



Friends of Kingman Park Meeting Minutes

Special Community Meeting with Mayor Bowser on the Future of RFK Stadium

St. Benedict the Moor Catholic Church, in the Imperial Room (320 21st St. NE)

Wednesday, October 18th, 2023

FOKP Board Members in attendance:

1. President, Lisa White
2. Vice President, David Sanchez
3. Secretary and ANC 7D05, Ebony Payne
4. At-Large, Sarah Miller
5. At-Large, Lora Nunn
6. Parliamentarian, Bob Coomber

0:00 Friends of Kingman Park President, Lisa White, opens meeting at 6:52pm

1:33 Father Michal Sajnog of St. Benedict the Moor Catholic Church is introduced and leads a prayer and moment of silence

3:50 House rules and audience question sheets explained. Unanswered audience questions will be gathered and sent to the mayor's office for response by email.

4:40 Friends of Kingman Park created the RFK Future Task Force to begin a dialogue with the mayor to discuss the community's concerns regarding the future of RFK.

5:40 RFK Future task force members and FOKP board members stand to be recognized.

6:40 Sarah Miller, At-Large, gives presentation on [RFK Future Survey Results](#)

15:55 Ebony Payne, ANC 7D05 Commissioner and FOKP Secretary, thanks the Archdiocese of Washington for providing the meeting location and introduces Mayor Bowser

16:55 Mayor Bowser takes the podium to share her remarks (lightly edited for clarity).



17:50 Mayor introduces newly appointed Deputy Mayor for Economic Development Nina Albert, Senior Advisor Beverly Perry, Director of Dept. of Energy and Environment, Richard Jackson, Acting Director for Dept. of Parks and Recreation, Thennie Freedman, Ward 7 MOCRE Lawrence Davin, and Ward 6 MOCRE Marcus Manning.

18:55 One thing I think we can all agree on is the current state of RFK is unacceptable. We have a stadium that is crumbling and falling down and is the only memorial to RFK in Washington DC. It is surrounded by 174 acres of asphalt. We have locally invested in recreation space for young people of all ages on our soccer fields and I'd like to thank the Ward 6 and Ward 7 communities for your advocacy on that.

19:30 Since I've been Mayor, I have had one goal as it relates to the RFK Campus, and that is to get control of it. I think you know that we currently have a lease with the federal government, the National Park Service (NPS). That lease has allowed us to operate the campus and we do so through an instrumentality of the District, Events DC, or the Convention Center Authority. This allowed us to manage the site when the Nationals used it before they had their stadium [Nationals Park] built and when DC United used it before it had its stadium [Audi Field] built. And they continued up through just a few years ago to use [RFK Stadium] for games, some college level games, and some high school level games. But for a number of years, it has been completely shuttered.

20:35 We know that getting control of that property would allow the District to do what we've been able to do on other underutilized federal parcels. To reimagine it and to create the things that we need including more jobs and opportunity and housing and park space. It will allow us also to invest our local dollars and enter partnerships with companies that know how to build the type of development that we want and deliver it. I listened to some of the things that community members said that they wanted, and I agree with all of them, and I know that on 174 acres, they are all possible. So really if you ask me what my vision is, I've said long and frequently it is not to have a stadium surrounded by asphalt, but to have a mix of uses that serve the District of Columbia. We participated in a Congressional hearing. Our Director of DGS, the former Director of Parks and Recreation, testified in Congress last month and shared our vision for using the campus to create and increase access to recreational space. And under the District's stewardship, unlike the National Park Service, who is responsible for vast amounts of park space around our country and has an unfunded list of projects for all of them. So, our first and most pressing task is to



get control of the land and make sure that we can create a plan that we can fund to transform it for the residents of the District of Columbia.

22:45 And so our ideas include, and this has been discussed publicly when EventsDC convened, the Anacostia River trail, leading investments in the Fields at RFK, investments in environmental programming on the Kingman and Heritage Islands under the stewardship of the Dept. of Energy and Environment. We envision increased access to organized recreation and activities including kayaking and more outdoor space for cultural activations. We also see the economic development potential for this site including much needed housing. We already know that a couple of years ago I already budgeted and the council approved the local investment of \$60M for the indoor sports complex at RFK that would be programmed and managed by our Department of Parks and Recreation.

23:55 Our goal is to build this indoor sports complex for our youth that will become a premier destination for youth sports. You probably know that many of our kids now travel outside of the District for soccer, for indoor track, for gymnastics, cheerleading, and many other sports that they could and should be doing right at home. What I am trying to explain, these are not either-or, either there would be a stadium or there would be youth sports. In 174 acres, we can create multiple uses.

24:50 Our task right now, is to get control of the land. Congresswoman Norton has introduced with Representative Comer (R-KY), a piece of legislation that is moving through the House of Representatives that would allow for a 99 year extension of the lease. It would allow us to do more than sports. To include housing and job opportunities on the campus. Right now, if that legislation didn't pass, the only thing that can happen at RFK is sports, or a stadium, like the Congress did [in 1960] when the original RFK was built.

25:40 What we are working on right now is the transfer of that land. So, then you ask, how do we get it into productive use when we get control of it? That is where the local and community engagement part of the process will begin. You know well our interests in working with all of our professional sports teams to make sure all of our professional sports teams can thrive in the District, and that would include our football team.



26:17 We are working not on any arrangement or deal with the team, we're only working on getting our land so that the District, not the National Park Service, would be in control of our destiny at RFK. So, with that I'm happy to answer any questions.

27:31 Question #1 – People prefer to see this land used for parks, recreation, and multi-generational housing. How do you propose meeting the community's desires?

27:51 I addressed that saying with 174 acres there can be multiple uses. The stadium would take only a portion of the campus and you can envision what that might be like because there is a stadium there now. We would look to partner, like we have done at Walter Reed, or at the Wharf, or at MacMillan, or at St. Elizabeth's, with local development partners to come up and respond to RFPs where we identify what we want to see happen there. We have a couple of different examples. We have some examples like down at the Wharf where there was a master developer, and the entire project was conceived and delivered in two phases. The same is true for Walter Reed, at St. Elizabeth's and Hill East, we have divided the parcels and are working with several development partners to deliver all of those things. So how the District does that, is when we have a parcel that we control, we write an RFP, we listen to the community, we put in our priorities, and we ask for ideas. Then we select a partner that best delivers on those ideas. The way that process works...we try to do a lot of the community involvement upfront before we write an RFP. And the community continues to be involved because the council will then begin its process of how we transfer land. There are several processes on the council's end about that land disposition.

30:00 Question #2 – Will taxpayers' dollars and public funding be used [to build the Stadium] when we have other pressing community needs as well as needs here in the District of Columbia?

30:25 Thank you for that question because I want to make clear that we have a couple of examples about how we work on stadiums in the District. Many of you will remember when Nationals Park was being debated. Who remembers that debate? Do you think it looked like a home run of a debate where all 13 council members voted for it? Most of the votes were 7 to 6. It was hotly contested. The question you just asked me was asked then: *should we be building a stadium for billionaires when we have schools and the like*. And the answer is we're a big city and we have to do both....I don't know too many people who think we shouldn't have the Washington Nationals in Washington. Because we have our professional team and at the same time, we built a lot of schools. We invested in public services. In fact, we've invested in more



housing per capita than any city in the United States of America. We've done all those things and we built a world class arena. Now in that case, the taxpayers built the whole thing. Let me give you another example. This was an example that I led when I was on the council and chaired the Committee on Economic Development. When we built Audi Field, we know how many of our kids and our residents enjoyed soccer and enjoyed professional soccer. We acquired the land and the team built the stadium. I believe where we will be with RFK when we get control of it, is that we will prepare the land, the infrastructure, and we have to do that anyway, whether there's a stadium there or not, we the taxpayers are going to develop the infrastructure for housing, for parks, for all of the things that you said, it will require the District to invest in the infrastructure. I expect that that will be the case when we look at RFK Stadium. The reason I'm not telling you definitively this, that, or the other, is because we have commissioned a sports study which is looking at all of our professional teams, from the Capitols to the Wizards, to the Mystics, to the Washington Spirit, to our professional tennis, to baseball, all of our teams. We are indeed a growing sports capital, and it is an important part of our economy. Let me give you one example, I was talking to the folks who own the Mystics and the Capitols and the Wizards. Did you know that last year they had the best year in the history of their company because thousands of people are going to a downtown arena for sports and entertainment. Erasing that type of economic activity would be devastating to the things that you just mentioned you cared about. If I look at the development around the Nationals Park, it has paid for itself, the bonds that we took out earlier, than anyone expected and the revenue around the Capitol Riverfront BID is allowing us to have world class infrastructure and services across all 8 wards. We just cannot talk about sport as if it is not also linked to how this city invests in itself.

35:20 – Question #3: This area can't handle events that are held now at RFK that attract 20,000-30,000 people. How large of a stadium are you aiming for and what would your vision be for handling the traffic?

35:40 – It is true that we probably don't have the infrastructure that would best support large scale events because what we have is crumbling asphalt that is not well supported. When you actually plan the area for large scale events, you will be better able to manage large scale events. The thing about this campus, is that there is a football stadium is there now. We know that the roadway network, the metro network, has supported large scale events there. I don't know, and I am not advocating for a certain number of seats. What I would advocate for if we got in that position is a viable, not monstrosity of a stadium, one



that is beautiful and that is keeping with the structure that should be built on the monumental axis of Washington DC. And one that would be supported by structured parking and enough parking, that it can support its operation.

36:45 Question #4: Do you see that parking being lots or garages? How would you handle parking?

37:00 I would see it being in garages because that's the way you maximize a site in Washington DC on the monumental axis with the multiplicity of needs that we will require.

37:18 Question #5: Will any homes have to be razed to make room for the stadium?

37:20 I can't imagine that being the case.

37:35 Question #6: Is there a cost-benefit process that the public can participate in and learn about?

37:44 We are commissioning a sports study. We expect that the consultant that we hire will look at all the possible models that will work best for us financing our needs long term. And that's for all the sports teams. I'm not sure what part the public would participate in, but we will keep you informed of any community engagement opportunities.

38:18 Question #7: The legislation leaves 30% for open green space and there are concerns that the Fields at RFK will go away since the permit is temporary. What do you envision for that 30% and can you commit to the Fields staying?

38:40 I can commit to there being fields, let me put it that way, because I think they were meant to be temporary but we're going to make sure we have field space. The 30%, we embrace that number, that the NPS requires and in fact with the legislation we agree to maintain some adjacent NPS land that we currently don't have any involvement in. Our vision is that we bring everybody closer to the Anacostia [river], that we have better connections to the Anacostia and ability to have a trail and walkway and better access to Kingman and Heritage Islands. We think this is an amazing opportunity. Now, I grew up in a DC where you might not even know we had two rivers because we did not fully develop them in a way that's not just about economic activity: it's also about recreational activity. And in the last 10 years, we have seen that turn around happen with the Wharf and with all of our collective efforts to clean up our rivers. People swimming in the Anacostia? Not yet? We're that close to having a swimmable Anacostia! I tease



but it is really true, when we built those piers out into the Potomac, we actually reclaimed land and space where people can recreate, have events, and enjoy the river. We have more opportunities to do that.

40:50 Question #8: Virginia may possibly bid \$1.5 Billion to get the Commanders. What would DC's bid look like?

41:06: I already told you where we're going to get in on this. With the land. We're going to get the land and we're going to prepare the land. Let me tell you all, nothing against Virginia. We're not Virginia, we don't try to be Virginia, but I do look at their budgets and I don't see \$1.5 Billion for a football stadium. When I look at our budget, I don't see \$1.5 Billion for a football stadium.

41:40 Question #9: Are you seriously considering any other DC site for the football stadium? Maybe another neighborhood wants it other than Kingman Park?

41:50 I think we only have one site, and not only is it the best in DC, it's the best site in the region. We did consider another site which we just don't think transportation wise would support it.

42:25 Question #10: Will the District have a proposed site plan that the Commanders can commit to before the District offers any packages or funding incentives.

42:40 I anticipate, if I put my name on it and have to fight for it at the Council, I have a very good idea of what it looks like, how it fits into our community, how its going to be built, how many DC businesses would be working on it, how many DC residents would be employed by it. Typically, how that comes about is there's a concept drawing. EventsDC has done some concepts, not including an NFL stadium. This is probably 4 or 5 years old where there was a series of community meetings to talk about it. We would do some kind of concept drawing as well. And anybody who would seriously be considering going there would have invested in doing that too.

44:08 Question #11: Substantial research shows that stadiums are NOT economic drivers, especially football, so why would a stadium for the Commanders be any different?

44:30 I just explained that we have two examples that flies in the face of that conclusion. All you have to do is go to Nationals Park, go to downtown DC. It is a fair question, there are fewer football games, so



how do you activate during the rest of the time? We have to be able to commit to activations for more than those 8 games and build a facility that supports that.

45:11 Question #12: How many days a year will the stadium hold events and when the stadium is not being used for football, will we have to endure concert noise like we currently do now?

45:28 Those things are up for discussion. The community can say we want to limit the number of days that it can be used. We have an example of that with Carter Baron. But at the same time, you can't say well now it's not making any money for the city. Where I will likely land is what would enhance the quality of life and balance our city-wide needs with a city-wide destination with the concerns of the community. I think those are typically worked out in an agreement with the community. That would be the case whether there was no NFL stadium here and there were some other uses that generated traffic and noise which it would. It will not be 174 acres of nothing. It's going to have active uses.

46:12 Question #13: I am very concerned about the future of the skate park. Skateboarding reduces violence and youth violence. Can you give insight into the future of the skate park?

46:25 Well I'm glad and I saw a number of skaters walking in. I want to make sure that DPR is thinking about it with the facility that it will operate, and I want to make sure my sports team is thinking about it for our study of infrastructure needs.

46:50 Question #14: This area cannot handle events at RFK now. Traffic, trash, and crime was a nightmare this summer. How can we ensure if the Commanders come back that our quality of life is not negatively impacted?

47:23 If you're having problems with festivals right now, let's deal with that right now. We need to talk with the [event] organizers and EventsDC, we need to talk to whoever wants to use it to make sure they are good users of the property and that we have the appropriate city services and private services to support it. I can commit to you that we're going to work on that now before the summer so that we will have better activation. I believe firmly that part of the problem with managing those events is that we basically have people setting up whole city operations from start to finish on an empty parking lot. As long as you have an empty parking lot, you're going to have a rag tag of people who want to use it, including us, sometimes we park our trucks there. That's what happens when you have this vacant land.



48:33 Question #15: National Parks and Audi Field led to tremendous displacement and gentrification in that community. If DC moves forward with the Commanders stadium, how will you prevent displacement of lower income residents?

49:20 I think that as a city, we've learned a lot of lessons about having development and preparing communities for development. We have put a lot of those practices in place. For example, before at St. Elizabeth's which was vacant, like [the RFK Campus] is vacant, so nobody was displaced, but the thought was that the development would increase property values. We started homeowners clubs, credit counseling, and we started a number of activities that nearby neighbors could also participate in the progress and new development. That is not a perfect process and there are things that we learned in all of these developments that we can put in place to prepare the community for any increase in property values in the surrounding area.

50:30 Question #16: The community wants to have more information about the hazardous [materials] and the environmental impact of the demolition. Will an environmental impact study be done to make sure the surrounding community is not impacted?

51:17 We don't fully know the extent, but we are investigating that now, because we are responsible for the cleanup. I want to make sure I am separating this issue because we are going to have that issue whether there is an NFL stadium or not. We are preparing for that cleanup process and we will come to an agreement with the Federal government about whose going to take the lead. But you have my commitment, no matter who takes the lead, that we will be informing the community. I want to be clear whether the team comes back to its home or not, we're going to be doing that, the goal is to get these 174 acres productive.

52:20 Question #17: Tonight, you have made a lot of promises. How can we hold you and your administration accountable during this process and ensure our communities have a voice and a seat at the table?

52:50 I appreciate that question because everybody knows I love accountability. The reason why I think voters have sent me back three times is because I do what I say I'm going to do. It's a fair question because like I mentioned, I've worked on economic development projects for a long time. I've worked on city



projects a long time and again, they take a long time, and sometimes the same people aren't working on them from start to finish. With [my] longevity in office, I've seen a lot of projects go from start to finish. We will make sure that we are memorializing all of our commitments and there will be a package. It's not just Bowser saying to the community, or saying to the individual users of RFK, this is what we're going to do. We're a city of laws and the way that this works is that the Mayor proposes, and we put it in a package, and the council knows as well, there will be a development agreement. There would be any funding that is necessary. But more than likely in a development agreement that goes to the Council, it becomes law. It will be written in law the things that we agree to. Further, if there are, because I expect that there will be capital investment dollars needed for the infrastructure work on the 174 acres whether there is an NFL stadium there or not, we're going to need to do that over many years, and I will propose that funding to the council, that will go through the legislative process and become law. There are a number of legal written documents that accompany the package that is sent to Council that becomes the law.

55:05 FOKP President, Lisa White, thanks Mayor Bowser for coming and adjourns meeting at 7:45pm