

THE INDIANAPOLIS STAR

"Where the Spirit of the Lord is, there is Liberty" II COR. 3:17

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Meeting on arena heartens disabled

Builder sought input on design

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People with disabilities said they were encouraged by a public meeting Wednesday where they could comment on access to the new Indiana Fieldhouse.

They urged planners to continue in the same vein as construction progresses.

"I thought it was pretty good," said Dave Andrews, a Mooresville resident who uses a wheelchair. "They obviously don't have everything carved in stone right now, and they seem to be sincere in getting input."

Indeed, officials said, plans for the arena are not final and changes can be made. That's why they had Wednesday's meeting at the Indiana Convention Center and continue to seek written comments.

"Ground has been broken, but that doesn't mean the design is complete," said Patrick McGarry, a consultant on the project.

"Your input today is timely and can affect and change the outcome of this facility," he said.

The 19,000-seat \$175 million Fieldhouse is to be the new home of the Indiana Pacers. It is under construction in the block between Delaware and Pennsylvania streets at Georgia Street.

It is being designed by Ellerbe Becket Architects and Engineers, one of the country's leading designers of sports facilities. Some of the arenas designed by the firm have been or continue to be the subject of legal challenges that cite inadequate accessibility.

But the firm and its supporters have said it is precisely that history that has allowed Ellerbe Becket to become expert on issues of disability access, and many in the audience seemed to agree.

"I think the arena itself is going to be great," said Barry Hunter of Greenwood, who uses a wheelchair.

"It's parking I'm worried about. It don't do any good if

the building is accessible if it's so much of a hassle getting there."

Parking is an issue that remains unresolved, officials say. So far, no location for ramped or surface parking has been identified. When it is, accessibility will be taken into account. John Klipach, director of special projects for the city, told the meeting.

Several people offered suggestions that officials said will be taken into account and possibly incorporated into the design. For example, Andrews suggested placing coat hooks lower on the restroom stall doors so people in wheelchairs could reach them.

Mark and Laura Minzes of Indianapolis said they were pleased with the foresight the meeting showed.

"I commend the group for being proactive rather than reacting to access issues," said Mark Minzes who is blind. Although the Americans with Disabilities Act is seven years old, many architects and property owners still don't take the issues into account when designing buildings, he said.

His wife agreed.

"This is where it has to start. It has to start in the design stage."

Bill Crockett, Ellerbe Becket's project manager for the Indianapolis arena, said his firm's history has benefitted the project.

ADA consultant Kevin G. McGuire agreed. McGuire, Chairman and CEO of McGuire Associates, Inc. of New York, has worked with Fieldhouse developers in addressing ADA accessibility issues in designing the new stadium. "People with disabilities in the Indianapolis community have nothing to fear with Ellerbe Becket."

The meeting itself was accessible with a ramped platform area for wheelchair users so they could see over the rest of the audience, a sign language interpreter and an instant typed transcription of the comments shown on a large screen. Initially, a scale model of the arena was covered with plexiglass, but one of the officials removed that upon Minzies' request so he could use his hands to get an image of what the building will look like.