

THE CASE FOR FENWAY PARK

Fenway Park is a treasure. For tens of millions of people in America and throughout the world, the ballpark is synonymous not only with the Red Sox but with Boston itself. Nevertheless, Fenway Park today is threatened by the current economic structure of Major League Baseball; and the proposition has been forwarded that only a new stadium built to current industry standards can keep the Red Sox profitable and competitive, and provide their fans with the comforts and conveniences that baseball fans elsewhere have come both to enjoy and take for granted. As a bonus, the Red Sox claim that their proposed new \$664 million stadium will enhance the quality of life in Boston generally and---particularly in the Fenway neighborhood in which the proposed stadium is to be located---enhance it enough to justify some \$312 million in proposed public subsidies for their project.

During the next week, a group of gifted design and building professionals from Boston and around the country will challenge the propositions being put forward by the Red Sox, and explore an alternative way for the Red Sox to achieve their objectives at significantly less cost to both taxpayers and to their neighbors. We bring a different approach to ballpark design than has been tried recently; and to differentiate our point of view we believe it essential to re-define the problem. Up until now the situation in Boston has been defined entirely in terms of what the Red Sox want---and what the Red Sox need. We would like to re-define the problem in terms of the city and the neighborhood, and to characterize our approach as an exercise in neighborliness. Over the course of the next week we intend to look comprehensively at several related issues: a major Fenway Park reconstruction proposal; a Fenway Park preservation and restoration proposal; urban design in the Fenway neighborhood; and the unavoidable parking, traffic, and transportation issues that arise when considering these other issues. In so doing, we will be trying to be good neighbors to the Red Sox, to seek for ways to help them to flourish as our neighbors, and to treat them with the respect that we ourselves would wish to be treated by them. But we are insisting also that the Red Sox *be* good neighbors: that they not covet their neighbors' property, and that they not presume to divert tax money from the pockets of their fellow citizens. Thus, we begin our exercise with certain assumptions:

- That our work should assume the primacy of good city life, and the integral and reciprocal relationship of Fenway Park to its neighborhood, where each is a critical component of the character of the other.
- That our deliberations should be driven more by the character of the site than by the Red Sox building program---as it was when Fenway Park was originally built, but not as it has been for the last dozen years. This does not mean that we are unmindful of the Red Sox programmatic objectives, but simply that these objectives must be weighed against other legitimate concerns.
- Our design explorations for Fenway Park will assume that the Red Sox should stay on the block on which they are currently located and not be permitted to take any land owned by others in the private sector.
- That we propose---*at the very least*---to save of the existing Fenway Park: (a) the playing field in its current configuration; (b) the Green Monster; (c) the existing right and right-center field bleachers; and (d) portions of the existing facade to be determined. Our preservation proposal will in all likelihood call for saving even

more; but even our most aggressive reconstruction proposal will call for saving at least this much.

During the coming week, our hope and intention is to produce two different proposals for a renovated Fenway Park: a preservationist proposal *and* a reconstruction proposal. These proposals will include sufficient graphic information to determine what the proposed ballparks would look like, what they would cost to construct, and the kinds of revenues they could be expected to generate for the Red Sox. In addition, we intend to "flesh out" an existing proposal for the design of an "urban village" in the Fenway neighborhood---again, with sufficient graphic information to indicate both what it would look like, what the proposed mix of residential, retail, commercial, and civic uses might be, what it might cost, and the economic development opportunities it would represent.

We propose to produce all of this over the next week in an intensive design workshop that is known in architectural circles as a *charrette*; and this charrette is the means by which we intend to engage the public in discussion about the future of Fenway Park. We will be asking you to tell us the issues that you think are important---both for the future of Fenway Park and the future of the Fenway neighborhood. We cannot promise that we will resolve each issue to everyone's satisfaction, because not all desires are reconcilable. But we do promise that we will consider your concerns; and if we do not resolve them in exactly the way you want, we will at least try to explain our reasons for doing whatever it is we propose to do. Moreover, this process of public participation will not be confined to one meeting. While we are working at the Simmons College library, the doors will be open; and if you can endure the near chaos, you are welcome to come see what we are doing. The public is also invited to a daily review and critique session to see where we are in our work, to voice your concerns (and on occasion, we hope, your praise), and to see how the concerns you raise are being addressed.

And who is the intended (or at least hoped for) audience for our work? In no particular order: the Red Sox, Boston and Massachusetts politicians, Bostonians in general, neighborhood residents, Red Sox fans, baseball fans, and lovers of cities everywhere. We'll be working out in the open, and everyone is invited to come....

Finally, let me suggest at the outset several reasons why our proposal will be better than what the Red Sox have offered so far:

- Our proposal will occupy approximately half as much land as the Red Sox proposal, on land the Red Sox already own.
- Our proposal will require no taking of privately owned property.
- Our proposal will retain the economic value and consume less of existing neighborhood property; and as a consequence will allow more ancillary neighborhood development.
- Either of our proposals---reconstruction or renovation---will cost significantly less money to build, and will significantly increase current Red Sox revenue streams.
- Our ballpark proposals will be noticeably---no, *viscerally*---more intimate than the new stadium the Red Sox are proposing.
- Our ballpark proposals will preserve, extend, and improve the living tradition of baseball at Fenway Park---a historic site and an important piece of Boston.
- Lastly (as befits the Athens of America, which has always prided itself in leading rather than following), we hope the proposals we come up with here in Boston

will demonstrate to other cities now contemplating new ballparks a different and better paradigm than the present industry standard, of which the current Red Sox proposal is but the latest and costliest dismal example.

What---ultimately---is it that motivates us to fight to save and restore Fenway Park, and to work for the creation of good neighborhoods? I've identified above a sizeable number of practical and pragmatic issues, including economic, traffic, and transportation concerns. But important as are all of these issues, they are secondary to another issue; and that issue is qualitative. And here I must tell a brief story, a true story, one that has recurred in slightly different form perhaps as many as half a dozen times since I have lived in Chicago. A friend came to visit from out of town, and we went to a night game at Wrigley Field. The weather was warm; the ivy on the wall was green; the twilight was purple and orange and pink; the lake visible to the east was turning a steely gray; the grills were fired up on the rooftops across the street; the El-train would clatter past every five minutes or so; the Cubs were winning; and the ballpark and the city were working together like Fred Astaire and Ginger Rogers. And my friend turned to me after a long silence and said, simply: "This is perfect." At such moments, so it is; and so I have said to myself so many times when I go to Wrigley Field.

Fenway Park, like Wrigley, is a garden in a city. And the way I feel about Wrigley Field, and its neighborhood, and my own neighborhood as well, is (I suspect) exactly how many Bostonians---and many visitors to Boston---feel about Fenway Park, and about their own neighborhoods. These are not replicas; they are not consumer commodities. They are real, tangible, historical things that we love and for which we care for their own sake; and their joys make the pains we endure for their sake a mere inconvenience. And it is above all for the sake of these joys---joys that are and should be the prerogative of every human being, of the poor as well as the wealthy---it is for the sake of such joys that we fight for our neighborhoods and we fight for Fenway Park.

This essay is adapted from an August 2000 talk at the beginning of a design charrette sponsored by Save Fenway Park! and the Fenway Community Development Corporation. It was first published in the Fall 2000 issue of *Elysian Fields Quarterly* (Volume 17, Number 4). Under new ownership, the Red Sox have adopted many of the proposals generated by the charrette; and Fenway Park and its adjacent neighborhood have never looked better nor been more profitable.