

# Sudden arena idea angers, unnerves Philadelphia's Chinatown

By Claudia Lauer  
The Associated Press

PHILADELPHIA — Wei Chen wants people who visit Philadelphia's Chinatown to look through the community's gateway arch and see the residents chatting in Mandarin on the steps to the apartments above or the vendors selling traditional Chinese food to families walking by, not a giant Philadelphia 76ers arena a block away.

"These apartments are full of people who are low-income, who are elderly people, and people who are new immigrants," said Chen, the community engagement director for Asian Americans United. "You have to think about how Chinatown was created. We weren't welcome in other neighborhoods."

Chen, along with other organizers and members of Chinatown, said they were surprised by the Philadelphia 76ers' recent announcement of a proposal to build a \$1.3-billion arena just a block from the community's gateway arch. They said neither the organization nor the property owner reached out for community input before the announcement.

A spokesperson for 76 Devcorp, the development company behind the arena, said in an e-mailed statement that the process is in its early stages — years from "anything changing" — and that the company planned to work with the community to help shape the project and ensure it's "done right."

"We are very sensitive to the Chinatown community's concern in light of prior Center City proposals and are committed to listening to and working with the community in a way that hasn't happened before," the statement read.



**UNWELCOME ARENA.** A customer shops for produce in the Chinatown neighborhood of Philadelphia on July 22, 2022. Organizers and members of Philadelphia's Chinatown say they were surprised by the 76ers' announcement that they hope to build a \$1.3-billion arena just a block from the community's gateway arch. (AP Photo/Matt Rourke)

Those are promises many in Chinatown have heard before. After decades of developments — like the Pennsylvania Convention Center, which took homes from 200 families; Interstate 676, also known as the Vine Street Expressway, which threatened to cut off parts of the community — and proposals for a jail, a casino, and another sports facility that all were beaten back by the community, residents have a deep playbook of their own to choose from.

Across the country, there are fewer than 50 Chinatowns, some more vibrant and larger than others. Many took root in areas of cities that were thought of as red light districts. And as cities grew and changed around those communities, many Chinatowns have been under threat from gentrification or development.

Like others, the community in Philadelphia is just bouncing back after losing business during the pandemic, when Chinatown's restaurants were

shuttered for dining in. Much of the senior population didn't want to leave the neighborhood because of the fourfold increase since 2019 in hate crimes against people of Asian descent.

"This is an ongoing struggle for Chinatowns and other downtown communities of color and of low income," said historian John Kuo Wei Tchen, director of Rutgers University's Clement Price Institute on Ethnicity, Culture, and the Modern Experience. "In the case of Chinatowns that play important symbolic roles for the cosmopolitan claims of the city, sport authority interests often trump such roles."

The 76ers' current home is in south Philadelphia, a few miles from downtown, along with most of the city's other pro sports teams.

Many Chinatown residents and business owners are concerned that if a new arena is built, affordable street parking will disappear, traffic will increase, and

holding traditional celebrations and festivals could become more difficult. But they are also worried that already-increasing property values could spike and force many who depend on the community to leave.

Debbie Wei is a founding member of Asian Americans United, started in Philadelphia in the 1980s to unite people of Asian ancestry to build the community and fight oppression. She was also an organizer of the protests against a proposed Phillies baseball stadium that city officials wanted to place at Chinatown's door in 2000.

"If it's not a stadium, it's a highway or a convention center. Seattle ... Detroit ... Chicago, Boston, and then Washington, D.C. I have friends who grew up in Chinatown in D.C. and it's just been decimated," Wei said.

The home of the Washington Capitals hockey team and the Wizards basketball team moved to D.C.'s Chinatown community in 1997. Economic development experts say the increased foot traffic and more desirable real estate brought revitalization, but for the Chinatown community it meant rising rents and chain restaurants forcing them out.

Census numbers show that in 1990, about 66% of the people who lived in the D.C. Chinatown area identified as Asian American. That dwindled to 21% in 2010. And as of the 2020 census, that had dropped to about 18% in the two tracts that

*Continued on page 8*

## Welcome back to care

### Preventive care for youth is more important than ever

Get the vaccines, checkups and dental care your children need. Regular physical and dental checkups and keeping vaccines current can help prevent problems before they arise. See the chart below to see what vaccines kids ages 7-18 need.

Vaccine	7-8 years	9-10 years	11-12 years	13-15 years	16-18 years
Flu (influenza) <small>yearly</small>	■ ■	■ ■	■ ■	■ ■ ■	■ ■ ■
HPV (human papillomavirus)			■ ■ 2 doses	(at least five months between doses)	
Meningococcal MenACWY			■ 1 dose		■ booster
Meningococcal MenB					
Pneumococcal					
Tdap (tetanus, diphtheria, pertussis)			■ 1 dose		
Hepatitis A					
Hepatitis B					
MMR (measles, mumps, rubella)					
Polio					
Chickenpox (varicella)					

■ Recommended at age requirement    ■ Recommended for high-risk adolescents    ■ Catch up on missed

**Call your child's physical and dental providers and schedule a checkup today. Or contact CareOregon Customer Service if you have questions.**

Reach us 8 a.m. to 5 p.m. Monday through Friday at 503-416-4100, 800-224-4840 or TTY 711.