chinatown!’ Hundreds question Sixers’ commitment to community engagement at raucous meeting on arena proposal.” BILLY PENN. December 14, 2022. Available online: <https://billypenn.com/2022/12/14/chinatown-sixers-arena-community-meeting-pushback/>.

⁷ Gammage, Jeff. “Group calls Sixers plans for new arena ‘inconsistent’ with international human-rights law.” PHILADELPHIA INQUIRER. September 7, 2023. Deleted from source, but not retracted. Available online: <https://linktr.ee/spocphilly>; Gammage, Jeff and Jake Blumgart. “Sixers will pay for Philadelphia’s impact studies of the team’s plan for a downtown arena.” PHILADELPHIA INQUIRER. July 19, 2023. Available online: <https://www.inquirer.com/real-estate/commercial/sixers-new-arena-downtown-philadelphia-study-20230719.html>.

⁸ Information about volunteer opportunities available at [Restaurant Industry for Chinatown’s Existence \(RICE\)](#), the Chinatown Coalition to Oppose the Arena, Save Chinatown, No Arena in Chinatown Solidarity, and Students for the Preservation of Chinatown, which includes students at the University of Pennsylvania and Bryn Mawr College.