

DESIGN
ADVOCACY
GROUP
of Philadelphia

18 September 2008

Mayor Michael Nutter
City Hall
Philadelphia, PA 19107

RE: Foxwoods Casino

Dear Mayor Nutter:

The Design Advocacy Group (DAG) welcomes the decision by Foxwoods Casino to consider a site at the Gallery. This location offers many important advantages for both the casino and Center City, where the new facility can take its place among nearby hotels, shops, and restaurants, and where excellent public transportation is already in place.

We believe that the success of this project will depend on good process and good design. Any site considered for the casino must go through a thoughtful and open vetting process, and the design must be carefully shaped and rigorously reviewed. To that end, we have invited the developers of the casino to discuss the project at one of DAG's monthly public meetings this fall. The commonsense principles that should shape this project are summarized in DAG's Urban Design Evaluation Guidelines, which were developed by DAG as a starting point for the evaluation of all projects proposed for the City. A copy of the guidelines is attached. We have also attached DAG's casino building design evaluation form. These documents, while prepared several years ago, underscore the value of planning and we believe they will be helpful at this time in evaluating the new site.

Thank you for leading our city toward good design.

Sincerely,

Joanne Aitken, AIA
Chair, Design Advocacy Group of Philadelphia

encl: Urban Design Evaluation Guidelines

cc: Andrew Altman, Deputy Mayor and Chair, City Planning Commission
Alan Greenberger, Executive Director Designate, City Planning Commission
Terry Gillen, Senior Advisor to the Mayor for Economic Development

The Design Advocacy Group of Philadelphia is a volunteer organization whose nearly 1000 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.
c/o KieranTimberlake Associates LLP, 420 North 20th Street, Philadelphia, PA 19130

Urban Design Evaluation

Developed by the Design Advocacy Group
September 12, 2006

Individual development projects - new construction, expansion, or renovation - can affect the surrounding environment in many ways, both positively and negatively. Each proposed project should be evaluated for its relationship to the immediate surroundings, the neighborhood community, and the larger urban context. The following list of questions has been assembled to provide a framework for discussion between community groups, designers and developers and guide development projects towards making positive environmental contributions.

*Note: Words in **bold type** are explained in the accompanying Glossary of Terms.*

Neighborhood Context

1. **Zoning**

What **zoning variances** to the **Zoning and Planning Code** would be required for the development, and would they be consistent with the community master plan and urban design best practices?

2. **Use**

Would the proposed building uses be appropriate to the particular site and the neighborhood and is the development consistent with the community master plan?

3. **Density**

Could the proposed **density of use** be adequately supported by adjacent **transportation infrastructure**, or would the project contribute to unacceptable levels of congestion?

4. **Amenities**

Would the proposed development include the construction or enhancement of any public amenities, such as parks, plazas, playgrounds, community centers, libraries, or transit stops?

5. **Connections**

Would the project enhance pedestrian linkages to neighboring public amenities?

6. **History**

Does the proposed design appropriately incorporate or respond to any **historic assets**, or would the development destroy or compromise such assets?

7. **Environment**

Would the building preserve and enhance the existing natural resources while addressing its own environmental impact appropriately?

Street Life

1. **Activity**

Would the building uses at street level promote sidewalk activity? Are the building fronts designed to emphasize pedestrian entrances? Would the appearance of activity within the building on the second and third floors be visible from the street?

2. **Continuity**

Would the proposed development maintain or strengthen the existing **street edge**, or would it create an interruption in urban continuity?

3. Streetscape

Would the sidewalk be enhanced with amenities such as benches, paving patterns, and planters so as to enhance the pedestrian experience? Are the curb-cuts, service entries, and vehicular access ways minimized and designed to create comfortable and safe interactions between pedestrians, bicycles and motor vehicles?

4. Landscaping

Has the proposed landscaping been designed to link the building with its site in a meaningful way? Would existing street trees be maintained and would new trees and plantings be added? Would the proposal be in accordance with the community streetscape plan?

5. Parking

Would automobile parking be handled in a way to minimize the impact on the surroundings? Has underground parking been utilized? If above ground parking decks are part of the proposal, would they be set behind building elements with human uses so as not to be visible from the street?

6. Servicing

Would the design of the loading and servicing provisions be appropriate to the building and neighborhood?

Building Character

1. Height

Would the height and form of the building have a positive relationship with the street and surrounding buildings as viewed from both near and far? Would the shadow cast by the building adversely affect neighboring buildings and outdoor public space? Would the building obstruct any important view corridors?

2. Massing

Would the massing of the building be an appropriate response to the context? Would the height and width of the building be appropriately subdivided into component parts?

3. Composition

Does the design of the façade form a sophisticated composition of component parts? Does the architectural vocabulary relate to the existing context or create a meaningful juxtaposition? Would the design of the building enliven the streetscape?

4. Materials

Would the building materials and colors be attractive and appropriate to the surroundings? Would the materials be durable and are they employed in an appropriate manner. Would any reflections created by the wall or window materials adversely impact the surrounding buildings or street? Would the developer maintain a commitment to utilize the proposed materials through the completion of the project?

5. Openings

Have the building entrances been designed to express the importance of the connection between the interior and exterior of the building? Would the **scale** of the entrances be appropriate to the neighborhood context? Would each of the dominant walls of the building have a sufficient number of door and window openings? Would the scale and proportion of the window openings and their articulation form a positive relationship with architecture character of the surrounding buildings?

6. Roof

Has the roof edge been designed to express the termination of the building in an attractive or meaningful manner? Are the rooftop mechanical units and penthouses successfully incorporated into the design of the building?

7. Sustainability

Would the project utilize **sustainable materials and building practices**?

Glossary of Terms

Definitions of some of the terms used in the Urban Design Evaluation are provided below:

Density of Use – the number of individuals per unit of area. Higher levels of density must be appropriately supported by the urban infrastructure to prevent overcrowding and congestion. The advantages of denser settlement patterns include the decrease of separating distances between individuals, businesses, and institutions; the increase of social interactions; and the preservation of natural resources, such as land and energy (decrease of sprawl). The common means to measure and regulate density of development is by Floor Area Ratio (FAR), which is the proportional relationship between the total floor area of the buildings and the land on which they are built.

Historic Assets – buildings or aspects of neighborhoods that hold significant shared memories for the residents and provide historic identity for the community. Some buildings are specifically recognized by the city for their historic character and are provided with a degree of protection from destruction or significant alterations to the exterior. Some neighborhoods that have many historic structures have been recognized as Historic Districts or, alternatively, Conservation Districts, and these classifications provide certain levels of protection for the neighborhood as a whole.

Scale – a general design term used to describe the size and proportions of a building and its components, such as stairways, windows, doorways, cornices, and ornamentation. For example: The *scale* of Independence Hall is consistent with most historic houses in Society Hill, but not with most new high-rise buildings.

Street Edge – a term often used to describe the line to which the front walls of buildings on a particular street are built. For example: If a new store on Chestnut Street is built with its front wall back twenty feet from the front of all the other buildings on the block to provide off-street parking spaces, that building can be said to have not maintained the *street edge*.

Sustainable Materials and Building Practices – terms used to describe a wide range of building practices and materials that are designed to limit the depletion of natural resources. Building designs that utilize such practices are often referred to as “Green Architecture”.

Transportation Infrastructure – includes all built aspects of the private and public systems of transportation, such as rail lines, roadways, bridges, parking lots, and bike paths.

Zoning and Planning Code – the legal guidelines by which the city controls the uses of buildings or areas of land and also the rules about building size and height, setbacks from lot lines, and required open space.

Zoning Variances – the legal remedies by which property owners may obtain permission to build structures that do not fully correspond to the existing zoning codes. In Philadelphia, variance requests are reviewed by the Zoning Board of Adjustment (ZBA).

DESIGN ADVOCACY GROUP

of Philadelphia

DESIGN STANDARDS FOR CASINOS IN PHILADELPHIA

There is no other American city on the scale of or with the architectural heritage of Philadelphia that has chosen to introduce gaming venues into its existing mix of urban development. It is essential that we set goals and standards for these new facilities that will enable us to take full advantage of this unique opportunity. We should aspire to create the new urban entertainment center that includes a vibrant mix of gambling along with other activities such as restaurants, retail, live performances, movies, dance clubs, and other compatible uses. We should demand that the very best architects be engaged to create precedent-setting buildings of incomparable quality that radiate a magnetic sense of excitement, entertainment, fun and a little risk.

Candidate casino developers should be required to submit proposals that are developed in sufficient detail so that the quality of their planning and design may be evaluated in comparison to other applicants. To facilitate this process, the following is a scoresheet that includes the criteria by which each proposal would be evaluated. Reviewers would award anywhere from zero to five for each factor.

CRITERIA	SCORE
Location	
Compatible with site context in land use, scale, appearance and materials.	
Makes maximum use of the site's development potential.	
Will enhance prospects for further appropriate development of adjacent sites.	
Accessible by public transit.	
Easily connected to other cultural and entertainment destinations.	
Program	
Includes an effective plan for pedestrian, auto, bus and service traffic.	
Incorporates a unique development concept.	
Contains an exciting mix of recreational and entertainment activities.	
Includes retail and restaurant space.	
Allows for expansion of gaming space.	
Site	
On site parking is not visible from the street.	
Contains exterior public amenities such as plazas, arcades, riverwalks.	
Building	
Design approach is bold, contemporary and innovative.	
Street facades are active, inviting and visually connected to the interior.	
Uses institutional and corporate quality building materials.	
Contains monumental and memorable public spaces that connect to the exterior.	
Clear and legible interior spatial organization and circulation.	
Meets LEED standards for sustainable design.	
Design Team	
Experienced in design of gambling and entertainment development.	
Has achieved public awards for design excellence.	
TOTAL SCORE	