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FACILITY MANAGER

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VENUECONNECT DESCENDS ON TORONTO



# TRANSFORMING A NEIGHBORHOOD THROUGH INNOVATIVE PARTNE

This summer, Audi Field, Major League Soccer's (MLS) newest stadium, is scheduled to open in Washington, D.C.'s Buzzard Point neighborhood. It will serve as the new home for D.C. United, U.S. Soccer's most decorated franchise, and as a venue for concerts, cultural events, and community activities. Through an innovative public-private partnership project, this state-of-the-art, 20,000-seat stadium has already begun transforming Buzzard Point from an isolated industrial area into a vibrant mixed-use neighborhood serving as a new destination within the city and repositioning the MLS franchise in the process.

After decades of under-investment and neglect, Buzzard Point lacked critical infrastructure and was littered by vacant and under-utilized properties and poor aesthetics. It was not until D.C. United and the D.C. government boldly identified Buzzard Point in 2013 as the new home for D.C. United that developers looked at the surrounding parcels with anticipation. Combined with a stakeholder-driven and forward-looking urban design plan, and near immediate action on improving the transportation and utility infrastructure, Audi Field suddenly changed perceptions and jump-started interest in future possibilities.



# OOD AND AN MLS FRANCHISE RSHIPS: **THE D.C. UNITED STORY**

By Sanath Kalidas, PMP, LEED AP



# TRANSFORMING A NEIGHBORHOOD AND AN MLS FRANCHISE THROUGH INNOVATIVE PARTNERSHIPS: THE D.C. UNITED STORY

## An urban design framework for the neighborhood

In conjunction with the stadium initiative, the District of Columbia sought to develop and define a new vision for Buzzard Point. The Buzzard Point Vision Framework + Design Review Guide created by the District provides the planning and urban design foundation to help shape development. The vision is for a medium- to high-density mixed-use waterfront neighborhood with strong connections to nearby areas and attractions like the Anacostia River and Nationals Park.

The stadium is configured to fit within the urban grid to maximize circulation. One of its key design features is Audi Drive, a flexible corridor for vehicles and pedestrians that provides a vital neighborhood link through the stadium site. The corridor will serve as a linear extension of the plaza during stadium events.

## Collaboration between the District and D.C. United

To bring this vision to fruition, the District of Columbia entered into a public-private partnership with D.C. United. The District retained ownership of the property and served as the developer for the horizontal infrastructure, while D.C. United were the developer for the vertical construction of the \$200 million stadium. At the end of the lease term, the District will own the stadium facility.

The District of Columbia's development management team is comprised of the Office of the Deputy Mayor for Planning and Economic Development (DMPED) and the Department of General Services (DGS).

In its role as horizontal infrastructure developer, the District acquired land from multiple property owners and worked with permitting agencies to consolidate several parcels including portions of public streets into one 489,869 square-foot record lot. In addition, the District remediated the site, demolished existing buildings and structures, and upgraded site utilities. The infrastructure and public realm improvements undertaken by the District will not exceed the \$150 million cap approved by the D.C. City Council.

Tom Hunt, President of Business Operations at D.C. United, spoke

to the value of the new venue: "It's been a long-term focus for the club and ownership group to build a venue that can serve as a home for soccer in the nation's capital. Audi Field is another major step for D.C. United as we enter a transformative and promising era for the club. We are excited to mark a new chapter in D.C. United history by giving the fans and community a new state-of-the-art, soccer-specific stadium."

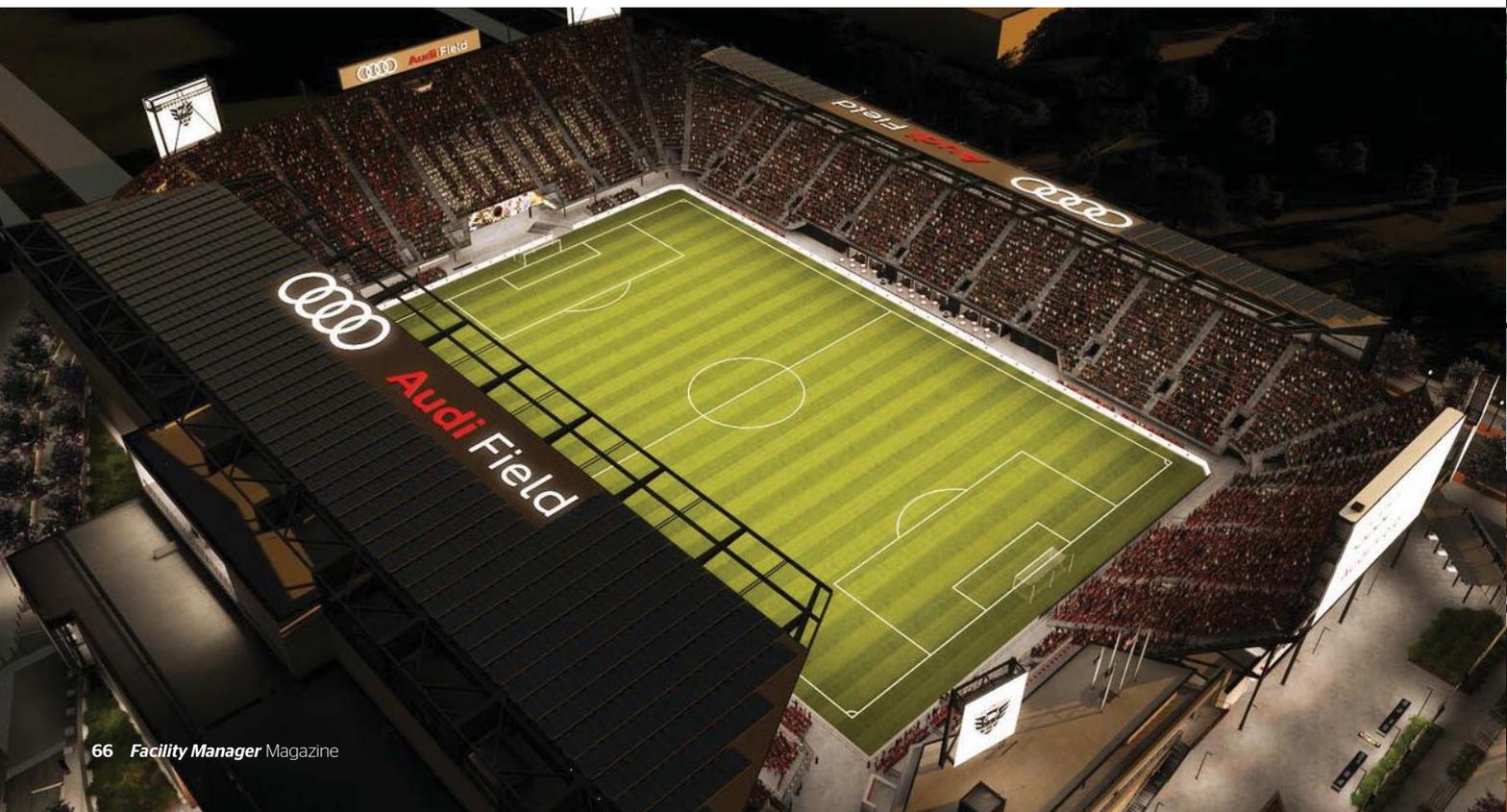
Finally, the development agreement allows for on-site ancillary real estate development to supplement the stadium. D.C. United plans to develop a mix of retail, commercial, and hotel uses that will help fill in Buzzard Point's additional vacant properties.

## Innovative green financing and leadership in sustainability

MLS's commitment to greener goals helps identify ways to reduce the carbon footprint and raise awareness about environmental issues throughout the soccer community. The greening of the game will encourage MLS clubs, players, partners, and fans to create a healthier environment. Additionally, the District's Sustainable D.C. initiative focuses on making the nation's capital the country's healthiest, greenest, most livable city by 2032.

In line with these goals, the District Department of Energy and Environment (DOEE) provided a \$25 million funding package for the installation of state-of-the-art energy and water efficiency measures, such as an 884 kW solar array and storm water retention systems at Audi Field. These measures are funded through DOEE's Property Assessed Clean Energy (DC PACE) program, DC's innovative green funding solution that operates through a public-private partnership, allowing local lenders to fund environmentally beneficial projects at no cost to taxpayers. This tool spurs economic development while providing substantial environmental benefits for the city. This funding package, made possible through a partnership with Eagle Bank, marks the program's largest single note issued to date.

Ketan Gada, Project Director for DMPED said, "The strategic partnership with D.C. United for PACE financing will not only allow



the District of Columbia to green Audi Field, it will create opportunities for local businesses and high-quality green jobs for D.C. residents.”

“D.C. United are committed to building an environmentally responsible, world-class stadium,” Hunt added. “As the first stadium to use PACE financing, we are excited to make Audi Field a national leader in environmental performance and green community benefits.”

Additionally, the project team incorporated sustainability principles including using recycled material, landscape buffers, increased tree canopies, and storm water management techniques in the stadium design to achieve LEED Gold certification.

### Repositioning D.C. United within its league

The new venue will replace RFK Stadium as D.C. United’s home after 22 seasons. The match-day experience for the team’s loyal fan base will be taken to new heights with Audi Field’s premium areas, including 31 luxury suites, an expansive rooftop patio view of Washington, D.C.’s captivating landmarks, a 10,000 square-foot indoor lounge, and more. The team designed the suites at Audi Field to foster community—a meeting place for fans prior to kickoff and throughout the match in a world-class venue. From the fan plaza outside the main entrance to the rooftop patio and a re-imagined team store, Audi Field was designed with the fan experience in mind. The experience will extend far beyond the seats and game-day excitement.

According to Bloomberg, Audi Field will likely help raise the team’s valuation to \$500 million—up significantly from Forbes’ 2017 figure of \$230 million. The 2017 valuation ranked D.C. United 11th among the 23 MLS teams. With the projected valuation, naming rights, and a multi-million-dollar sponsorship, D.C. United are well-positioned to move to the top of the league.

### Catalyst for future development

Audi Field was envisioned as a powerful catalyst not just for the team, but the neighborhood’s growth—and indeed it is proving to be

that catalyst. After decades on the sideline, Buzzard Point has seven development projects in play delivering five million square feet of residential, retail, office, and hotel space.

Audi Field, in conjunction with its associated infrastructure improvements and development projects, has already begun transforming Buzzard Point into a pedestrian-friendly and environmentally sustainable community. More specifically, it is becoming a residentially focused neighborhood connected to an enhanced waterfront public realm. The plazas and open spaces created by the stadium are establishing a green network of parks and waterfront trails that enrich the emerging neighborhood with critical amenities—a public plaza and community space with concessionaires, food trucks, local band performances, a children’s zone, and farmers markets.

Proposed uses for the parcel adjacent to the stadium and future transit systems will continue to spur mixed-use development within surrounding neighborhoods, improving quality of life for existing residents and revitalizing the community by retaining current residents and attracting new ones to the area. All of this work will of course spur economic activity. The new stadium is projected to generate \$1.6 billion in total economic activity. Additionally, it will support 1,059 full-time equivalent jobs and generate \$65 million in fiscal benefits on an annual basis.

In all, the numerous moving parts and aspects of Audi Field’s planning, design, and construction have set new standards of excellence in stakeholder collaboration, leadership, and community participation. To put it simply: Audi Field is redefining Buzzard Point. **FM**

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