

Memo

To: Neighbors Allied for the Best Riverfront
From: Joel T. Fry, Professional Archaeologist
B.A., Anthropology, Univ. of Penn.
M.A., American Civ./Historical Archaeology, Univ. of Penn.
Date: December 1, 2007
Re: Archaeology at Proposed Casino Site

The materials on the Phase I archaeological survey of the SugarHouse site are very interesting. There does seem to be potential for significant archaeological remains on the SugarHouse site.

I can provide some general comments on the Phase I studies:

First I would say it is surprising how fast the Phase IB Management Summary Report appeared considering the major field work was only undertaken in October. I'm sure the full report could not have been written yet. It suggests to me they were under pressure to get a report out very rapidly.

As an archaeologist, what is most interesting is that a portion of the original Delaware River bank may be partially preserved beneath all the fill and construction debris on the site. Both reports emphasize "precontact archaeological potential" and this would be evidence of Native American settlement or use of the land, prior to European colonization, prior to say 1600 in the Philadelphia area. There is also potential for "contact" period remains, when Europeans interacted with the Lenape at the presumed village of Shackamaxon, which was centered somewhere around the modern Penn Treaty Park. The initial archaeological survey did not find any clear evidence of precontact remains, but I would say there is still a good likelihood Native American remains are preserved where the SugarHouse site overlies the original riverbank.

This area is largely the southwest corner of the SugarHouse site, along Delaware Ave. from Laurel Street to Ellen Street. The same area has the most potential for interesting historical archaeological remains beginning in the mid-18th c. including, housing, early wharfs, early industrial sites, etc. Where typical 18th and 19th house sites are preserved on the SugarHouse site they are perhaps more valuable cultural resources than similar sites in say Society Hill because so much early housing in the Northern Liberties and Fishtown was destroyed by the construction of I-95.

I would criticize the Phase IA survey report's very brief review of the potential for archaeological remains in the filled area of piers and bulkheads that make up the bulk of the

SugarHouse site. They suggest a small, and perhaps uninteresting potential for historic pier remains, pilings and bulkheads. In reality very little of the 18th and early 19th century waterfront of Philadelphia remains intact and virtually none has seen archaeological investigation. While I-95 was being cut across the front of the Center City ca. 1976, a vast number of interesting artifacts were recovered by contractors from construction excavations into 18th c. wharfs. None of this was recorded by professional archaeologists as there were no applicable Federal preservation laws at the time. The vast destruction of the historic waterfront across Center City again makes the preserved wharf area in Fishtown more significant. The Phase IA report also discounts much potential for shipwrecks or abandoned hulks in the area, which might be true for actual wrecks in the river channel, but ship hulks are known to be found among the fill either between early wharfs or incorporated within the fill as they are extended. Archaeological excavation into these wet filled areas would be considerably more expensive and time-consuming, but not impossible or impracticable. Similar large areas of early filled wharves have been extensively excavated and studied in New York and Boston.