

The Proposed Multiuse Facility and our Neighbors

by Paul LaFollette, Editor Faculty Herald

On March 1, the Stadium Stompers, the Black Clergy of Philadelphia and Vicinity, and the NAACP hosted a town hall meeting at George Washington Carver High School to discuss Temple's plans for a new stadium in North Philadelphia. An estimated 400 people including residents of the neighborhood, Temple students, and Temple faculty joined the hosts. Absent were any representatives of Temple's administration, in spite of invitations issued to President Richard Englert and Patrick O'Connor, the Chairman of the university's the Board of Trustees.

The speakers were uniformly opposed to the creation of a stadium. Much of the commentary from neighbors and community leaders was centered on their sense that Temple has made no meaningful effort to have dialogue with the community. While there have been some small meetings with selected members of the community, there has thus far been no attempt by the administration to have conversation with all of those whose neighborhood and lives will be affected by this proposed stadium. Pastor Jay B. Broadnax, President of the Black Clergy of Philadelphia and Vicinity expressed a view that was echoed by many of the other speakers when he decried the "disempowerment of people in our community and the lack of inclusion in the process" and the "spirit of arrogance that suggests that powerful institutions can just assert political and economic will by encroaching on communities."

On March 3, Temple issued invitations to a meeting to be held March 6. The March 6 meeting began with President Englert attempting to read a multi-page statement. His statement was quickly interrupted by protesters who began chanting "no new stadium," drowning out Englert's voice and resulting in his leaving the meeting. Leaders of the Stadium Stompers group attempted to quiet the crowd unsuccessfully. Some of those present later suggested that the disruption was a measure of how many people were upset because they believed that this would be an opportunity for dialogue, and they interpreted the prepared statement as one more interaction in which Temple was telling them what would happen rather than listening to their concerns and negotiating. One person who attended the March 6 meeting pointed out that the neighborhood meeting on March 1 was the third such meeting over the past three years, and that representatives of Temple's administration have attended none of them. President Englert expressed disappointment after the aborted meeting, but vowed to "continue talking to our neighbors."