

## **Franklin Park - White Stadium Frequently Asked Questions**

### **What is being proposed for the renovation and expansion of White Stadium and the land around it in Franklin Park?**

Boston Unity Soccer Partners LLC, a for-profit private company, recently unveiled a proposal for the redevelopment and privatization of White Stadium in Boston's historic Franklin Park in partnership with the City of Boston. Their proposal includes the use of the stadium as a 10,000-seat professional soccer venue. The proposal has alarmed many community leaders and members of the public, both around Franklin Park and citywide.

The proposal would grant the rights to a 30-year lease to a professional for-profit sports team; build dedicated private facilities and other uses like offices, luxury boxes, restaurants and shops; and displace Boston Public School (BPS) students and the general public from the stadium and effectively much of the rest of the park for 20 games and 20 practices on the majority of Fridays and Saturdays from March-November. The proposal would displace BPS football teams from the stadium for their entire regular season and limit the availability of one of the most-used free public areas of Franklin Park for music and cultural festivals, basketball and tennis games, and cross country running meets.

### **What are the primary concerns with the project?**

Members of the community around Franklin Park are deeply concerned about:

- the unconstitutional privatization of public land;
- the displacement of BPS student-athletes and the local community from White Stadium and Franklin Park;
- the absence of a realistic transportation plan for 20 annual game days that will draw more than 10,000 attendees to the stadium; and
- the lack of adequate community input throughout an incredibly fast-moving redevelopment process.

### **Why is this project concerning?**

The City of Boston, as part of this plan, would lease half of White Stadium and several acres of surrounding public park land to the professional soccer team year-round, and lease the entire stadium and surrounding area to the team on game days. This privatization plan could last for the next 30 years. This unconstitutional land grab is in violation of the Public Lands Protection Act, Article 97 of the Massachusetts Constitution. That requires this type of proposal to be reviewed and approved in a process that protects public lands. Not following those protections would have far-reaching implications for public lands across the Commonwealth.

Franklin Park is a Constitutionally-protected public open space. White Stadium is owned by the George Robert White Fund, a permanent public charitable trust, which means it is held in trust for the public benefit of the people of Boston.

This project is being rushed through an accelerated approval process without consideration for what's legal, what's practical or what the communities around Franklin Park support. Hundreds of members of the community spent years developing the thoughtful, award-winning Franklin Park Action Plan, which never considered handing White Stadium over to a private developer and displacing the community. This proposal is directly in conflict with many of the improvements envisioned in the Franklin Park Action Plan.

## **Did the plaintiffs and the Emerald Necklace Conservancy try any other avenues before making a formal legal complaint?**

On numerous occasions representatives of the Conservancy staff, Board of Directors, Park Advisors and other community leaders raised specific concerns during in-person meetings with the Mayor and other City representatives. We spoke out at public hearings and submitted several detailed public comment letters outlining our specific concerns. Those letters are posted on our [Franklin Park's White Stadium Advocacy webpage](#).

## **Why did the group move forward with the legal complaint?**

Despite plaintiffs' and many others' major concerns about the project, the project continues to be fast-tracked. The City of Boston sought and received bids for a \$46 million contract to demolish half of White Stadium and the existing athletic field and track. The demolition may take place as soon as this spring.

## **Who is part of the group and what do they want to achieve?**

Twenty individual citizen plaintiffs (an increase from fifteen when we originally filed on February 20<sup>th</sup>) and the Emerald Necklace Conservancy are challenging the proposed redevelopment and privatization of White Stadium and 3 acres of surrounding public parkland. These spaces, especially the Playstead, are used by the environmental justice communities of Roxbury, Dorchester, Mattapan and Jamaica Plain.

The group supports the renovation of White Stadium in Franklin Park to improve access for BPS student-athletes and the local community. But we oppose turning control of the stadium over to a professional sports team at the expense of BPS students and the local community and allowing for-profit investors to privatize and profit from a public resource in violation of the state's Constitution. The Mayor's office has identified \$50 million in taxpayer funds for the improvement of the stadium, and we agree these funds are well spent renovating the current facilities, in line with the approved Franklin Park Action Plan.

## **Why does the City of Boston say that this proposal will increase Boston Public School usage of Franklin Park's White Stadium?**

Renovating White Stadium in any capacity will improve the stadium and increase its usability. It is in incredibly poor shape and has needed renovations for decades. A renovated stadium means a safer stadium. A safer stadium means better lighting, proper drainage systems, cleaner and usable facilities and so much more. A renovated White Stadium could be accessible to the public for more hours per day and more days per week.

However, we do not need a private entity to help repair a dilapidated stadium for Boston Public School athletics and the community. We strongly believe that White Stadium should be updated and renovated for the community surrounding Franklin Park and for ALL Boston Public School student athletes, not for the benefit of a for-profit professional soccer team.

## **Isn't the soccer team only going to use the stadium for a small portion of days during the year?**

As outlined in Boston Unity Partners LCC's Project Notification Form released on December 18, 2023, there will be 20 game days and 20 practices from March to November when the team will be using the stadium.

Importantly, this is during the warmest months of the year and on the busiest days when individuals and families use Franklin Park – **the precious few fair-weather Saturdays in spring, summer and fall**. Please scroll to the sample calendar at the end of this document for a visualization.

### **Has the Conservancy offered to help raise funds for a fully public restoration of White Stadium?**

Yes. Contrary to comments made in the media, the Emerald Necklace Conservancy has offered to partner with the City and others to support improvements to the Park and the Stadium.

### **Didn't the Franklin Park Coalition's survey say that the majority of respondents support an improved White Stadium?**

Yes, the results from the Franklin Park Coalition's survey show the public wants an improved White Stadium, which is understood by all has been for years, and the Franklin Park Action Plan. Unfortunately, the way the survey was drafted did not explain what the current proposal is, so the questions only indicate the feeling the people who responded have about improvements to the stadium in general.

Despite this overwhelming need, it only showed that 31% of respondent were in full support of the current project, 24% were "cautiously supportive", 25% "have some concerns" and 20% were "against it".

In the qualitative responses to the Franklin Park Coalition's White Stadium survey, dozens of concerns were raised by community members, many of which have been raised in public meetings but have yet to be addressed by the current proposal. In fact, it is clear from the survey that this project has many areas for improvement and a lot of people are very concerned or opposed.

### **Has Boston Unity Soccer Partners committed to giving \$500,000 annually to the communities surrounding Franklin Park?**

Yes, investors from BUSP have said that this is their intent. On April 10, they affirmed that they have "committed to a \$500,000 annual fund to be distributed to local organizations and initiatives dedicated to four pillars: Investments in Franklin Park and the Franklin Park Action Plan, youth sports and development, health and wellness of Black and Brown communities, and local business development. [They] invite neighborhood representatives to be part of an Advisory Committee that will make recommendations on the organizations and initiatives the fund will support."

### **What are members of the Franklin Park community saying about this project?**

*"Franklin Park, as it was originally designed by Fredrick Law Olmsted over a century ago, is for the people who live here. It's not for any private group to profit from; it's for the public's free use. All of us in Boston and the suburbs who use the park want it left pristine. We want it left the way we designed it — for the people."*  
— plaintiff Dr. Jean McGuire of Roxbury, former executive director of The Metropolitan Council for Educational Opportunity (METCO) and community leader who lives four blocks from Franklin Park

*"I grew up in Franklin Park; it's where I learned to ride a bike, and attended festivals for the Caribbean community. I'm fearful that the things I love about the park will go away if White Stadium is sold off to the highest bidder. This just isn't the right place for a professional sports stadium. There's no realistic plan for handling more than 10,000 visitors who will create a traffic nightmare throughout all of the neighborhoods around Franklin Park, including on the single-lane roads around the park. I'm concerned that the resulting traffic gridlock will hurt home values, harming the generational wealth of Black and Brown people who live around Franklin Park."*  
— plaintiff Renee Welch, an Egleston Square resident

"Hundreds of members of the community spent years developing the Franklin Park Action Plan, which never considered handing White Stadium over to a private developer and displacing the community. But under this proposal, the Roxbury, Dorchester, Jamaica Plain, and Mattapan community will be unable to access the most-used public portion of Franklin Park during most weekends from April through October. And while the taxpayers of Boston provide the majority of the funding for the project, the community's needs would take a back seat to a professional sports team schedule. This private project is being rushed through an accelerated approval process without any consideration for what's legal, what's practical or what the communities around Franklin Park support. We're bringing this lawsuit because something wrong is happening." — plaintiff Melissa Hamel, a Jamaica Plain resident

"I'm a BPS parent with multiple kids, and I would love to see a women's professional soccer team in Boston, but it doesn't belong in a public park. A sports team, a money-making enterprise does not belong in public space. In a perfect world, we would put that \$50 million [in taxpayer money identified by the City of Boston] and whatever extra money we needed to rehab White Stadium fully." — plaintiff Carla-Lisa Caliga, Jamaica Plain resident

**Where can I learn more?**

Learn more at [www.emeraldnecklace.org/white-stadium/](http://www.emeraldnecklace.org/white-stadium/)

