

The Impact of the World Cup on Philadelphia

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Introduction

REI's initial look at the impacts of the 2026 FIFA World Cup highlighted activities and perceptions in Vancouver BC. This article will look at the impact on one of the US host cities, Philadelphia PA. As in Vancouver, there are many unknowns or closely held projections, along with likely exaggerations or minimizations in Philly, but the atmosphere seems fairly different from that portrayed in Vancouver: Philadelphia is nothing if not a city of avid and irrational sports fans; we are impressed to be chosen and excited for the party, if oblivious to any potential costs.

As I began to research the anticipated local impacts, I also began to wonder if the topic suddenly seems hot only because I'm writing this article, or if Philly suddenly woke up to what's about to happen. These days every gathering and club meeting features a speaker on 2026, City

departments, non-profits managing the events, and businesses interested in profiting/participating are multiplying like bunnies, and 2026 is in the news frequently. It's not just FIFA's World Cup in Philly, we're also a key national host for the Semiquincentennial (see how I used that word like it was always part of my vocabulary? Microsoft doesn't even recognize it!), and we have the Major League Baseball All-Stars game, basketball's March Madness, a series of TED talks, and the PGA Championship that year too. How big a deal is all this? And how are we going to manage it?



Fan Fest Location

City Council held hearings on the topic just before Thanksgiving, taking a break from fighting about whether or not to put a new Sixers (basketball) arena in the heart of Center City. Philadelphia does in fact have a basic 2026 plan – that's how we were chosen as one of the sixteen World Cup cities. The private non-profit that put together our World Cup bid, [Philadelphia Soccer 2026](#), pitched the Eagle's football stadium for matches (Lincoln Financial Field or "the Linc", which will be renamed "Philadelphia Stadium" for the duration due to FIFA sponsorship rules), Lemon Hill in Fairmont Park for our massive on-going outdoor "Fan Fest" location, (no one knows where this is, but they will!) and our transit system, SEPTA, to get between these two and everywhere else. These are so ready that the head of [Philadelphia Soccer 2026, Meg Kane, has said](#) "the infrastructure is done." That was, however, before SEPTA was de-funded by the State and the size of the overall tab began to be known.

Structure & Leadership

The anomalous group of events that will hit Philadelphia in 2026 will reach into every corner of the city, both organizationally and physically. Taking a step back, let's review who's running what, what they plan to invest, the attendees expected, and the potential economic returns. Because the Semiquincentennial will be intertwined with the FIFA World Cup, I'll include a separate look at these factors for the Semiquincentennial.

FIFA World Cup Organizations

| Organization Name | Chair | CEO |
|--|---|--|
| Philadelphia Soccer 2026 | Dan Hilferty, Comcast Chair, replacing founder David L. Cohen, Comcast & City | Meg Kane |
| Philadelphia Convention & Visitor's Bureau | Karen Buchholtz, Comcast | Greg Caren |
| Visit Philadelphia | Manuel Stamatakis, Temple Univ. | Angela Val |
| City of Philadelphia | Cherrelle Parker, Mayor | Jazelle Jones, City Rep for Special Events Michael Newmuis, 2026 Director |
| City Council | Kenyatta Johnson, Council President | Isaiah Thomas, Legislative Oversight Committee Chair |
| Philadelphia Chamber of Commerce | Greg Deavens, President, from Independence Health | Chellie Cameron, former airport CEO |
| Philadelphia Union (Soccer Team) | | Jay Sugarman, Chair & Principal Owner |

[Philadelphia Soccer 2026](#), the private non-profit that pitched our bid, was initially chaired by David L. Cohen (currently US ambassador to Canada), and is now chaired by Dan Hilferty, the Chair and CEO of Comcast Spectacor. Cohen, a lawyer, former Managing Director of Philadelphia, and an officer of Comcast, understood that Philly basically met FIFA's requirements. Meg Kane, the [Philadelphia Soccer 2026](#) CEO, said the pitch team made [five main points](#): Philly has:

- Substantial experience managing large events, such as the Papal visit, both national political conventions, the NFL Draft, the Eagles Superbowl parade, the sole Trump-Harris debate, and others.
- Amazing soccer venues. All the FIFA matches will be held in NFL venues, but some need more work than others. The Eagles' Lincoln Financial Field ("the Linc") already has natural grass, is large enough to hold all but the final matches, and is LEED Platinum certified as required by FIFA. Additionally, Philadelphia has Subaru Park, the Philadelphia Union's home stadium, and other locations that can be used for practice such as the Eagles Novacare training complex and University stadia.
- Hospitality and public transit. FIFA was impressed by Philly's transit system, SEPTA, which can get one from City Hall, in the center of the city, to the Linc in 11 minutes. Along with our suburbs and region we have sufficient hotel rooms, and we are well known for our excellent cuisine, both the high-brow and low-brow versions.
- Walkability and compactness. Central Philadelphia was built before cars, and it expanded largely with row homes, so everything is close.
- Fanatic sports fandom. We have five national-level sports teams, and soccer is the growth sport. Our avid fans can connect across cultures, particularly in soccer.

The [Philadelphia Convention & Visitors Bureau](#)'s CEO Greg Caren opines that each of six games will consume [26,000 room nights](#) over about three days. Philadelphia itself has 14,400 rooms, many of which will also be in use for the Semiquincentennial, so it anticipates filling regional rooms as well.

[Visit Philadelphia](#) is the region's official leisure tourism marketing agency. It is managing part of the City's budget for the World Cup event; it has raised \$14.6 million to date from private sources and hopes to raise a total of \$32.6 million. It then seeks an additional \$23.4 million from the City and State, a total of \$56 million. [These dollars](#) will go toward event costs, marketing, beautification, and ambassadors. Beautification likely includes things like washing the Art Museum's "Rocky Steps", and creating the Lemon Hill Fan Fest venue; updating SEPTA cars and stations would be a real plus. The overall budget for the World Cup is expected to be [over \\$100 million](#), with other portions handled by other groups.

[Philadelphia](#)'s mayor, Cherrelle Parker, has appointed a "2026 Director", Michael Newmuis. He has

not opined on how much the City will budget for 2026 and how much it will request from the Commonwealth. Funds from both of these are aimed at “public safety infrastructure”; the City, and potentially the State, will be holding the bag for most policing, traffic, and trash collection costs.

[Philadelphia City Council](#) member Isaiah Thomas, who chairs the legislative oversight committee, anticipates a need for \$50-100 million from the City and State for all events except the World Cup. Meg Kane of [Philadelphia Soccer 2026](#) opines that the world cup events themselves will require “[north of \\$100 million.](#)” The City has so far allocated \$3.5 million for improvements at Lemon Hill, the location of the outdoor Fan Fest for the World Cup, and [Philadelphia Soccer 2026](#) has just requested [another \\$6 million.](#)

THE SEMIQUINCENTENNIAL

| Name | Chair | CEO |
|-----------------------------------|---|--|
| US Semiquincentennial | Rosie Rios, former US | |
| America250 | Rosie Rios, former US Treasurer Patrick Burns, with 6 living Governors and ex- | Rosie Rios, former US Treasurer |
| Philadelphia250 | Ed Rendell, former Mayor & Governor | Danielle Dileo Kim |
| City of Philadelphia City Council | Cherrille Parker, Mayor Kenyatta Johnson, Council President | Jazelle Jones, City Rep for Special Events Michael Newmuis, 2026 Director Isaiah Thomas, Legislative Oversight Committee Chair |

Philadelphia Chamber of
Commerce

Greg Deavens, President,
from Independence Health

Chellie Cameron, former
airport CEO

In 2016 congress established the [U.S. Semiquincentennial Commission](#) to plan and orchestrate the national celebration; it is non-partisan, appointed by leadership of both parties, and includes 8 members of Congress, 12 ex-officio members from relevant branches of the government, and 16 private citizens. It is chaired by Rosie Rios, former Treasurer of the US. [America250](#) is the non-profit that supports the Commission, also chaired by Rosie Rios; it focusses on inclusive personal involvement in the celebration.

Pennsylvania's official agency is [America250PA](#); it also focusses on being inclusive and making this an EPIC celebration: Educate, Preserve, Innovate and Celebrate. Potentially the national and state focusses will change due to the recent election.

[Philadelphia250](#) is a regional non-profit that aims to create a collective, inclusive moment for the city, the country and the world in 2026. As Philadelphia is the place where the celebrated Declaration of Independence was inspired, written, and signed, it has a key role to play. Per its website:

“PHILADELPHIA250 is an independent nonprofit organization formed to create a people-driven movement so that 2026 is a collective, inclusive moment for the City of Philadelphia, the country and the world. Our “[By the People, For all People](#)” approach provides the structure needed for multiple diverse stakeholders to achieve common goals. PHILADELPHIA250 initiatives are organized by contemporary applications of themes from the Declaration of Independence – revolutionary actions, pursuit of happiness, people’s histories, and shared prosperity.

“PHILADELPHIA250 is charged with celebrating a document penned by a nation whose aspirations shrouded deep atrocities, contradictions, and hypocrisies. So we know we have challenging, uncomfortable work ahead. Yet our team is committed to progress, and helping create an inclusive America that promises safety, happiness, and the security of rights for all, as promised by the founding ideals of equality and justice as outlined in the Declaration of Independence.

“We will listen to and learn from those who are directly affected by injustice and racism. We promise to lift up the voices of our fellow Americans that have been silenced for too long. PHILADELPHIA250 stands for the guiding values expressed almost 250 years ago.

“The 250th Legacy Community is a group of organizations large and small across the city, united in a common pledge to implement a new initiative, or accelerate and scale the reach of an existing program, that will result in significant, tangible and positive community impact by the 250th anniversary in 2026.”

Philadelphia 250 focusses on individual and neighborhood activation and grassroots change and

commitment; its events are not intended to be huge central events, which are the purview of Welcome America.

[Welcome America Inc.](#), or Wawa Welcome America for its July 4th activities, is a private non-profit that partners with the City for the traditional July 4th celebrations, including an Avenue of the Arts Block Party, Juneteenth Celebrations, Hispanic Fiesta, Wawa's annual Hoagie Day and Party on the Parkway, and the free July Fourth concert and fireworks along the Benjamin Franklin Parkway. It claims to have the largest celebrations in the country annually, and anticipates participation to double in size for the Semiquincentennial.

Locations and Infrastructure:

[The infrastructure is the easy part, Kane says](#), because Philly already has it. That's not to say new hotels or businesses won't spring up in advance of the 2026 World Cup. But Doha's immense burden to build — stadiums, accommodation, grocery stores, you name it — won't be felt the same way in Philadelphia. The FIFA capacity requirements are met.

The Stadium



Philadelphia pitched its Eagles football stadium, Lincoln Field, for the World Cup matches. Philly's Linc has a capacity of 62,000, which, per FIFA, is enough for all but the opening, semifinal, and final matches. The Linc has most requirements generally in place but [will need to add hospitality](#), VIP, and press areas, much of them outside the stadium, increasing the ticketed perimeter.

Some of the benefits of the Linc for FIFA include:

- Personnel experienced with huge events
- Strong wi-fi capacity
- Extensive security provisions
- A grass field
- [LEED platinum rating](#)
- Transit access

Fan Fest

FIFA requires a convenient open area with concessions, huge monitors, and lots of services and support. Philadelphia [originally pitched](#) an under-construction lid over I95 at the Delaware river in Center City for this use, but its construction schedule was not going to synch with 2026.



The City moved the planned “Fan Fest” area to Lemon Hill, a section of the City’s sprawling Fairmont Park. Lemon Hill is an open area north of the Ben Franklin Parkway and the Art Museum; it currently has a number of playing fields, mostly baseball. “Philadelphia’s parks and public spaces are second to none,” [said Philadelphia Mayor Cherelle L. Parker](#). “Welcoming visitors from around the world to Lemon Hill will allow us to show off these assets like never before. Beyond the tournament, this investment will enhance the park’s infrastructure, facilities, and community engagement opportunities, making our City Safer, Cleaner, and Greener—and benefiting residents and visitors for years to come.”

[Kane says public input](#) will be sought for what park improvements should be built after 2026. “It could be a soccer pitch. It could be an improved baseball field. It could be a new playground. It could be any number of things,” she said. Kane says the goal is to have a Legacy Park open and ready for use by summer 2027.



Renderings credit Marvel Architects



Team Base Camps

Forty-eight teams will eventually compete in the FIFA World Cup, and they have to stay somewhere. FIFA plans a variety of locations and accommodations for them, called “Base Camps”; these are not necessarily tied to any of the match venue cities. The one nearest to Philadelphia will be in Wilmington, DE, a half hour drive or train ride southwest of Philadelphia. The Wilmington Base Camp

with be at the Hotel du Pont, with the team staying there practicing at the Philadelphia Union soccer team's field Subaru Park, in Chester, just south of Philadelphia.

Which team goes where is [not yet determined](#). "Teams will submit their final selections following the Final Draw for the FIFA World Cup 26. The draw, anticipated for December 2025, will reveal the geographic zones in which teams will play their group matches, further guiding their decisions regarding their respective Team Base Camp locations."

Housing & Food

Philadelphia's hotel rooms and food providers have met FIFA's requirements, although likely we will be reaching far into the region for the July 4th. Some new and informal housing will likely be created as well: I certainly expect to put an apartment in my house up on Airbnb when the time comes.

Philadelphia excels, in my opinion, on the food front, with both haute and bas cuisine. I've heard that fans will need more informal food than we have ready today, we anticipate [expanding the number of food trucks and vendors for 2026](#).

Transportation

Philadelphia's airport, inter-city train transportation, and local mass transit have met FIFA's requirements, and in fact local transit on SEPTA was one of the elements that impressed FIFA most. Meg Kane hastens to point out that "[This is not a car event, this is a walking event](#)," she said. Kane thinks one thing many Americans may need to adjust to is knowing that the World Cup requires a change in mentality for a car-heavy culture." I suspect Philadelphia will fare better on this score than many other US cities.

Amtrak provides great inter-city transport along the Northeast Corridor, specifically from Boston to New York, Philadelphia, Wilmington, Baltimore, and DC. This will allow fans to travel between matches in Boston, New York, and Philadelphia, as well as to expand hospitality opportunities if one city is full at one time.

Local transit on SEPTA is robust by US standards but hardly by global standards. SEPTA includes a cobbled-together mix of subway/elevated trains, street cars, and buses, with many lines originating in separate companies long ago. That said, it reaches most parts of the city and provides access between the Lemon Hill Fan Fest and the Linc Stadium, as well as to events, sights, and hospitality all over the City. SEPTA has good experience with accommodating large events, increasing service as needed.

Like most public transit in the US, SEPTA is not self-supporting based on fares, and since it serves an urbanized area in the corner of a largely rural state, it has difficulty raising state support. Most

recently multiple hundreds of millions of annual dollars of turnpike toll proceeds were diverted from SEPTA for other highway uses, leaving SEPTA in a “[death spiral](#)” of raising fares and cutting routes. Pennsylvania Governor Shapiro diverted funds from highway uses back to SEPTA for 6 months, but this is hardly stabilized funding. Perhaps the urgency to host the world in Philadelphia will incent the State to allow funding of SEPTA; if the World Cup leaves any legacy to Philadelphia, stabilized transit funding would be a winner.

Philadelphians love to hate SEPTA almost as much as they love to hate the City itself, and SEPTA often gives them reason. Lack of funding has led to old dirty buses, train cars and stations; the national housing crisis has led to many unhoused folks trying to live on the rolling stock or in stations, and crime on the system has increased somewhat. [Philadelphians worry about how SEPTA will look to outsiders.](#)

Anticipated Size and Economic Impact

How will the World Cup stack up compared to other large events in Philadelphia? I garnered the below attendee numbers from Wikipedia, however it is notoriously difficult to pinpoint the number of attendees at an event, and even more difficult if the event lasts more than one day, involves multiple locations, and attracts both locals and visitors.

| PAST EVENTS | YEAR | EST. ATTENDEES | EST COST |
|------------------------------|------|----------------|----------|
| Republican Natl Conv. | 2000 | 50,000 | |
| Phillies World Series Parade | 2008 | 2,000,000 | |
| | | | |
| Eagles Super Bowl Parade | 2018 | 700,000 | |

| | | | |
|---|--------------|---------|---------------|
| Semiquincentennial | All Year | | \$15 million |
| NCAA 1 st & 2 nd Rounds | March 20, 22 | 128,000 | |
| Art Philly What Now | May 10 days | | |
| FIFA World Cup | June-July | 500,000 | \$262 million |

MLB All Star Game

July

50,000

The actual economic impact is even harder to quantify, but estimates are in the works. “Each one of these (six) matches will consume about 26,000 room nights,” [Philadelphia Convention & Visitors Bureau President and CEO Gregg Caren said](#). “To put that in perspective, the city proper has 14,400 rooms, in the city and county of Philadelphia. So you think about what that immediate impact is going to have on our collar counties and our partners in South Jersey and out to the western suburbs. The impact is huge. [Visitor spending is expected to reach between \\$147 and \\$262 million](#).” Those funds certainly wouldn’t hurt amid lingering [questions about the city’s spending and saving plans](#). Mega-events can also [bring displacement](#), recent history shows. And [public participation](#) in the hosting process is often closed or inequitable. How susceptible Philly is to the destructive dynamics of hosting the World Cup is an open question.

Is the FIFA World Cup Good for Philadelphia?

Unlike in Vancouver, I have not found any public opinion polls taken in Philly about hosting the World Cup, so I can’t assert any definitive views of Philadelphians. Philadelphia does, however, have some strong tendencies: it thinks of itself as a lousy city, and can’t believe anyone sees it differently. At one point we considered the tourism tagline “Philadelphia: it’s not as bad as Philadelphians say it is.” And Philly loves professional sports. Together, I sense this means that Philadelphians are impressed that the FIFA World Cup chose us, and look forward to any big sports party. The one area where the [public typically expresses concern and has here is on traffic, parking, and transit](#): much of SEPTA’s rolling stock and stations on the line that goes to the stadium are old and in need of work. And don’t even think about taking my parking spot!

Little information has been made public about the costs or benefits of the World Cup, particularly in light of the fact that Philly’s biggest match will take place on July 4th when we were planning something else big already. Will the synergy take us to new heights, or will the World Cup destroy us? Citizens do not yet expect themselves to be paying for, or benefitting from, the World Cup; at most they may be worried about traffic jams. Increased taxes have not been proposed; spending priorities have not yet been considered. Only very general information about potential benefits has been publicized: there will be a big month-long party and lots of foreign visitors and this will somehow be good for Philadelphia. I personally believe it will be good for Philadelphia: raising our global profile is likely to bring residents and business. Even if soccer isn’t our favorite sport, it is in the rest of the globe.

[Meg Kane said](#) after participating in Doha “What I loved about the outside presentation facilities was that these captured the authenticity of Doha, especially those at Souq Waqif. If I had one hope for hosting the World Cup in Philadelphia is that we introduce the world to the Philadelphia we know. “If that means live shots at John’s Roast Pork on Snyder, we’ll make it happen. If that means CNN

broadcasts live from Fishtown, Bartram’s Garden, or the River Wards, let’s do it. If Italian TV decides the Italian Market is its home away from home for a month, let’s go for it. We want the world to see Philadelphia as the gem it is — and it isn’t all in Center City.”