

DC United Considering Buzzard Point for New Stadium

BY WILLIAM RICH

As the 2011 MLS season gets underway, there have been several reports recently in the media about DC United's search for sites to build a new stadium in the District. Previous attempts to build one at Poplar Point and Prince George's County, Maryland never materialized. This time around, one of the sites under consideration is in Buzzard Point, specifically Akridge's 100 V Street project. Currently, 100 V Street is planned as a secure federal campus, but there have been no tenants lined up so far. According to Lisa Steen, Vice President of Marketing at Akridge, they are aware of DC United's ongoing search, but Akridge has no immediate plans for any type of development at 100 V Street. "We would certainly be open to any number of uses, but I imagine only [DC United] can say whether they're interested in it for a stadium," said Steen. DC United is being coy about their intentions as well. Doug Hicks, Senior Vice President of Marketing at DC United said, "We are looking at several locations in the District, but I'm unable to specify which ones. We've had conversations with Akridge, but we've also met with other developers."

Despite the vague comments from both parties, it appears that Buzzard Point is one of the top contenders for a new stadium to replace DC United's current home at Robert F. Kennedy Stadium, which is an aging facility surrounded by parking lots on federal land along the banks of the Anacostia River. Several MLS franchises have built new soccer-specific stadiums in the past few years, including the New York Red Bulls,



The 100 V Street project planned by developer Akridge is represented by the buildings with the green roofs. If DC United built a stadium at the site instead of the initial plan for a secure federal campus, it would be only a few blocks from Nationals Park. Rendering courtesy of Akridge

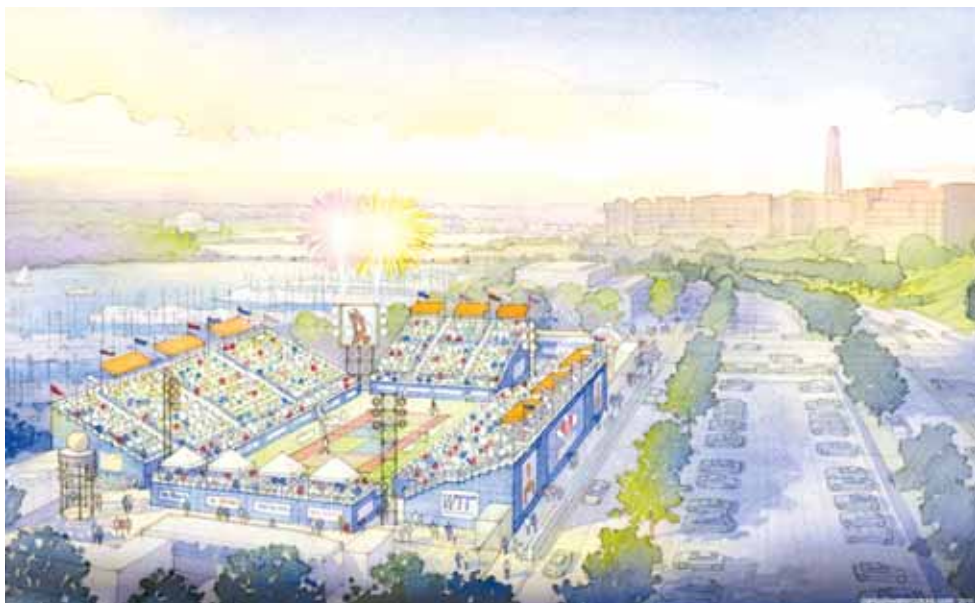
Chicago Fire, Philadelphia Union, and the Colorado Rapids, while RFK is a multipurpose stadium built in 1961 that has a seating capacity of over 45,000, lacking the intimate atmosphere of newer stadiums. While United is searching for a new home, it is in negotiations with the city to extend their lease at RFK. "We are in the process of expanding our relationship with the city at RFK and look forward to continuing that relationship," said Hicks. It is unclear what financial contribution can be made by the city towards construction of a new soccer stadium for DC United since the District is nearing its borrowing limit and is facing budget shortfalls.

The Buzzard Point site in ques-

tion is located three blocks southwest of Nationals Park on nine acres of land one block wide and three blocks long. A soccer stadium on a narrow site like the Buzzard Point location is not unprecedented – stadiums for Boca Juniors in Buenos Aires and Tottenham in London are located in dense urban areas with limited space. If a soccer stadium is located at Buzzard Point, the area would become a stadium district of sorts. Linking the stadiums would be Potomac Avenue, SW, which currently is lined mostly with industrial operations west of South Capitol Street. With a soccer stadium on one end and a ballpark on the other, Potomac Avenue, SW could become an entertainment district with retail stores, bars and res-

taurants that cater to fans, as well as neighborhood residents and employees at Fort McNair. The DC streetcar is planned to have a couple lines come down to Buzzard Point and possibly run along Potomac Avenue, SW, a wide boulevard that would have room for a streetcar. Perhaps ferry service can be introduced on game days via James Creek Marina, located just to the southwest of the stadium site.

While there are differing opinions over the effect that stadiums have on economic development and how Buzzard Point should be developed, a DC United Stadium in the area may cause other projects to get underway that otherwise would take several years or decades to get built, including development on Po-



Kastles Stadium at The Wharf, located at the site of the former Hogates restaurant on the Southwest Waterfront, will open in time for the 2011 season in July. Rendering courtesy of the Washington Kastles

tomac Avenue, SW. Back in 2009, a neighborhood study was done by the American Planning Association's Planning Assistance Team (PAT) and recommended that Buzzard Point become a primarily residential neighborhood. There are other proposals to make the area an environmentally-friendly eco-zone that would exclude vehicular traffic. The introduction of retail to the neighborhood, coupled with a streetcar line could help spur residential development in Buzzard Point, like Marina Place, a planned 99-unit condo project by Buzzards Point LLC catty corner to the site at 1st Street, SW and V Street, SW. As a condition of approval by the ANC in January, the developer pledged to promote the area as pedestrian-friendly. Just to the east of 100 V Street is the Buzzard Point Power Plant, which Pepco plans to decommission by May 2012. The power plant itself will most likely be landmarked as historic, but the PAT recommends that the plant can be repurposed as a cultural amenity like a museum or art gallery space. With the planned departure of the U.S. Coast Guard from its headquarters at 2nd Street, SW and V Street, SW to St. Elizabeth's by 2015, the PAT suggests the Coast Guard headquarters building and another office building nearby get acquired by the District for a mix of open space and limited redevelopment. That option seems unlikely, but a similar alternative would be to redevelop the Coast Guard headquarters building as a mixed use project that embraces its location next to the river and provides public access to the waterfront.

Even without a soccer stadium, the Near SE-SW area is already becoming a stadium

district. Aside from Nationals Park, the Washington Kastles World Team Tennis organization recently announced it will move from downtown to a new stadium this summer at The Wharf, which is the \$1.5 billion redevelopment of the Southwest Waterfront by the Hoffman-Madison Waterfront team. Kastles Stadium at The Wharf will be built at the corner of 9th Street, SW and Maine Avenue, SW at the site of the former Hogates restaurant and will be there for two years. A surface parking lot along Water Street, SW will be provided for patrons as well as a pre-existing parking garage. Aside from Kastles matches in July, the stadium will be used for other events throughout the year to keep the space animated. Once construction of phase one of the Southwest Waterfront begins in 2012, the stadium will either be moved to another site along the Southwest Waterfront, or the team will play in an indoor concert facility the Hoffman-Madison Waterfront team is planning for The Wharf.

Although a soccer stadium at Buzzard Point would not be used as often throughout the season as Nationals Park and would most likely not host as many non-soccer events as planned at Kastles Stadium at The Wharf, there is the potential for the venue to host exhibition matches, high school & college matches, concerts, as well as other sporting events, including lacrosse. The alternative for the stadium site as a highly secure federal campus will create a dead zone 12 months out of the year.

William Rich is a blogger at Southwest...The Little Quadrant that Could (www.southwestquadrant.blogspot.com). ★

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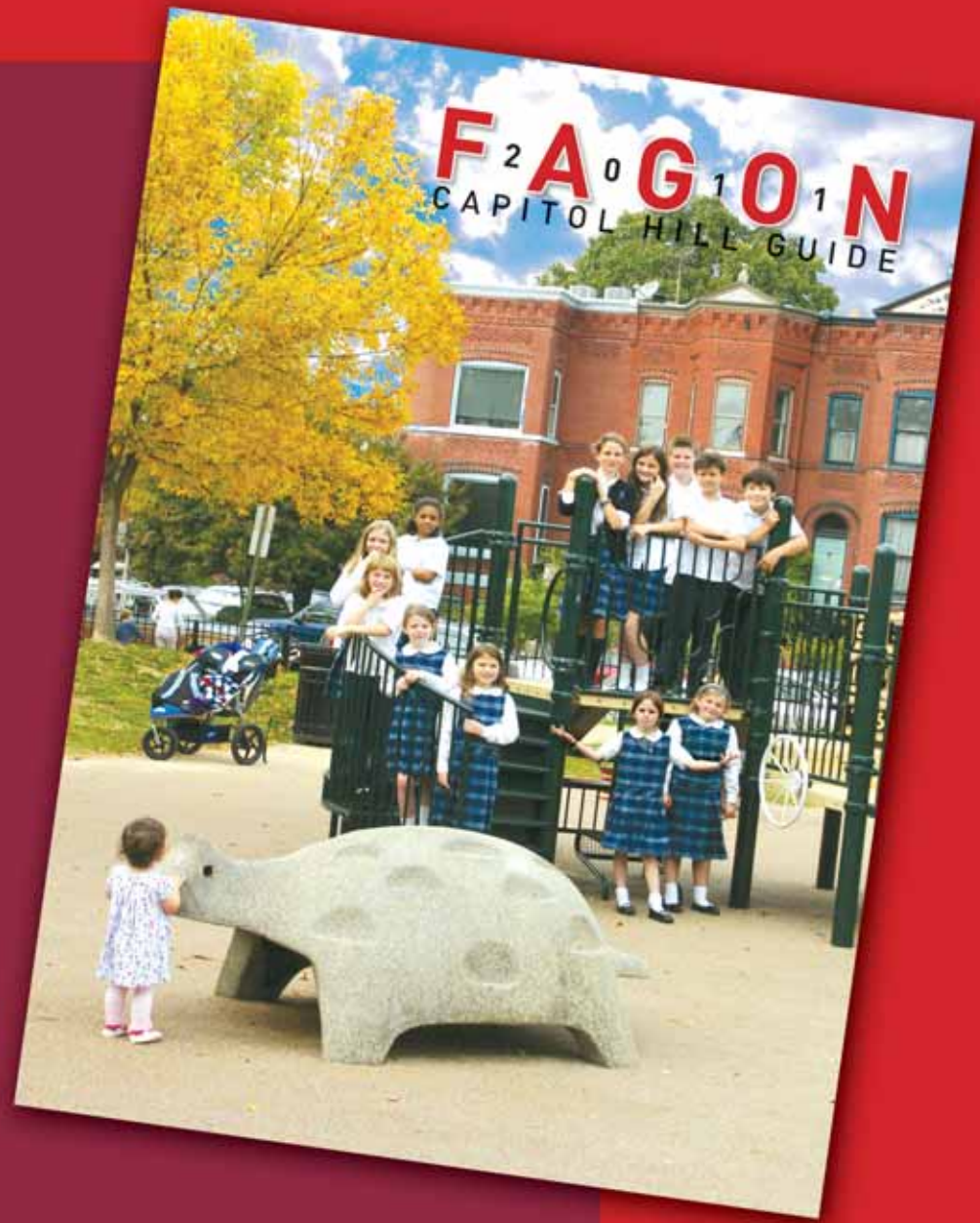
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