

[washingtonpost.com](http://www.washingtonpost.com)

**CORRECTION TO THIS ARTICLE**

A Sept. 26 article about the possible effects of new baseball and soccer stadiums on the District incorrectly described the location of the proposed site for a baseball stadium. It would be just west, not east, of the Southeast Federal Center.

## **Anacostia Waterfront At Juncture**

Twin Sports Stadiums May Produce Rebirth

By Debbi Wilgoren

Washington Post Staff Writer

Sunday, September 26, 2004; Page A01

The Frederick Douglass Memorial Bridge soars above the Anacostia River, linking two desolate stretches of waterfront famous for being undistinguished and inaccessible. The northern bank has vacant lots and warehouses, the southern side a green expanse cut off by Interstate 295.

The plan for this part of the nation's capital is grand and meticulous -- and mostly on paper. Large-scale urban regeneration can be seen today just beyond the northern bank, where five large office buildings have risen in the past three years and the new headquarters for the federal Department of Transportation is under construction.

That was the vision and the promise until last week, when city officials chose the northern bank as the site for a possible new baseball stadium and then announced that negotiations are underway to build a soccer stadium to anchor development on the southern bank. The two proposed sporting venues could dramatically accelerate the pace of development along the Anacostia riverfront, city officials, developers and others said.

"People are going to be clamoring to build nearby," said Whyne S. Quin, a land-use lawyer and partner with the law firm of Holland & Knight. "It was going to take, I think, a long time, unless some major catalyst came in."

The central catalyst is a \$400 million ballpark on a bleak, industrial parcel at the foot of South Capitol Street, to be built by the city if Major League Baseball decides to move the Montreal Expos to Washington. The soccer stadium would be funded in large part by Phil Anschutz, owner of D.C. United, and built across the river on a mostly vacant stretch of parkland known as Poplar Point.

Making a sporting riverfront complex a reality depends on a host of factors, principal among them MLB's decision to relocate the Expos; no talks concerning the team were held yesterday. Legislation to authorize financing for a stadium would then have to be voted on by the D.C. Council. A development plan and financing package would also be needed for the soccer stadium, which would cost \$70 million to \$100 million. Development on Poplar Point, which is owned by the federal government, would also require public hearings and approval by the Commission on Fine Arts and the National Capital Planning Commission.

The challenges, however, have not tempered the enthusiasm of city economic development officials, who see the stadiums as engines for growth. In their view, the stadiums would draw tens of thousands of visitors to parts of the city relatively few ever visit.

Both areas are considered prime sites for new residential neighborhoods and public amenities under the 20-year, \$8 billion plan for the Anacostia Waterfront Initiative, released this spring. Planners had assumed that such development would not begin until other projects already on the drawing board were finished and attracting residents and visitors. But if the sports complexes come to fruition, planners and developers said, that timeline would shrink significantly.

The areas are already served by Metro -- the Navy Yard station near the baseball site and the Anacostia station near the soccer site. But new stadiums would require road and other infrastructure improvements that would speed the creation of planned waterfront parks, city officials said. They said soccer and baseball fans would want nearby places to eat, drink and socialize. And developers, knowing that people will be coming, would likely rush to build housing, offices and retail projects on adjacent parcels -- just as they did in the formerly blighted east end of downtown after Abe Pollin built MCI Center in 1997.

The baseball stadium "would improve a large tract of land all at once," said R. Stewart Bartley, managing director of JBG Cos., which is building the new U.S. Department of Transportation headquarters complex a few blocks away. "It takes a lot . . . to displace some of those industrial uses. It's a daunting task if you think about doing it one 150- or 200-unit [apartment] project at a time."

Both stadium projects generally fit within goals that officials have set for the area. Planning director Andrew Altman also said that having the soccer stadium east of the river, historically a painful dividing line within the city, would be an important symbolic step.

The city wants such a stadium to be part of a sports complex that would include athletic fields and recreational facilities for local residents, Altman said. The city has pledged that riverfront projects would benefit residents of the mostly impoverished neighborhoods just east of the redevelopment area. As currently envisioned, the stadium project would also include some apartments and retail, which city officials say would form the nucleus of a neighborhood that eventually could include up to 1,000 residences.

"The idea was to think of Poplar Point as a neighborhood and not just a vast field," Altman said. "Soccer gives a stimulus to accelerate the thinking about Poplar Point and what could happen there."

One way of seeing those possibilities is to look north across the river from Poplar Point at the Washington Navy Yard and the Southeast Federal Center. The Navy Yard, between the river and M Street, has doubled the number of its employees in the past 10 years and now has a daily workforce of more than 11,000. Its growth has launched a flurry of

private office and some retail construction on the north side of M Street. The demand by contractors and other firms that want to be near the growing area has pushed rent and land prices up significantly.

The Transportation Department headquarters is rising on part of the long-vacant federal center, and developers have been chosen to build hundreds of apartments and townhouses, along with offices and shops, from the federal complex down to the planned waterfront park. New Jersey Avenue, now truncated at the entrance to the federal center on M Street, would be improved and extended to the park, providing a scenic view of the Capitol.

The site offered for a baseball stadium starts just east of that federal center site, across First Street. Altman said the city would insist on an architecturally striking stadium that would serve as a dramatic gateway to the city's monumental core from the south. The project would include green space on the currently inaccessible riverfront.

"It completes that whole west side of the waterfront, from the 11th Street Bridge to South Capitol Street," Altman said. "There would be public access all the way across."

North of M Street, the 700-unit Arthur Capper-Carrollsborg public housing complex -- which makes up most of the housing in the part of the city known formally as Near Southeast -- is being emptied of residents. The complex will soon be razed and then rebuilt as an extension of Capitol Hill with more than 1,500 apartments and townhouses -- at least 700 subsidized for the poor and the rest sold or rented at market rate.

The project, part of the federal HOPE VI program, would stretch west to New Jersey Avenue and include new retail and office buildings, as well as a re-created canal that used to exist along Second Street. That canal would become the centerpiece of a new park.

Michael Kelly, executive director of the D.C. Housing Authority, said the city has negotiated with developers of the project on public land to get a share of rental revenue from private commercial projects. If those rents jump after a stadium is built, Kelly said, the authority will have more money to expand subsidized housing and social programs there.

City officials said they will try to emphasize those benefits, as well as the public facilities connected to the soccer stadium, to counter those who say the city should invest in affordable housing and improve schools instead of stadiums, or those who argue that the projects will push housing prices in nearby neighborhoods so high that they could displace longtime residents.

Public housing residents who until recently lived at Capper-Carrollsborg are having a hard time picturing a stadium in their oft-forgotten corner of the city, said Yvonne Clary, 67, a longtime leader at Capper-Carrollsborg who is working with housing officials to create the new neighborhood and bring old residents back.

"They were just amazed -- a baseball field down here?" Clary said. "I say bring it on. Hopefully it will bring some jobs for the residents when we come back."

Between the two stadium sites is the sagging Frederick Douglass Bridge, which along with the gritty sections of South Capitol Street that it connects is slated for a complete makeover during the next decade or so as part of the riverfront initiative.

The bridge project, which will cost hundreds of millions of dollars, has the strong support of Rep. Steny H. Hoyer (D-Md.), who wants to create an attractive route into the city from his Prince George's County district. Last week, city planners and developers said that road improvements that would be required for the stadiums could accelerate work on the bridge.

The waterfront plans also depend in part on restoring the Anacostia River, polluted by street runoff and raw sewage and viewed as an underused waterway.

The possibility of thousands of fans flocking to venues at either end of the Douglass bridge had those involved in riverfront planning envisioning numerous spinoff developments this week -- sleek water taxis ferrying patrons from one side of a restored river to another, marinas offering kayaking and other water sports, apartments with roof decks that would offer a glimpse of a game.

"You get the right design team to make sure the stadium isn't just an isolated, standalone development but is woven into the fabric of the waterfront area and lots of positive things can happen," said Charles "Sandy" Wilkes, chairman of the Wilkes Co., a real estate development firm. "People have growing appreciation of the opportunity we're on the verge of here."

*Staff writer Karlyn Barker contributed to this report.*

© 2004 The Washington Post Company