

SEATTLE TIMES

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Editorial: Judges spot a fast-track deal on Sodo arena

Judicial curiosity is stirred by the intense prior planning between Seattle City Hall and the developer of a proposed Sodo sports arena. An interesting line of inquiry.

Seattle Times Editorial

MEMORANDUM of Understanding. To say the very least.

Three judges of the state Court of Appeals appeared to be on to the wink-wink, nudge-nudge mode of the proposal to build a new sports arena in Sodo.

The question is whether an agreement between Seattle City Hall and a developer to build the arena raced ahead of state environmental laws. Was a legal requirement turned into a pro formairitual?

What the judges noticed, as reported by Seattle Times reporter Lynn Thompson, was the fast and furious efforts to get ready to build an arena in Sodo. Full speed ahead on the paperwork for a grand bureaucratic assumption leavened with public financing.

What about state law that requires an authentic environmental review of other potential sites beyond the one owned by the developer and coveted in the official Memorandum of Understanding?

Longshore and warehouse workers who see their livelihoods in jeopardy if an arena conflicts with Port of Seattle operations raised the question in a legal challenge. A lower court ruled the city's frenzy of activity was not an issue, because the environmental review only had to be concluded before a final decision.

The case was appealed, and those judges found themselves looking at the actual plans for palace grounds, measured against hypothetical afterthoughts.

Hmm, was someone's mind already made up?

All of the premeditation came to an abrupt halt when the National Basketball Association refused to serve up a franchise — at least for now.

Still, the questions of environmental rigor, municipal credibility and mockery of state law are in question. The skeptical inquiries are welcome.