

Should the USOC Bid on the 2024 Olympic Games?

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Overview

The United States Olympic Committee (USOC) has not hosted an Olympic Games since the 2002 Salt Lake City Winter Olympics and it has not put in a bid for the Olympic Games since the Chicago 2016 bid led to a loss in the first round, even though it had the best technical evaluation (Berkes, 2009). In fact, the New York City bid for the 2012 Games also resulted in a loss in the first round of bidding (USOC Encourages Chicago To Bid For 2024 Summer Olympics, But City Hall Says No, Thanks, 2013). Several factors went into these tremendous losses for the USOC. One reason was the revenue-sharing conflict between the USOC and the International Olympic Committee (IOC) (Associated Press, 2012). With that issue seemingly solved and at bay, the USOC can feel more comfortable in the bidding process on some level. However, the other complications that have recently been brought into the spotlight have caused other National Olympic Committees (NOCs) to not bid, and even pull out of the Olympic bidding process (Austrian Olympic Committee, German Olympic Sports Confederation, Swedish Olympic Committee, & Swiss Olympic Association, 2014). The IOC is in discussions of changing aspects of the bidding process in order to bring in more bids, from bigger, better cities.

The question reflected in this paper is that given the history of the USOC and the Olympic bidding process, as well as the bidding process complications and the possible changes to come within the bidding process, should the USOC bid on the 2024 Olympic Games? Furthermore, if the USOC was to bid, what city has the strongest chance of winning the bid? Currently, the USOC is vetting US cities for the 2024 Olympic Games. The four contending cities were announced in June 2014 and include Washington D.C., Boston, San Francisco, and Los Angeles. This paper will discuss why, if certain changes are made to the Olympic bidding

process, the USOC should bid for the 2024 Olympic Games, and that Washington D.C., based on its infrastructure, its American history, and the economic and legacy impact, has the best chance of winning the Olympic bid.

The Bidding Process

According to the IOC website, the bidding process for the Olympic Games is broken down into two phases: Phase I - Applicant Phase and Phase II - Candidature Phase (All About the Bid Process, 2013). Each phase takes about one year to complete, and the winning bid city is picked seven years prior to the Olympic Games. Thus, the Applicant Phase process begins 9 years before the Olympic games with NOCs putting forth their applicant bid cities (All About the Bid Process, 2013). Sometimes, as is the current case for the USOC with the 2024 Olympic bid, NOCs will have to vet multiple cities that are interested in hosting the Olympic Games before the Applicant Phase begins since NOCs are only allowed to have one bid city during the bidding process (The Olympic Charter, 2013, pp. 68-69).

During the Applicant Phase, Applicant Cities are required to answer an IOC questionnaire and submit their answers, called an Application File, to the IOC. The Application File is then studied by an IOC-appointed Working Group. This Group...carries out a detailed risk assessment and makes a thorough and detailed report to the IOC Executive Board, which is then responsible for selecting the cities that will advance to Phase II. The cities selected become the Candidate Cities (All About the Bid Process, 2013).

During the Candidature Phase, the Candidate Cities are required to answer another set of IOC questions and submit a detailed game plan of the city's Olympic Games bid, which goes into their Candidature Files (All About the Bid Process, 2013). Along with these documents, the cities must have legally binding guarantee letters that insure the Olympic Games will be fully financed (The Olympic Charter, 2013, p. 70). All of the documents in the Candidature File are then analyzed by an IOC Evaluation Commission and that Commission visits each city before producing a risk assessment report, which is given to all IOC members (All About the Bid Process, 2013). Along with these files, several presentations are made by the Candidate Cities throughout Phase II before giving the final presentation to IOC members on election day (All About the Bid Process, 2013). After the presentations, a report is given by the Evaluation Commission Chair and then the IOC members conduct a secret vote, electing the host city for the Olympic Games (All About the Bid Process, 2013).

Olympic Bidding Conflicts

The bidding process for the Olympic Games uses many of a bid city's resources causing potential financial hardship, as well as allows for zero-accountability in the voting process, therefore making bidding on the Olympic Games a very risky opportunity for any city. For example, Chicago 2016 spent approximately \$100 million just to bid for the Olympic games, before it lost to Rio de Janeiro, even though it presented a better infrastructure and financially capable plan to IOC members (Smith, 2009).

Recently four Western European NOCs published a report analyzing three key issues within the Olympic Bidding process: the process of bidding, the costs of the games, and the scale of the

games. Each key issue was then broken down and analyzed in relation to the Winter Olympics bidding experience of these NOCs, but they note that these findings could be applied to the Summer Games as well. According to the four NOCs, this report was conducted because

public and politics seemingly fear the high costs of bidding for and hosting the Games, especially in the aftermath of the increase of costs that was witnessed in Sochi as well as concerns relating to human rights and sustainability. The situation is aggravated by the media picturing mistrust in the IOC" (Austrian Olympic Committee, German Olympic Sports Confederation, Swedish Olympic Committee, & Swiss Olympic Association, 2014, p. 4).

The 2022 Winter Olympic bid is already suffering from these issues with only Oslo, Norway, Almaty, Kazakhstan, and Beijing, China in the running for the 2022 Olympic Games (2022 OLYMPIC WINTER GAMES Current Bid Process, 2014). Many other viable bid city options for the 2022 Winter Olympics either didn't bid or dropped out of the running after the high cost of Sochi was revealed and the lack of what the IOC calls "legacy".

It is clear that these key issues need to be addressed in order for the Olympics to continue. "The EB [Executive Board] clearly formulates the reformation of the bidding procedure as a major prerequisite to ensure unique Olympic Games in the future. The bidding procedure shall be reviewed 'to make it more appealing and more flexible' and 'to allow for more diversity'" (Austrian Olympic Committee, German Olympic Sports Confederation, Swedish Olympic Committee, & Swiss Olympic Association, 2014, p. 3). This is after bidding procedures have already been reformed due to the corruption and bribery scandals during the late 1990s, early 2000s. In 1998, it was found that the Salt Lake City Olympic Committee gave roughly \$632,000

gifts or bribes to IOC officials in the form of "scholarships", which seemingly helped Salt Lake City secure its bid for the 2002 Winter Olympics (Olympics corruption probe ordered, 1998). "Marc Hodler, a member of the International Olympic Committee (IOC) executive board, said there had been abuses in voting for the 1996 Atlanta Games, the choice of Sydney for the 2000 Olympics as well as Salt Lake City for the 2002 Winter Olympics" (Olympic 'vote buying' scandal , 1998). These scandals caused the IOC to reprimand or excuse members of the IOC who participated in these scandal, as well as restructure the bidding process, including limiting visits from IOC members, creating a formal bid policy, and putting in place new guidelines to make sure there is no more corruption or gift giving during the bidding process.

Even though these new policies and guidelines are in place to avoid bribery, the IOC still has issues with not holding IOC members accountable in the Olympic bid voting procedures. As was seen in the 2016 bid and the 2014 bid, the two cities with the worst infrastructure/technical evaluation won the Olympic Games: Sochi for the 2014 Winter Olympics and Rio de Janeiro for the 2016 Summer Olympics (Kirkpatrick, 2014). This is one of the points made in relation to the process of bidding in The Bid Experience report:

The final decision, however, is solely left to the IOC members which vote in a secret ballot. When looking at the Host City Elections of the past three bid processes it was recognized that the technical assessment of bids was not always sufficiently reflected in the voting behaviour of IOC members. Even worse, there were elections where the city with the lowest technical grades was elected Host City: as happened in 2007, when Sochi was elected Host City for the 2014 Winter Games and as also happened in 2009, when Rio de Janeiro was elected Host City for the 2016 Games (Austrian Olympic Committee,

German Olympic Sports Confederation, Swedish Olympic Committee, & Swiss Olympic Association, 2014, p. 8).

Given all of the risk Applicant and Candidate Cities are taking in bidding for the Olympic Games, it is almost pointless for a city to spend millions of dollars on bidding with no way to hold IOC members accountable for their voting decisions. In order to make bidding more appealing to cities, the IOC is stressing using the bidding process to create a "legacy" even if cities do not win the games. According to the IOC, "legacy provides the host city [or bid city] a unique opportunity to not only improve its city's infrastructure, but also improve the attitude of the people living in it by incorporating Olympic values into its policies and educating people on the importance of excellence, respect and friendship" (BIDDING FOR THE GAMES - BEYOND 2022: Legacy, 2013). The IOC further breaks legacy down into tangible legacy (new facilities, new/improved transportation infrastructure, urban upgrading, etc.) and intangible legacy (national pride, improved policies, enhanced workforce skills, environmental awareness, etc) (BIDDING FOR THE GAMES - BEYOND 2022: Legacy, 2013). Examples given are how Chicago 2016 turned their bid into World Sports Chicago, an organization focusing on enhancing youth sports and improving the quality of life through sport in Chicago (BID LEGACIES: Chicago's Sporting Legacy, 2013).

USOC Bidding Options

In order for the USOC to bid on the 2024 Olympic Games, many of the issues brought to light in the previously mentioned Bid Experience report must be addressed by the IOC in the December meeting of the 2020 Olympic Agenda. From a financial perspective, The Bid Experience report suggests shortening the bid phases and reducing international activities, restricting the

information and level of detail asked for the first bid phase to a minimum, eliminating guarantees in the first bid phase, and establishing a dialogue process with bidders to prevent one-way planning (Austrian Olympic Committee, German Olympic Sports Confederation, Swedish Olympic Committee, & Swiss Olympic Association, 2014, p. 7). The USOC is not funded by the government nor do US bid cities get much help from the federal government when bidding for the Olympics. If there was a plan in place for upgrading infrastructure, the US federal government might expedite the process for obtaining a federal grant for the upgrade, but there is no direct funding from the federal government going to the Olympic Games. Having support from the IOC would help guide the US bid cities on the best ways to use its funding for the Games, including developing legacy plans. Furthermore, revising the bidding process to cut costs for bidding cities during the Phase I would be beneficial as well due to the high risk, high competition within Phase I of bidding.

Another issue that needs to be addressed is how to hold IOC member accountable during the voting procedures. The last thing the USOC wants in the bidding process is for another technically strong bid to lose in the first round of voting after putting forth the work and the funding for bid for the games. The Bid Experience report recommends leaving room for country specific concepts in Phase I of bidding, giving more technical support in Phase I, and making technical evaluation an integral part of the final voting (Austrian Olympic Committee, German Olympic Sports Confederation, Swedish Olympic Committee, & Swiss Olympic Association, 2014, p. 8).

The cost of the games overall, is also an issue that would be necessary for the IOC to address. Many countries in the world, including the United States, are experiencing financial and economic difficulties. Adding an Olympic Games to that is a tremendous burden on any country or bid/host city. As previously mentioned, the cost of the Sochi games has scared off a lot of viable cities to host the 2022 Winter Olympics. Some suggestions that could help reduce the overall cost, or make the Games more cost effective would be transparency within the budget and financials between the NOCs, IOC, and the OCOG, having the IOC and OCOG help cover potential shortfalls, so it's not fully left on the host city, and showing the public the breakdown of the cost between public and private sectors so the public becomes educated on the cost of the games, and in return becomes more supportive of hosting the games (Austrian Olympic Committee, German Olympic Sports Confederation, Swedish Olympic Committee, & Swiss Olympic Association, 2014, pp. 9-10).

The last key issue that should be addressed in order for the USOC to bid on the 2024 Summer Games is the sustainability, environmental impact and legacy. According to the Bid Experience report, "sustainability has increasingly gained importance during the past three bid cycles. The IOC strives to make sustainability an integral part of the vision and the culture of its movement" (Austrian Olympic Committee, German Olympic Sports Confederation, Swedish Olympic Committee, & Swiss Olympic Association, 2014, p. 13). By addressing sustainability and legacy in a more official capacity within the bidding process, the cost of hosting the Olympic Games becomes much more reasonable. For example, after the 2018 Winter Olympics in PyeongChang, South Korea, one of the Olympic venues is going to be broken down and moved to a different city within the country. These kind of ideas and plans to not only use the Olympic games for

improving the host city, but other areas of the country, would greatly increase the value of hosting the Olympic Games. The US has many more resources than most countries, but still has a lot of areas of improvement. With the IOC helping to strategize and plan for sustainability, the USOC and the bidding/hosting cities can make a greater impact throughout the United States, as well as in the city/state itself.

Washington, D.C.

If these issues are met, specifically in reducing costs in the bidding process and the overall hosting of the Games, creating more value through sustainability, and restructuring the voting process, The USOC should definitely bid for the 2024 Olympics. While all four of the candidate cities (Washington, DC, Boston, San Francisco, and Los Angeles) are great choices and they could all make a great Olympic Games, Washington, D.C. seems to be the best choice for the IOC.

First, a DC 2024 Olympics would mean a regional bid incorporating Washington, D.C., Northern Virginia and Maryland (Clarke, 2014). The D.C. Metropolitan Area includes Northern Virginia and Maryland, making this a joint effort on a financial and infrastructure basis. There are three international airports in the D.C. area, as well as some of the best public transportation in the country. Furthermore D.C. is easily accessible to major East Coast cities such as New York, Philadelphia, Baltimore, etc. With D.C. being a top political city, the transportation infrastructure is already supportive of big events. The Boston Globe did a comparison between the four contending bid cities and ranked how each fared with transportation. Based on The Globe's findings, Washington, D.C. has lower congestion than Los Angeles and San Francisco, and holds

the third highest score in public transportation, only down by 10 points from the top ranked San Francisco and 5 points from second place Boston (How Boston stacks up as an Olympics host city contender, 2014). While the Globe ranks DC last of the four contending cities in air passengers at 21 million annual air passengers, it still meets the IOC requirements of "the host city [must] have 'an international airport that can handle thousands of international travelers per day' (How Boston stacks up as an Olympics host city contender, 2014).

There are also numerous prestigious universities with major sports programs throughout and near the D.C. area that can serve to support venues as well as provided knowledge and workforce to a D.C. Olympic Games. Universities include Georgetown, George Washington University, American University, University of Maryland, George Mason University, etc. Moreover, established professional sports venues within D.C. can fill venue requirements (FedEx Field, Verizon Center, and Nationals Park), and about an hour and a half away in Baltimore other professional sports facilities are available (Oriole Park at Camden Yards, M&T Bank Stadium). D.C. is also located on the Potomac River, making it easy to host any rowing competitions. According to Liz Clarke, the only venues that would need to be built are the Olympic stadium and the athlete's village and that these new facilities would be built in an area that is in need of redevelopment (2014). According to the Boston Globe study, Washington, D.C. has the highest number of hotel rooms between the contending bid cities at 106,200 hotel rooms, which is well within the IOC requirement "that potential host cities have 45,000 hotel rooms for the surge in overseas visitors" (How Boston stacks up as an Olympics host city contender, 2014).

Another reason DC2024 would be a great Olympic bid city is because it has strong leadership from finance, venture capital, and sports professionals within the D.C. area. DC 2024 is led by Russ Ramsey, a Virginia based financier and philanthropist. Vice chairman is Ted Leonsis, Washington Wizards and Capitals owner and a former AOL executive and venture capitalist" (Clarke, 2014). The strong leadership in D.C. is also reflected in the strong security measure, due to D.C. being the Nation's Capital and home to the President of the United States. All of the parameters for security at an Olympic Games would fully be covered by the large amount of military power and security organizations within the region (Clarke, 2014).

Aside from what is required of the host city by the IOC, Washington, D.C. also presents one of the best representations of an American city, considering it is the Nation's Capital. The city and the region have such historical significance to the foundation of the United States and that has not been represented with a US Olympic Games before, as well as being a multicultural hub. For tourists, there are many historical attractions to explore in the D.C. area, that would give many international travelers a different view of American than they are probably used to seeing in the media. It would be a great showcasing of American culture and history to have the Olympic Games in Washington, D.C.

Conclusion

Based on the conflicts within the bidding process, the USOC should move forward in bidding for the 2024 Olympic games only if those changes are made with the key issues of accountability in the bidding process, reducing the cost of the bidding process and the games overall, and creating more value through sustainability/legacy efforts mentioned in The Bid Experience report. If

these issue can be resolved for the 2024 Summer Olympic Games, the USOC should put in a bid for Washington, D.C. While all four of the contending US bid cities are capable of hosting the Olympic Games, Washington, D.C. is the strongest bid based on the geography allowing both Northern Virginia and Maryland to be a part of the bid with Washington, D.C., as well as the venue, accommodations, and transportation infrastructure already in place, and the strong security measures D.C. takes on a daily basis with it being the Nation's Capital. On an emotional standpoint, having D.C. as the US host city would show the world the historical foundation of the US, as well as provide a uniquely American culture based on the founding history, and provide tourists with the opportunity to explore historical landmarks and see America from a different perspective.

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