

June 18, 2008

The Honorable Robert B. Stewart
Chairman - Board of County Commissioners
315 Court Street
Clearwater, Florida 33756

Re: Waterfront stadium proposal

Greetings:

After reading a great newspaper article by John Romano, and coupled with the comments of Stuart Sternberg and Bud Selig, the time has indeed come to address the elephant in the room. Without a new stadium, the Tampa Bay Rays will leave St. Petersburg, and our City's one hundred year history with major league baseball will be just that - history.

Last night, I witnessed our beloved Rays defeat the best team in baseball, and while driving home, passing yard signs and billboards, I was brought back to earth by this constant reminder of the polarizing issue facing the community, and a thought came to mind. Why do we have to choose between our affinity for waterfront land and baseball? Why isn't Plan B on the table for discussion? City / County leaders and newspaper writers have danced around Plan B for the past few weeks, and yet no one is willing to put anything on the table for public discussion. The time has come for a reality check, and for us to make certain admissions which are obvious - thus, Plan B.

You begin with the recognition that the Rays and MLB are significant economic partners with St. Petersburg and Pinellas County, and you realize that the Trop has a shelf life. It wasn't designed to last forever, and our partners require a new house to remain economically competitive. Says Mr. Sternberg "I know we have to be here at least five years, and I know we can't be here for 20". Next comes the acceptance that the stadium proposal as it exists, in all likelihood, will not pass muster with the citizens of St. Petersburg or Pinellas County. The risk of failure, to the City, to the County, to the Rays, is simply too great, and alienating the most important partner of all - the citizens of St. Petersburg and Pinellas, is not the answer. The Rays have a great many fans, champions and supporters, and we would love to come to their aid, but not this, and not now.

In Plan B, the Rays, either voluntarily or through the appropriate vote by the County, pull their plans for a new "waterfront" stadium. The City and County assemble a task force consisting of the best and brightest from all stakeholders, including, but not limited to, the Rays, City, County, CVB, city
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and regional Chambers, Downtown Partnership, neighborhood leaders, hotel planners, etc., with one mission: to design, locate and fund a baseball facility with a multi-use component benefitting the Rays and Pinellas community with economic benefits to all partners, and with minimal tax implications on the citizenry.

Plan B is all about timing, funding, design and location - not in a New York minute, but at a pace conducive to today's market and environment. Plan B allows the community a moment to breath, and to appreciate the Rays current successes on the field as we roll up our sleeves to begin work as true partners to resolve some of the challenges on all sides. This will certainly work within the original time frame proposed by Mr. Sternberg, and will ensure that neither side, with the exception of the Ray's fascination with "waterfront", will be required to make unpalatable concessions. Issues over size, compatibility, parking, transportation, environment, heat, location, tourism, the Arts, etc., become a thing of the past. The Rays could have their offices on site in a multi-use facility geared for baseball, which site could accommodate the private development of convention and hotel facilities. Not only could we get an All Star game, but we could be back in the market for a Final Four or concert tours, and actually compete for events now housed at an ever aging Forum in a sister city. Rolling back the proposed timetable five to eight years allows us to pay off our existing debt, and gives the partners greater funding opportunities in an improving economy with less impact on the taxpayers. This renewed partnership will demonstrate that we are all in this with a common goal, and this process in the sunshine will enhance the buy-in required for all citizens.

This is Pinellas County, and we are a little more thoughtful when it comes to the preservation of our unique assets and quality of life, and moving at a "Pinellas pace" has served this community well. The lack of support for a waterfront stadium is not an indictment of our love affair with baseball or the Rays - it's just this plan - this location - this timing. There's no rush. Remember, it took the Rays eleven years to build a winning franchise.

Attached hereto is a sample Resolution for consideration by the TDC. I am no Resolution writer, but perhaps you get the gist, and will consider a few points worthy for discussion.

Please consider this in your deliberations, and if you have any questions, then please feel free to contact me.

Very truly yours,

DWF:wh
Enclosure

Bill Foster

cc. Board of County Commissioners
Members Tourist Development Council