



Alliance for Progressive Values
Giving Your Values a Voice!

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The Alliance for Progressive Values statement on purposed plans for a baseball stadium in Shockoe Bottom

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The Alliance for Progressive Values opposes the present plan for a baseball park in Shockoe Bottom.

Recently Richmond Mayor Dwight Jones unveiled his plan for a minor league baseball stadium to be built in the Shockoe Bottom neighborhood over the next several years. The plan would call for an urban complex comprised of apartments and shopping around the ballpark. The Mayor touts the plan as bringing jobs and revitalization to an underserved part of the city and even throws in the promise of an African American museum of some kind in the future that would recognize the singular importance of Shockoe Bottom's place in the history of slavery.

On behalf of the Alliance of Progressive Values and our hundreds of members in the Richmond metro area we must voice our skepticism and ultimately our opposition to the Mayor's plan. We are prepared to accept the need for a new minor league ballpark to replace the aging Diamond facility on the Boulevard, we support the desire to continue the resurgence of the Shockoe Bottom neighborhood, we applaud bringing much needed jobs to the surrounding neighborhoods, and we strongly support the construction of a museum to chronicle and celebrate the struggle of African Americans for freedom. Unfortunately, the Mayor's plan appears to be more conducive to lining the pockets of developers and contractors than actually producing any of these outcomes save shoehorning a stadium into a neighborhood that already strains its dilapidated infrastructure. In addition we are deeply skeptical of the process the Mayor would like to use to get his ballpark, one which involves putting all the deals in place first and then presenting the plan as a *fait accompli* to the citizens of the city. We applaud City Council president Charles Samuels for attempting to slow this process, and for raising the option of a referendum. This is a sensible course of action and we hope that City Council takes its time and hears from all parties - not just the Mayor and his paid consultants. Before we go any further, APV believes we should have a full vetting of the many questions and concerns that surround the Ballpark project. Here are just some of our questions and concerns.

Where is the promised alternate plan for a ballpark on the Boulevard? In late November, Mayor Jones rolled out a plan for a Shockoe Bottom baseball stadium and concomitant residential and commercial development that he asserts will bring in almost \$100 million dollars more in revenue over 20 years than if the stadium stayed in its current Boulevard location. This plan, he says, which was supposed to be accompanied by another plan that would keep the baseball stadium on the Boulevard, would result

in job growth in Richmond and increased revenue for the City. According to our own City Council president, quoted in Style Weekly, a plan for a baseball stadium on the Boulevard seems to have been omitted.

Will the property owners and developers expect tax credits or some other form of financing that ultimately falls to the tax payers to insure?

How many permanent jobs will the stadium create, and how many of those will be living-wage or salaried positions?

Will construction jobs be counted in the tally of jobs created through this proposed redevelopment? While these jobs certainly count for the people filling them, they're temporary. If this project is like most major construction projects, a lot of tradespeople and construction management staff will be residents of other localities. So even if the construction of a new stadium and allied development creates 1,000 jobs, the contribution to our local tax revenue would be comparatively small. And did we mention temporary?

How much use is the new stadium going to get? According to their online schedule, the Richmond Flying Squirrels will play at the Diamond for approximately 72 days out of the year in 2014. What happens at the Diamond the rest of the time? Say a new stadium gets built in Shockoe Bottom, and the Squirrels or their successors play 70+ home games between April and September. And let's say that optimistically, during the same period of time, there's one outdoor concert per week at the stadium (looking at the Flying Squirrels' 2014 schedule, that's about 23 weeks, give or take). What about the remaining 29 weeks of every year?

If the stadium is built in Shockoe Bottom, are we really going to have a large, expensive building sit vacant and underutilized for more than half the year? Let me put it another way: Shockoe Bottom is a densely developed mixed use neighborhood that sees activity 24 hours per day. Is a large building that sits vacant for as much as 29 weeks per year something we want in a densely developed residential/commercial district, or should we consider the possibility of building spaces that will get used closer to 24 hours per day, 365 days per year? What if we built more shops, more housing, more services for the people who live and work downtown instead?

What about traffic during games? How will the city expand transportation options? AND please don't tell us about adding more lanes, which is the wrong answer. There needs to be a coordinated mass transit plan and so far we've heard nothing.

What is the City planning to do to mitigate the traffic impact? Of the 70,000 cars per day that travel through the project area, how many travel during the evening peak period? And how many more vehicles will be added due to all the new housing and other uses?

Can we really trust the numbers on jobs or growth that the Mayor and his friends are floating? There is now a large body of evidence that urban ballparks are nowhere near as strong a revenue generator or job creator as they're alleged to be. While there are several book length investigations of this question, a good starting point might be this article from the [Atlantic](#), which contains this telling quote:

"The basic idea is that sports stadiums typically aren't a good tool for economic development," said

Victor Matheson, an economist at Holy Cross who has studied the economic impact of stadium construction for decades. When cities cite studies (often produced by parties with an interest in building the stadium) touting the impact of such projects, there is a simple rule for determining the actual return on investment, Matheson said: "Take whatever number the sports promoter says, take it and move the decimal one place to the left. Divide it by ten, and that's a pretty good estimate of the actual economic impact."

When will the other shoe drop as far as the Mayor's plans for the area now occupied by the Diamond? We are gravely worried about rumors that continue to swirl around possible big box retailers and Short Pump style sprawl along a historic thoroughfare (the Boulevard), that is just now beginning to find its legs after generations of neglect. Rather than bring in large corporations to "bigfoot" local businesses we feel it would be better to nurture the organic growth now occurring in places like Scott's Edition through small business loans and tax easements that keep the taxpayers money circulating in the city. Under no circumstances does downtown Richmond need a Wal-Mart desert or the like.

What if instead we prioritized a memorial to the enslaved people who built our city and our economy, rather than treating that history as an afterthought to a sports arena? We should be looking to Berlin, Phnom Penh, and Cape Town among other places to learn how those cities have woven education about the horrors of Nazi Germany, the Khmer Rouge's reign of terror, and the Apartheid era into the fabric of mixed use communities.

We are hearing that the Heritage Center, or whatever they're calling it, is absolutely a must. If that's the case, is the City committing funds to it if there is no ballpark in the Bottom, or is it in fact a hostage to a minor league ballpark and may or may not ever be built?

According to published reports in the Times Dispatch, it looks like there's a funding gap between projected cost and debt service generated through development in Shockoe Bottom AND Boulevard. Where are they planning to make up the difference?

And looking at the Boulevard, please tell us why a stadium is not a good fit for a city gateway that's already a destination for sports fans and entertainment seekers. It's absolutely true that the Diamond and the adjacent City property are completely underutilized, and in desperate need of redevelopment. The oceans of surface parking there are a complete waste of land, but encouraging development of big-box retail in the vein of Short Pump is worse. It's worse because it would not only encourage sprawling, suburban style development with oceans of parking, but it would do so at the expense of the hundreds of small businesses within a mile or two of it.

Why can't we redevelop the Diamond where it is, and create stronger ties to the Redskins training camp and the Richmond Kickers? Why can't we build on the existing businesses on the Boulevard, such as Bowtie Cinemas, Buzz and Ned's, and Kitchen 64, and create a destination entertainment district that already has newly improved highway access that makes getting there and getting home relatively easy compared to getting into and out of Shockoe Bottom?

There are so many other options for developing both Shockoe Bottom and the Boulevard corridor. APV is extremely disappointed that the administration has seized on an option that Richmond citizens have twice rejected, and developed a full plan in secret. We urge the administration and our City Council to go back to the drawing board and consider alternatives that would build on and strengthen Richmond's existing resources.

We also propose that the citizens of Richmond who will be paying for this potential white elephant for a generation to come, get the opportunity to express their opinion at the ballot box through a referendum before any major portions of this plan go into effect. There seems to be a growing realization that this is not a good idea and that its proponents would like to keep us in the dark about the details until after the construction has begun. Instead let's fully vet this issue and let the people of Richmond decide.

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