



**I. NATURE AND PURPOSE OF THE PROCEEDING**

On July 13, 2015, Defendant AMC Entertainment Holdings, Inc. (“AMC”) agreed to acquire all of the outstanding voting securities of SMH Theatres, Inc. (“Starplex Cinemas”). AMC and Starplex Cinemas are significant competitors in the exhibition of first-run, commercial movies in parts of New Jersey and Connecticut. Plaintiffs filed a civil antitrust complaint on December 15, 2015, seeking to enjoin the proposed acquisition and to obtain equitable relief. The Complaint alleges that the acquisition, if permitted to proceed, would give AMC direct control of its most significant competitor in the area in and around East Windsor, New Jersey and in the area in and around Berlin, Connecticut. The likely effect of this acquisition would be to substantially lessen competition in the exhibition of first-run, commercial movies in violation of Section 7 of the Clayton Act, 15 U.S.C. § 18.

At the same time the Complaint was filed, Plaintiffs also filed a Hold Separate Stipulation and Order (“Hold Separate”) and a proposed Final Judgment, which are designed to eliminate the anticompetitive effects of the acquisition. Under the proposed Final Judgment, which is explained more fully below, AMC and Starplex Cinemas are required to divest one theatre located in New Jersey and one theatre located in Connecticut to acquirer(s) acceptable to the United States, in consultation with the State of Connecticut.

Under the terms of the Hold Separate, Defendants will take all steps necessary to ensure that the two theatres to be divested are operated as competitively independent, economically viable, and ongoing business concerns, and that competition is maintained and not diminished during the pendency of the ordered divestitures.

Plaintiffs and Defendants have stipulated that the proposed Final Judgment may be entered after compliance with the APPA. Entry of the proposed Final Judgment would terminate this action, except that the Court would retain jurisdiction to construe, modify, or enforce the provisions of the proposed Final Judgment and to punish violations thereof.

**II. DESCRIPTION OF THE EVENTS GIVING RISE TO THE ALLEGED VIOLATION**

**A. Defendants and the Proposed Transaction**

Defendant Starplex Cinemas is a Texas corporation with its headquarters in Dallas, Texas. Starplex operates 33 movie theatres with a total of 346 screens in 12 states throughout the United States, primarily located in small to midsize markets. Starplex earned domestic box office revenue of approximately \$57 million in 2014.

AMC is a Delaware corporation with its headquarters in Leawood, Kansas. It operates 349 theatres and 4,975 screens in locations primarily throughout the United States. Measured by number of screens and box office revenue, AMC is the second-largest theatre exhibitor in the United States and earned domestic box office revenues of approximately \$1.8 billion in 2014.

On July 13, 2015, AMC and Starplex Cinemas executed a stock purchase agreement under which AMC will acquire, for approximately \$172 million, all of the outstanding voting securities of Starplex Cinemas.

The proposed transaction, as initially agreed to by AMC and Starplex Cinemas on July 13, 2015, would lessen competition substantially as a result of AMC's acquisition of Starplex Cinemas. This acquisition is the subject of the Complaint and proposed Final Judgment filed by Plaintiffs on December 15, 2015.

**B. The Competitive Effects of the Transaction on the Exhibition of First-Run, Commercial Movies**

*1. The Relevant Product and Geographic Markets*

The exhibition of first-run, commercial movies is a relevant product market under Section 7 of the Clayton Act. The experience of viewing a film in a theatre is an inherently different experience from live entertainment (e.g., a stage production or attending a sporting event), or viewing a movie in the home (e.g., through streaming video, on a DVD, or via pay-per-view).

Reflecting the significant differences between viewing a movie in a theatre and other forms of entertainment, ticket prices for movies are generally very different from prices for other forms of entertainment. Live entertainment is typically significantly more expensive than a movie ticket, whereas renting a DVD or ordering a pay-per view movie for home viewing is usually significantly cheaper than viewing a movie in a theatre.

Moviegoers generally do not regard theatres showing “sub-run” movies, art movies, or foreign language movies as adequate substitutes for commercial, first-run movies.

The transaction substantially lessens competition in two relevant geographic markets: the area in and around East Windsor, New Jersey (“East Windsor”) and the area in and around Berlin, Connecticut (“Berlin”).

East Windsor

The only theatres that predominantly show first-run commercial movies in the East Windsor area are the Starplex Town Center Plaza 10, the AMC MarketFair 10, and the AMC

Hamilton 24. No other non-party theatres in this area predominantly show first-run, commercial movies.

### Berlin

Within the Berlin area are the Starplex Berlin 12 and the AMC Plainville 20. These two theatres are located approximately 8 miles apart. Three non-party theatres in this area also show first-run, commercial movies.

The relevant markets in which to assess the competitive effects of this transaction are the first-run, commercial theatres in East Windsor and Berlin. A hypothetical monopolist controlling the exhibition of first-run, commercial movies in East Windsor and Berlin would profitably impose at least a small but significant and non-transitory increase in ticket prices.

### *2. Competitive Effects in the Relevant Markets*

Exhibitors that operate first-run, commercial theatres compete on multiple dimensions. Exhibitors compete on price, knowing that if they charge too much (or do not offer sufficient discounted tickets for matinees, seniors, students, or children), moviegoers will begin to frequent their rivals. Exhibitors also compete by seeking to license the first-run movies that are likely to attract the largest numbers of moviegoers. In addition, they compete over the quality of the viewing experience. They compete to offer the most sophisticated sound systems, largest screens, best picture clarity, best seating (including stadium and reserved seating), and the broadest range and highest quality snacks, food, and drinks at concession stands or cafés in the lobby or served to moviegoers at their seats.

AMC and Starplex Cinemas currently compete for moviegoers in East Windsor and Berlin. Each of these markets is concentrated, and AMC and Starplex Cinemas are each other's

most significant competitor, given their close proximity. Their rivalry spurs each to improve the quality of its theatres and keeps ticket prices in check.

In East Windsor and Berlin, the acquisition by AMC of Starplex Cinemas' theatres likely will result in a substantial lessening of competition. The transaction will lead to significant increases in concentration and eliminate existing competition between AMC and Starplex Cinemas.

In East Windsor, the proposed acquisition would give the newly merged entity control of all of the first-run, commercial theatres, with 34 out of 34 total screens and a 100% share of annual box office revenues totaling approximately \$13 million. Using a measure of market concentration called the Herfindahl-Hirschman Index ("HHI"), as discussed in Appendix A of the Complaint, the acquisition would yield a post-acquisition HHI of 10,000, representing an increase of roughly 2,300 points.

In Berlin, the proposed acquisition would give the newly-merged entity control of three of the six first-run, commercial theatres, with 44 out of 79 total screens and an approximate 68% share of annual box office revenues totaling approximately \$11 million. The acquisition would yield a post-acquisition HHI of approximately 5,260, representing an increase of roughly 2,280 points.

In East Windsor and Berlin today, were one of Defendants' theatres to increase ticket prices unilaterally, the exhibitor that increased price would likely suffer financially as a substantial number of its customers would patronize the other exhibitor's theatre. Other theatres are smaller than and/or farther from the parties' theatres and unlikely to offer enough of a competitive constraint to prevent such a price increase. After the acquisition, AMC would

recapture such losses, making price increases more profitable than they would have been pre-acquisition. The acquisition is, therefore, likely to lead to higher ticket prices for moviegoers, which could take the form of a higher adult evening ticket price or reduced discounting for matinees, children, seniors, and students.

Likewise, the proposed transaction would eliminate competition between AMC and Starplex Cinemas over the quality of the viewing experience at their theatres in East Windsor and Berlin. If no longer required to compete, AMC and Starplex Cinemas would have a reduced incentive to maintain, upgrade, and renovate their theatres, to improve the theatres' amenities and services, and to license the most popular movies, thus reducing the quality of the viewing experience for a moviegoer.

The entry of a first-run, commercial theatre sufficient to deter or counteract an increase in movie ticket prices or a decline in theatre quality is unlikely in either East Windsor or Berlin. Exhibitors are reluctant to locate new first-run, commercial theatres near existing first-run, commercial theatres, unless the population density, demographics, or the quality of existing theatres makes new entry viable. Over the next two years, entry of any new first-run, commercial movie theatres in East Windsor and Berlin would be unlikely to defeat a price increase by the merged firm.

For all of these reasons, the proposed transaction would lessen competition substantially in the exhibition of first-run, commercial movies in the East Windsor and Berlin markets, eliminate actual and potential competition between AMC and Starplex Cinemas, and likely result in increased ticket prices and lower quality theatres in those markets. The proposed transaction therefore violates Section 7 of the Clayton Act.

### **III. EXPLANATION OF THE PROPOSED FINAL JUDGMENT**

The divestiture requirement of the proposed Final Judgment will eliminate the anticompetitive effects of the acquisitions in each relevant geographic market, establishing new, independent, and economically viable competitors. The proposed Final Judgment requires Defendants within thirty (30) calendar days after the filing of the Complaint, or five (5) days after the notice of the entry of the Final Judgment by the Court, whichever is later, to divest as viable, ongoing businesses one theatre in each of the relevant markets.

The theatres must be divested in such a way as to satisfy Plaintiffs that they can and will be operated by the purchaser as viable, ongoing businesses that can compete effectively as first-run, commercial theatres. To that end, the proposed Final Judgment provides the acquirer(s) of the theatres with an option to enter into a transitional supply agreement with Defendants of up to 120 days in length, with the possibility of one or more extensions not to exceed six months in total, for the supply of any goods, services, support, including software service and support, and reasonable use of the name AMC, the name Starplex, and any registered service marks of AMC or Starplex, for use in operating those theatres during the period of transition. This ensures the acquirer(s) of the theatres can operate without interruption while long-term supply agreements are arranged and the theatres rebranded. Without the option to enter into a transitional supply agreement, the acquirer(s) might find itself temporarily without provisions, including concessions, necessary to operate the theatres.

Until the divestitures take place, AMC and Starplex Cinemas must maintain the sales and marketing of the theatres, and maintain the theatres in operable condition at current capacity configurations. In addition, AMC and Starplex Cinemas must not transfer or reassign to other

areas within the company their employees with primary responsibility for the operation of the theatres, except for transfer bids initiated by employees pursuant to Defendants' regular, established job-posting policies. In the event that Defendants do not accomplish the divestitures within the periods prescribed in the proposed Final Judgment, the Final Judgment provides that the Court will appoint a trustee selected by the United States to effect the divestitures.

If Defendants are unable to effect any of the divestitures required herein due to its inability to obtain the consent of the landlord from whom a theatre is leased, Section VI.A of the proposed Final Judgment requires them to divest alternative theatre assets that compete effectively with the theatres for which the landlord consent was not obtained. These provisions will insure that any failure by Defendants to obtain landlord consent does not thwart the relief obtained in the proposed Final Judgment.

The proposed Final Judgment also prohibits Defendants, without providing at least thirty (30) days notice to the United States Department of Justice, from acquiring any other theatres in the following counties: Hartford County, Connecticut and Mercer County, New Jersey. These counties correspond to the relevant geographic markets in this case. Such acquisitions could raise competitive concerns but might be too small to be reported under the Hart-Scott-Rodino ("HSR") premerger notification statute.

The divestiture provisions of the proposed Final Judgment will eliminate the anticompetitive effects of AMC's acquisition of Starplex Cinemas.

#### **IV. REMEDIES AVAILABLE TO POTENTIAL PRIVATE LITIGANTS**

Section 4 of the Clayton Act, 15 U.S.C. § 15, provides that any person who has been injured as a result of conduct prohibited by the antitrust laws may bring suit in federal court to

recover three times the damages the person has suffered, as well as costs and reasonable attorneys' fees. Entry of the proposed Final Judgment will neither impair nor assist the bringing of any private antitrust damage action. Under the provisions of Section 5(a) of the Clayton Act, 15 U.S.C. § 16(a), the proposed Final Judgment has no prima facie effect in any subsequent private lawsuit that may be brought against Defendants.

**V. PROCEDURES AVAILABLE FOR MODIFICATION OF THE PROPOSED FINAL JUDGMENT**

Plaintiffs and Defendants have stipulated that the proposed Final Judgment may be entered by the Court after compliance with the provisions of the APPA, provided that the United States has not withdrawn its consent. The APPA conditions entry upon the Court's determination that the proposed Final Judgment is in the public interest.

The APPA provides a period of at least sixty (60) days preceding the effective date of the proposed Final Judgment within which any person may submit to the United States written comments regarding the proposed Final Judgment. Any person who wishes to comment should do so within sixty (60) days of the date of publication of this Competitive Impact Statement in the Federal Register, or the last date of publication in a newspaper of the summary of this Competitive Impact Statement, whichever is later. All comments received during this period will be considered by the United States Department of Justice, which remains free to withdraw its consent to the proposed Final Judgment at any time prior to the Court's entry of judgment. The comments and the response of the United States will be filed with the Court. In addition, comments will be posted on the U.S. Department of Justice, Antitrust Division's internet website and, under certain circumstances, published in the Federal Register.

Written comments should be submitted to:

David C. Kully  
Chief, Litigation III  
Antitrust Division  
United States Department of Justice  
450 5<sup>th</sup> Street, N.W. Suite 4000  
Washington, DC 20530

The proposed Final Judgment provides that the Court retains jurisdiction over this action, and the parties may apply to the Court for any order necessary or appropriate for the modification, interpretation, or enforcement of the Final Judgment.

**VI. ALTERNATIVES TO THE PROPOSED FINAL JUDGMENT**

Plaintiffs considered, as an alternative to the proposed Final Judgment, a full trial on the merits against Defendants. Plaintiffs could have continued the litigation and sought preliminary and permanent injunctions against AMC's acquisition of Starplex Cinemas. Plaintiffs are satisfied, however, that the divestiture of assets described in the proposed Final Judgment will preserve competition for the exhibition of first-run, commercial movies in East Windsor and Berlin. Thus, the proposed Final Judgment would achieve all or substantially all of the relief Plaintiffs would have obtained through litigation, but avoids the time, expense, and uncertainty of a full trial on the merits of the Complaint.

**VII. STANDARD OF REVIEW UNDER THE APPA FOR THE PROPOSED FINAL JUDGMENT**

The Clayton Act, as amended by the APPA, requires that proposed consent judgments in antitrust cases brought by the United States be subject to a sixty-day comment period, after which the Court shall determine whether entry of the proposed Final Judgment "is in the public

interest.” 15 U.S.C. § 16(e)(1). In making that determination, the Court, in accordance with the statute as amended in 2004, is required to consider:

- (A) the competitive impact of such judgment, including termination of alleged violations, provisions for enforcement and modification, duration of relief sought, anticipated effects of alternative remedies actually considered, whether its terms are ambiguous, and any other competitive considerations bearing upon the adequacy of such judgment that the court deems necessary to a determination of whether the consent judgment is in the public interest; and
- (B) the impact of entry of such judgment upon competition in the relevant market or markets, upon the public generally and individuals alleging specific injury from the violations set forth in the complaint including consideration of the public benefit, if any, to be derived from a determination of the issues at trial.

15 U.S.C. § 16(e)(1)(A) & (B). In considering these statutory factors, the Court’s inquiry is necessarily a limited one as the government is entitled to “broad discretion to settle with the defendant within the reaches of the public interest.” *United States v. Microsoft Corp.*, 56 F.3d 1448, 1461 (D.C. Cir. 1995); *see generally United States v. SBC Commc’ns, Inc.*, 489 F. Supp. 2d 1 (D.D.C. 2007) (assessing public interest standard under the Tunney Act); *United States v. U.S. Airways Group, Inc.*, 38 F. Supp. 3d 69, 75 (D.D.C. 2014) explaining that the “court’s inquiry is limited” in Tunney Act settlements); *United States v. InBev N.V/S.A.*, No. 08-1965 (JR), 2009-2 Trade Cas. (CCH) ¶76,736, 2009 U.S. Dist. LEXIS 84787, at \*3, (D.D.C. Aug. 11, 2009) (noting that the court’s review of a consent judgment is limited and only inquires “into whether the government’s determination that the proposed remedies will cure the antitrust violations alleged in the complaint was reasonable, and whether the mechanism to enforce the final judgment are clear and manageable.”)<sup>1</sup>

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<sup>1</sup>The 2004 amendments substituted “shall” for “may” in directing relevant factors for court to consider and amended the list of factors to focus on competitive considerations and to address

As the United States Court of Appeals for the District of Columbia Circuit has held, under the APPA a court considers, among other things, the relationship between the remedy secured and the specific allegations set forth in the government’s complaint, whether the decree is sufficiently clear, whether enforcement mechanisms are sufficient, and whether the decree may positively harm third parties. *See Microsoft*, 56 F.3d at 1458-62. With respect to the adequacy of the relief secured by the decree, a court may not “engage in an unrestricted evaluation of what relief would best serve the public.” *United States v. BNS, Inc.*, 858 F.2d 456, 462 (9th Cir. 1988) (quoting *United States v. Bechtel Corp.*, 648 F.2d 660, 666 (9th Cir. 1981)); *see also Microsoft*, 56 F.3d at 1460-62; *United States v. Alcoa, Inc.*, 152 F. Supp. 2d 37, 40 (D.D.C. 2001); *InBev*, 2009 U.S. Dist. LEXIS 84787, at \*3. Courts have held that:

[t]he balancing of competing social and political interests affected by a proposed antitrust consent decree must be left, in the first instance, to the discretion of the Attorney General. The court’s role in protecting the public interest is one of insuring that the government has not breached its duty to the public in consenting to the decree. The court is required to determine not whether a particular decree is the one that will best serve society, but whether the settlement is “*within the reaches of the public interest.*” More elaborate requirements might undermine the effectiveness of antitrust enforcement by consent decree.

*Bechtel*, 648 F.2d at 666 (emphasis added) (citations omitted).<sup>2</sup> In determining whether a proposed settlement is in the public interest, a district court “must accord deference to the

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potentially ambiguous judgment terms. *Compare* 15 U.S.C. § 16(e) (2004), *with* 15 U.S.C. § 16(e)(1) (2006); *see also SBC Commc’ns*, 489 F. Supp. 2d at 11 (concluding that the 2004 amendments “effected minimal changes” to Tunney Act review).

<sup>2</sup> *Cf. BNS*, 858 F.2d at 464 (holding that the court’s “ultimate authority under the [APPA] is limited to approving or disapproving the consent decree”); *United States v. Gillette Co.*, 406 F. Supp. 713, 716 (D. Mass. 1975) (noting that, in this way, the court is constrained to “look at the overall picture not hypercritically, nor with a microscope, but with an artist’s reducing glass”). *See generally Microsoft*, 56 F.3d at 1461 (discussing whether “the remedies [obtained in the decree are] so inconsonant with the allegations charged as to fall outside of the ‘reaches of the public interest’”).

government's predictions about the efficacy of its remedies, and may not require that the remedies perfectly match the alleged violations." *SBC Commc'ns*, 489 F. Supp. 2d at 17; *see also U.S. Airways*, 38 F. Supp. 3d at 75 (noting that a court should not reject the proposed remedies because it believes others are preferable); *Microsoft*, 56 F.3d at 1461 (noting the need for courts to be "deferential to the government's predictions as to the effect of the proposed remedies"); *United States v. Archer-Daniels-Midland Co.*, 272 F. Supp. 2d 1, 6 (D.D.C. 2003) (noting that the court should grant due respect to the United State's prediction as to the effect of proposed remedies, its perception of the market structure, and its views of the nature of the case).

Courts have greater flexibility in approving proposed consent decrees than in crafting their own decrees following a finding of liability in a litigated matter. "[A] proposed decree must be approved even if it falls short of the remedy the court would impose on its own, as long as it falls within the range of acceptability or is 'within the reaches of public interest.'" *United States v. Am. Tel. & Tel. Co.*, 552 F. Supp. 131, 151 (D.D.C. 1982) (citations omitted) (quoting *United States v. Gillette Co.*, 406 F. Supp. 713, 716 (D. Mass. 1975)), *aff'd sub nom. Maryland v. United States*, 460 U.S. 1001 (1983); *see also U.S. Airways*, 38 F. Supp. 3d at 76 (noting that room must be made for the government to grant concessions in the negotiation process for settlements (citing *Microsoft*, 56 F.3d at 1461)); *United States v. Alcan Aluminum Ltd.*, 605 F. Supp. 619, 622 (W.D. Ky. 1985) (approving the consent decree even though the court would have imposed a greater remedy). To meet this standard, the United States "need only provide a factual basis for concluding that the settlements are reasonably adequate remedies for the alleged harms." *SBC Commc'ns*, 489 F. Supp. 2d at 17.

Moreover, the Court's role under the APPA is limited to reviewing the remedy in relationship to the violations that the United States has alleged in its Complaint, and does not authorize the Court to "construct [its] own hypothetical case and then evaluate the decree against that case." *Microsoft*, 56 F.3d at 1459; *see also U.S. Airways*, 38 F. Supp. 3d at 75 (noting that the court must simply determine whether there is a factual foundation for the government's decisions such that its conclusions regarding the proposed settlements are reasonable); *InBev*, 2009 U.S. Dist. LEXIS 84787, at \*20 ("the 'public interest' is not to be measured by comparing the violations alleged in the complaint against those the court believes could have, or even should have, been alleged"). Because the "court's authority to review the decree depends entirely on the government's exercising its prosecutorial discretion by bringing a case in the first place," it follows that "the court is only authorized to review the decree itself," and not to "effectively redraft the complaint" to inquire into other matters that the United States did not pursue. *Microsoft*, 56 F.3d at 1459-60. As this Court confirmed in *SBC Communications*, courts "cannot look beyond the complaint in making the public interest determination unless the complaint is drafted so narrowly as to make a mockery of judicial power." *SBC Commc'ns*, 489 F. Supp. 2d at 15.

In its 2004 amendments, Congress made clear its intent to preserve the practical benefits of utilizing consent decrees in antitrust enforcement, adding the unambiguous instruction that "[n]othing in this section shall be construed to require the court to conduct an evidentiary hearing or to require the court to permit anyone to intervene." 15 U.S.C. § 16(e)(2); *see also U.S. Airways*, 38 F. Supp. 3d at 76 (indicating that a court is not required to hold an evidentiary hearing or to permit intervenors as part of its review under the Tunney Act). The language wrote

into the statute what Congress intended when it enacted the Tunney Act in 1974, as Senator Tunney explained: “[t]he court is nowhere compelled to go to trial or to engage in extended proceedings which might have the effect of vitiating the benefits of prompt and less costly settlement through the consent decree process.” 119 Cong. Rec. 24,598 (1973) (statement of Sen. Tunney). Rather, the procedure for the public interest determination is left to the discretion of the Court, with the recognition that the Court’s “scope of review remains sharply proscribed by precedent and the nature of Tunney Act proceedings.” *SBC Commc’ns*, 489 F. Supp. 2d at 11. A court can make its public interest determination based on the competitive impact statement and response to public comments alone. *U.S. Airways*, 38 F. Supp. 3d at 76.<sup>3</sup>

#### **VIII. DETERMINATIVE DOCUMENTS**

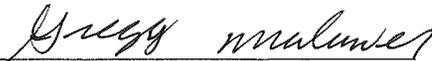
There are no determinative materials or documents within the meaning of the APPA that were considered by the United States in formulating the proposed Final Judgment.

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<sup>3</sup> See *United States v. Enova Corp.*, 107 F. Supp. 2d 10, 17 (D.D.C. 2000) (noting that the “Tunney Act expressly allows the court to make its public interest determination on the basis of the competitive impact statement and response to comments alone”); *United States v. Mid-Am. Dairymen, Inc.*, No. 73-CV-681-W-1, 1977-1 Trade Cas. (CCH) & 61,508, at 71,980, \*22 (W.D. Mo. 1977) (“Absent a showing of corrupt failure of the government to discharge its duty, the Court, in making its public interest finding, should . . . carefully consider the explanations of the government in the competitive impact statement and its responses to comments in order to determine whether those explanations are reasonable under the circumstances.”); S. Rep. No. 93-298, at 6 (1973) (“Where the public interest can be meaningfully evaluated simply on the basis of briefs and oral arguments, that is the approach that should be utilized.”).

Dated: December 15, 2015

Respectfully submitted,



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