
Southeast Is Doing Fine Without a Stadium

Proponents of spending more than \$500 million of D.C. taxpayers' money on a baseball stadium along the Anacostia River in Southeast say the potential benefits far exceed the enormous costs. They insist that the stadium would foster economic development in an otherwise neglected area near South Capitol and M streets. While this argument would have been valid in 1995, it is not in 2005.

In 1997 and 1998 Richard Monteilh and I served as the congressionally mandated coordinators of economic development for Washington. During the fall of 1997, the Navy decided to move the Naval Sea Systems Command and its 5,000 employees from Crystal City to the Washington Navy Yard. As part of this shift, the Navy required its contractors to relocate within walking distance of the Navy Yard. The result was five large private office buildings, including the Maritime Plaza complex, built within blocks of the Navy Yard. Another big office building is under construction.

The Navy Yard expansion launched a cycle of investment and economic growth in Southeast, with projects such as the massive Transportation Department headquarters, new housing for the Marine Corps, a mixed-income redevelopment of the Arthur Capper Homes, the commercial revitalization of Eighth Street and Manna Inc.'s Syphax Village for affordable homeownership. New housing, restaurants, stores and services have followed. Further, property owners such as Florida Rock Industries Inc. are planning mixed-use developments, and real estate entrepreneurs are searching for development opportunities around the Southeast-Southwest waterfront.

Clearly, a stadium is not needed to foster economic development in this area. In fact, the traffic and parking problems a stadium would generate might be detrimental to the neighborhood.

The D.C. Council should postpone approving a baseball lease agreement until public and private developers and financing are locked in for a mix of waterfront amenities and attractions. The District also must commit public funds for transportation and infrastructure improvements, including the Navy Yard and Waterfront Metro stations, the South Capitol and M street corridors and the Frederick Douglass Bridge. Making these investments is more important for economic development than spending lavishly on an "ultra-modern" stadium.

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