The Ballpark at Slater Mill

Background

On May 16, 2017, the owners of the Pawtucket Red Sox ball club, together with officials from the City of Pawtucket and the State of Rhode Island announced a proposed public-private partnership for building a new downtown stadium to replace the aging city-owned stadium located on Division Street in a densely settled residential and industrial neighborhood.

Mayor Donald Grebien attended Grow Smart RI’s July 27, 2017 Board of Directors meeting to present the proposal for the Board’s consideration.

Following the Mayor’s presentation and departure, the Board discussed various elements of the proposal and raised several questions for further research by staff (e.g. neighborhood impacts to the new and old location, parking, connection to the proposed new transit hub, ancillary recreation opportunities and the public input process for site design).

The following summarizes the facts as we know them for the purposes of evaluating the stadium proposal primarily from a smart growth perspective and our published core values in accordance with Grow Smart RI’s guidelines for providing project commentary.

The Proposal:

- The partners propose to construct a 10,000-seat state-of-the-art ballpark at the largely vacant and underutilized Apex Department Store site in downtown Pawtucket.
- The site is bounded by I-95, Main St., School Street and the Pawtucket River and is within a priority downtown redevelopment area or “growth center” in the city’s comprehensive community plan.
- The site is a designated brownfield site.
- The City would own the new stadium, just as it owns the current stadium.
- The City is considering new uses for the existing stadium site, including recreational and/or school uses.
- The total cost of acquiring the site and building the new stadium is estimated at $83 million. The estimated cost to renovate the existing stadium is $68 million.
- The $83M cost for the new stadium is proposed to be shared by the owners of the Pawtucket Red Sox, the City of Pawtucket and the State of Rhode Island as follows:
- $45M to be paid by PawSox (54%)
- $15M to be paid by the City (18%)
- $23M to be paid by the State of Rhode Island (28%)

- Pawtucket Redevelopment Agency to issue bonds totaling $71 million to be repaid by the City, State and the Pawtucket Red Sox.
- Pawsox owners to contribute $12M up front and repay the balance of their $45 million commitment to the city's redevelopment agency.
- The public portion of the funding for the Ballpark at Slater Mill represents 46% of the total costs while the private portion represents 54%. According to the City of Pawtucket, the average public portion funding for similar stadiums is 79% while the private portion is only 21%.
- The Apex site does not abut any residential neighborhoods and therefore is not expected to have an adverse effect on neighbors.
- The Apex site is approximately .6 mi from the planned commuter rail and RIPTA transit hub on Goff St. The existing McCoy Stadium is approximately 1.6 mi from the planned transit hub and is currently served by just one RIPTA route (#80) with only 90-minute frequency ending at 7:30 p.m., making it impractical for patrons to use transit.
- The City and RIDOT are considering ways to link a new downtown stadium with the planned commuter rail and bus hub, including a bus loop and strengthened pedestrian and bicycle connections.
- Parking would be provided with a combination of on-site parking and existing parking in the downtown within walking distance of the stadium.
- A new downtown stadium is expected to have fewer negative traffic impacts than the existing stadium because of its direct access to I-95 and improved access to Pawtucket’s planned transit hub.
- In addition to serving as home to the PawSox, the proposed downtown stadium would provide year-round events, activities and amenities, including improved access to the riverfront consistent with Pawtucket’s 1997 Riverfront Development Plan.
- The enhanced access would eventually include a pedestrian link to the recently renovated Festival Pier and Town Landing, another city-owned public park that connects the East Bay Bikeway and the Blackstone Valley Bikeway.
- The City of Pawtucket has pledged that site and building design would include many opportunities for public input to achieve a landmark that respects its historic surroundings and other quality of life elements that are important to the public.