

DESIGN
ADVOCACY
GROUP

of Philadelphia

6 December 2010

Dan McSweeney
Executive Director
SS United States Conservancy
Box 32115
Washington, DC 20007

Dear Mr. McSweeney:

In response to Mr. Lenfest's generous gift enabling the SS United States Conservancy to purchase and rescue the fastest ocean liner ever built, the Design Advocacy Group wrote in the Philadelphia Inquirer on July 8 ("No Need to Cross an Ocean") that it was now time for Philadelphians to figure out how to keep this extraordinary combination of beauty and technological prowess on the Delaware River. We even suggested that the ship might be used for either a hotel or a casino.

It looks as if the Conservancy has figured out how to do both. Working with architect Stephen Varenhorst, you've created a plan that finally offers a compelling solution to siting a casino in Philadelphia, and the City and its residents should do everything in their power to see that it gets built. Instead of the typical suburban strategy of stand-alone single-use venues with dedicated parking which we've seen to date, this is a smart and exciting mixed use development that is decidedly urban and specifically Philadelphian.

The genius of the plan is that it is organized around an open public space and the beautiful sculptural object of the SS United States. Embodying the principles outlined in the Vision Plan for the Central Delaware, the development proposal extends Philadelphia's street grid, permitting pedestrians to look and walk straight through the site to the water without impediment. Due to the compelling presence of the SS United States – and, just as importantly, its proposed active use – this project fulfills what should be Philadelphia's goal for waterfront planning: focus on the use of both land and water with an emphasis on the water. More than simply a sum of its parts – which include not only the casino and parking, but a hotel, restaurants, entertainment, and half of the ship (300,000 square feet!) left over for future development – this project could become a destination that would demonstrate once and for all the power and viability of the Delaware River Vision Plan and jump start the work of the forthcoming Master Plan.

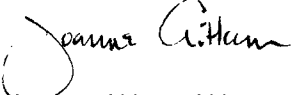
Appealing as it is, it also appears that this proposal is not simply a pipe dream. The design team has done its homework: they have confirmed that they can meet the ship's marine engineering requirements, they have a plan to protect neighbors from traffic congestion, they have consulted with developers, and they have worked with a gaming consultant to design a phased project that would enable any approved license holder to meet its obligations to the Gaming Control Board, stay within their budget, and have expansion space for future phases ready to go.

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If there is to be another casino on the waterfront, this is the proverbial win-win – what's stopping us?

Sincerely,



Joanne Aitken, AIA
Chair
Design Advocacy Group of Philadelphia

The Design Advocacy Group of Philadelphia is a volunteer organization whose nearly 1200 members come from a broad spectrum of disciplines and share an interest in design, development, and planning. DAG's mission is to encourage public discussion about design and to advocate for design excellence. Please visit our website at www.designadvocacy.org.