



February 23, 2022

The Honorable Muriel Bowser
John A. Wilson Building
1350 Pennsylvania Avenue, NW
Washington, DC 20004

Dear Mayor Bowser,

In 2019, the District and the Friends of Fort Dupont Ice Arena (“Fort Dupont”), the non-profit that has operated the Fort Dupont Ice Arena for 26 years, signed a Memorandum of Understanding (MOU) confirming the final terms under which the city would construct a new, 2-rink arena. The Council subsequently reviewed and amended the MOU in passing the District’s FY 2020 budget.

The parties agreed to work together to lower the current costs associated with the construction of the 2-rink facility. Those were the two key terms of the agreement — and, equally important, mutual goals: lower the costs for a 2-rink facility and include Fort Dupont as a partner¹.

Fort Dupont met its initial obligation under the agreement by raising over \$1,300,000 by March, 2020 to trigger the October 2020 “shovel in the ground” target date set by the District. That milestone is still unscheduled and, regrettably, the clear and documented record shows the District has breached the agreement.

Fort Dupont has not been afforded a substantive role in the process. For example, even after the intervention of Chairman Mendelson, the city has never provided Fort Dupont with a complete budget to review for comments and suggestions. Instead of reducing costs, the District has increased them.

¹ “The District will review the current design plan for the Ice Arena Project to identify opportunities to reduce the cost of the Project ...The District will actively engage FFD [Friends of Fort Dupont] in the design review process and seek FFD’s input on how to modify the Project design to reduce the estimated Project costs and meet the needs of current and future uses and users.” 2/19/2019 MOU Article II

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It's well established that a 2-rink recreational ice arena can be constructed for about \$15,000,000 (~\$150 per square foot) in 12 to 18 months. The initial approved budget for Fort Dupont's new rinks was \$15,000,000. Numerous independent appraisals and cost estimates will support these figures.

Nevertheless, last week, District officials advised Fort Dupont that the cost estimate for our now *single-rink* facility has exploded to \$37,500,000, with \$6,000,000 currently unfunded and an uncertain construction start date or schedule; the city's previous 12 to 18 month construction period estimate is now a "best guess" at 27 months.

To provide context, the cost estimate for this one-sheet facility is approximately \$700 per square foot – equivalent to a luxury New York City skyscraper. The Fort Dupont Board has direct experience in building, owning and operating over 28 rinks. We know of no recreational ice rink in the country that has a cost per square foot that approaches this level. We have been given virtually no details about the specifics other than the following: The cost estimate for the "ice plant" (ice-making equipment and piping) is \$3.6 million. We have direct experience purchasing and installing such equipment, including in the last year, and have NEVER exceeded \$1.5 million for a 2-rink ice plant. Having been denied access to the budget, we cannot endorse the District's cost figures based on our knowledge of reasonable costs for comparable projects.

This latest action by the city compels Fort Dupont to notify the District that it has breached the terms of the 2019 MOU. Fort Dupont cannot support or justify this proposed use of taxpayers' money. **The District is planning half the project for double its original cost.**

As a result, we will not agree to the city's current plan to demolish our building next month. We have no confidence that the city will actually replace the rink, and we can't risk that for the children we serve. We will continue to operate the rink as we have with a commitment to the Kids On Ice® programs and the children whose lives have been transformed in the safe and uplifting haven we provide in the District's most underserved Wards.

The District's commitment to this project and the unmatched access to ice sports and the opportunities for personal growth and achievement we offer the District's children has been spotty at best, as the attached timeline highlights. Fort Dupont, a small non-profit Board run by volunteers, has always been in a weak position, forced to accept whatever the city proposed. That's why we were hopeful that the clear language and obvious intent of the 2019 MOU meant we were finally on a path to a new 2-rink facility that would serve thousands of kids well for years to come.

The rink and our programs have survived since 1996 because of the commitment and dedication of the Fort Dupont team and the communities, parents and children we serve. The road forward has been made more difficult by the District's failure to fulfill the terms of the MOU, but we are committed to finding a path forward and providing the opportunities our kids cherish.

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We continue to be mystified that the city doesn't believe in this project. Fort Dupont has a 26-year successful track record. Our Kids on Ice® programs have transformed the lives of over 20,000 children, primarily from Wards 7 & 8. We put kids from all wards on the ice together, where the common denominator is "everybody falls down, get up and keep going." Sounds like an important life lesson.

District officials and Fort Dupont's dedicated volunteers and staff should be working together to achieve the updated ice facility the kids deserve and need.

Sincerely,

Friends of Fort Dupont Board of Directors