

FRANKLIN PARK **DEFENDERS**

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Judge Rules that State’s Public Land Protection Laws Do Not Apply to White Stadium Pro Soccer Project in Franklin Park; Franklin Park Defenders Respond

BOSTON — A Superior Court judge today ruled that the public parkland protections of the Massachusetts State Constitution do not apply to the proposed new, for-profit professional sports stadium and entertainment complex at White Stadium in Boston’s Franklin Park.

Plaintiffs in the citizens’ lawsuit against the City of Boston and Boston Unity Soccer Partners responded:

“We’re disappointed by the trial’s outcome, but we’re not surprised. Our community is used to seeing laws meant to protect the public get trampled when the rich and powerful see an opportunity to make money,” said **Dr. Jean McGuire, a Roxbury resident and plaintiff in the case**. “Despite this outcome, we still believe that our community deserves an alternative to an oversized, for-profit sports and entertainment complex in Franklin Park. Losing 145 trees, two acres of green space, two tennis courts, and full use of the field for several months each year is not the price our Boston Public School students should have to pay for working plumbing and high-quality athletic facilities. Leasing a new and bigger White Stadium to wealthy private sports investors is not the right plan for our kids or for Franklin Park. This is our park; the public’s park. We pay for it with our taxes, and have forever. Our kids should not have to ask permission to play in a public park.”

“The fight to protect Franklin Park is not over. The project’s full construction cost will not be clear until at least July, when construction bids are due, and we hope there is a limit to how much the city is willing to spend to prop up Boston Unity’s private investors,” said **Melissa Hamel, a Jamaica Plain resident and plaintiff in the case**. “A more reasonable, less expensive, and fully public renovation of the existing White Stadium, which could deliver high-quality facilities for BPS students without the many flaws of the new private soccer stadium, is still an option worth pursuing. It’s a shame that this project has divided our community so deeply, but there’s still a chance to unite around a community-led vision of a truly public White Stadium.”

“As we evaluate our next steps, we have a message for Boston Unity’s investors: you still have the chance to do the right thing,” said **Renee Stacey Welch, a Egleston Square resident and plaintiff in the case.** “You don’t have to bulldoze over our park, rip down our trees, and trample over our community’s concerns. You don’t have to kick BPS football teams out of the stadium where they’ve played for the last 75 years. You don’t have to bus in thousands of spectators who will take over Franklin Park on dozens of warm-weather weekends, displacing the people who have used this park for decades. There is still time for a better solution: find a different place to make your money, and let us rebuild White Stadium as a truly-public facility.”

“The Emerald Necklace Conservancy is proud to stand with civil rights leaders and community members from the neighborhoods surrounding Franklin Park in the face of the environmental injustices that are taking place in our beloved Emerald Necklace, and to our communities,” said **Emerald Necklace Conservancy President Karen Mauney-Brodek.** “We’re deeply disappointed by the judge’s decision regarding the applicability of constitutional public land protections to Franklin Park and the land of the George Robert White public trust, and we plan to assess our legal options. This proposal for Franklin Park is the biggest change to public land in Boston and the Emerald Necklace in at least half a century. Proposals for public land with such an impact on the public require a true and fair public process, including consideration of alternatives and a robust review under the Massachusetts Environmental Protection Act. This park, and our communities, have been denied that right.

“Our advocacy for Franklin Park and the community is about supporting our kids and the park with a truly public stadium. The communities around the park should be central to decision making for our parks, not asked their opinion after decisions are already made,” **Mauney-Brodek** continued. “We are proud to stand with community leaders who are not being heard. It’s our organization’s mission to work with all to protect and support Franklin Park and the rest of the Emerald Necklace for today and the future.”

Background on White Stadium Lawsuit

The lawsuit, which was originally filed in February 2024 by 20 citizen plaintiffs and the Emerald Necklace Conservancy, concerns the proposal by the City of Boston and a private group of sports investors, Boston Unity Soccer Partners (BUSP), to demolish 95% of the existing White Stadium and build a new, significantly larger for-profit professional sports stadium, entertainment venue, and multiple restaurants and retail shops in its place. This plan eliminates two tennis courts and removes 145 trees and two acres of green space around the current stadium footprint.

The new stadium complex, which would be significantly larger than the existing high school sports stadium, sits within a 14-acre parcel of public open space that is owned by the George Robert White Fund, a permanent public charitable trust for the benefit of the people of Boston.

The lawsuit alleged that the private stadium development proposal violates Article 97 of the Massachusetts Constitution, which requires a vote of the State Legislature in order to change the use of public park and recreation land. No such process has taken place, and the City of Boston and BUSP maintain that the White Stadium project is not subject to Article 97 protections. But for the last 20 years, White Stadium and the land around it was specifically listed as “Article 97 protected” in the City of Boston’s official Open Space and Recreation Plans.

White Stadium Redevelopment Project Status

Recently-revealed documents show that BUSP’s lead investor, Jennifer Epstein, approached city officials about the team leasing White Stadium months before the idea was presented to the public. After BUSP and the city signed a detailed letter of intent codifying the terms of a potential lease agreement, the city issued a public request for proposals (RFP) for the redevelopment of White Stadium and acres of surrounding public open space. That RFP, which included key details, a plan to divide the project into two halves, and other requirements that had already been negotiated with the team’s investors, received only one respondent: BUSP.

Since the project proposal was publicly announced, it’s been met with growing concern from neighbors and park advocates. In February, even after half of the Boston City Council called for an immediate pause to the project, construction crews began demolishing White Stadium and cutting down dozens of mature trees in Franklin Park. The soccer team aims to begin playing games in March 2026.

However, the White Stadium redevelopment project has not been fully put out to bid, and the full cost of construction will not be clear until at least July 15, when construction bids for the City’s share of the project are due. While it was initially described by city and team officials as costing as little as \$30 million, the project’s cost has since ballooned to over \$200 million, with the City and Boston Public Schools responsible for at least \$100 million.

Background on Opposition to the Current Plan

Over the past year, the [Franklin Park Defenders](#) movement has grown to include more than 400 residents, community leaders, and other concerned citizens, as well as 27 neighborhood associations and other organizations representing Boston residents who support a fully-public White Stadium rather than the BUSP proposal. In addition to the legal concerns expressed in the lawsuit, neighboring residents and park advocates have expressed opposition to the project over issues ranging from increased air, noise and light pollution, increased litter, the removal of 145 mature trees, increased traffic and parking restrictions, and decreased student and community access.

Pro soccer games and other private events would displace BPS students and the community from White Stadium and surrounding parts of Franklin Park on 20 annual game days, 20 practice days, and additional concert and event days - more than half of all weekends during the summer, when residents use the park the most. BPS football teams

would be displaced from the stadium entirely during their full regular season, because the soccer league doesn't want their cleats on the field.

The project has not received any Massachusetts Environmental Policy Act (MEPA) environmental review, which is a requirement under Article 97 of the State Constitution, and which would include the consideration of alternatives to the current proposal. Outside of Article 97 applications, analysis has shown that a MEPA review is required due to multiple factors: the project's traffic impacts, the rezoning of the stadium parcel, the land's change in use, the scale of activities and construction, and the project's impact on environmental justice neighborhoods. The Project proponents have claimed that the project is exempt from MEPA review.

Background on the Alternative: a Fully-Public Renovation of White Stadium

Neighbors and parks advocates support an alternative plan to renovate White Stadium as a public high school facility for BPS student-athletes, at a much lower cost to taxpayers and the environment.

The Emerald Necklace Conservancy has proposed such an alternative concept: [a high-quality, fully public renovation of White Stadium](#) that would avoid the many negative impacts of building a professional sports venue in the middle of historic Franklin Park. A detailed cost estimate conducted by Vermeulens, Inc. in January 2025, included in the report, found that Boston could renovate White Stadium as a high-quality, fully public high school stadium for \$28.9 million.

There are numerous examples of high school and even college sports stadiums being built or renovated for similar amounts. Stadium expert Andrew Zimbalist [states](#) that “a brand new high school soccer and football stadium should cost between \$5 million and \$20 million, depending on the specifications.”

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