



The District's Dime

Going Beyond the Budget Book

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Only Fools Rush In: The DC Council Should Take Their Time with Soccer Stadium Deal

By Wes Rivers

August is over, and the DC Council is about to get back into full swing. The Council's fall docket undoubtedly will include Mayor Gray's proposal to help pay for a new stadium for DC United. Indeed, the initial agreement with the team – which is non-binding – would require the Council to approve the deal very soon. Yet the stadium deal raises many important issues that need to be considered, from the potential costs and risks for the District, to selling city assets and engaging in complicated land swaps.

Rather than rush to make decisions, DC councilmembers should take their time to fully consider what's best for the District.

The [term sheet](#) sets a number of unrealistically short deadlines. DC would have until January 1, 2014 to make all necessary [land swaps](#), trading District-owned land for privately-owned land at Buzzard Point. By March 1, 2015, the District would have to complete infrastructure improvements to the site, including moving the Pepco utilities station which currently resides there. If DC does not meet those timelines, certain development and facility fees would be waived for the team and DC United would have the right to exit the contract.

Accomplishing these goals would require the DC Council to take quick action this fall to approve the disposition of the Reeves Center (and maybe other properties), approve expenditures to demolish and clean up the site, and build new infrastructure.

But, what's the rush? The plan to open the stadium for the 2017 season is a somewhat arbitrary goal. Regardless of timelines, getting the stadium deal right for District residents should be the DC Council's number one goal. The proposal is complicated, and the DC Council should take the time needed to carefully examine all of the terms.

Most important, the costs of the District's contribution to the stadium are uncertain and could be [substantial](#). The current cost estimate of \$150 million is a very rough guess, and there are great risks that the costs to the city could rise. The Council also needs time to consider the needs and concerns of residents in Southwest DC and throughout the city, including the development's effect on affordable housing, traffic, and parking.

Complicated issues are never served well by rushing. DC United can get a new stadium, and DC residents can get a good deal, if time is taken to get it right.

To learn more about the proposed stadium deal, visit DCFPI's article in this month's [*Hill Rag*](#).