SCORING POSITION: THE BALLPARK AS REVITALIZATION CATALYST

by

SETH WILCHER

(Under the Direction of JOHN WATERS)

ABSTRACT

Over a dozen new major league baseball ballparks were built during the 1990s and 2000s. Many of these were strategically located in downtown locations in hopes of spurring economic redevelopment of struggling historic neighborhoods. This thesis examines the history of the ballpark, this new trend of strategic ballpark location, how ballparks can act as an economic catalyst, how some cities have failed to realize a positive impact, and provides case studies of success stories in Denver, Colorado and Montgomery, Alabama by evaluating factors leading to revitalization.

INDEX WORDS: Historic preservation; Ballparks; Historic District; Economic Impact; Downtown Revitalization

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INTRODUCTION

Historic preservationists looking to bring about revitalization of historic structures, neighborhoods, or downtowns have a range of methods available to them, often referred to as "tools in the toolbox." These tools run the gamut. Smaller towns may utilize a Main Street program to focus on festivals and streetscape improvements in order to draw people downtown. Larger cities often have non-profit organizations which have the power to raise funds and promote awareness. Either size municipality may take advantage of historic preservation tax credits available to promote investment in historic structures in need of work.

This thesis will examine one method available to cities of sufficient size that has worked to near perfection in many cities. It is not fool-proof, as the reader will see. It takes a great deal of planning, very careful site selection, collaboration of the private and public sector, in some cases voter approval; and, a winning baseball team doesn't hurt. This thesis shows that the strategic placement of a new ballpark in or near a historic district can generate a degree of revitalization that is difficult to match using any other available technique.

Taxpayer investment, which usually is the funding source for a new ballpark, reaches hundreds of millions of dollars; and this has led many to criticize the approach. In addition, there are some cities (which the naysayers are quick to point to) which did a poor job in some aspect of their planning and found themselves disappointed with a lack of promised renewal. As the mayor of Denver - a city considered a shining example for how a ballpark can be a boon for

the revitalization of historic districts - tells anyone, a new ballpark is not the cure-all for a historic neighborhood's ills. The proper elements have to be in place.

What gives this tool such power? It is all about sheer numbers. A municipality has any number of civic structures in its downtown which draw its populace into the city. It may be a symphony hall, a zoo, or an aquarium. However, no such venue has the ability to draw the same number of people on an annual basis as a ballpark. A major league baseball team plays 81 home game per year, and average attendance in the major leagues is roughly 30,000. With a ballpark strategically located, the surrounding blocks enjoy the exposure of two and a half million visits each year. With all apologies to lovers of the symphony or animals or fish, such numbers are hard to duplicate with any other similar civic structure.

Unfortunately, as some cities have learned, if there isn't at least a base of good things for the masses to see, then they aren't likely to come back. Or if there isn't a degree of connectivity between the park and the district in need of a kick start, then the best intentions will not pay off. However, when the right amount of momentum has already begun in a historic area, the addition of a ballpark can be akin to pouring gasoline onto a small fire. Many downtowns still struggle to entice people to return to downtowns which were abandoned for the suburbs throughout much of the second half of the twentieth century. Supporters of ballparks as an economic catalyst hope that baseball attendees, if they like what they see, will come back during the offseason to try out new restaurants, do some shopping, or even trade in their commute and backyard for a loft and a daily walk to the office.

Historic preservation can often be the benefactor of this chain of events. Cities seeing the most ancillary economic development from new ballparks are those that built the park in an area surrounded by historic structures. The tipping point for investment is often the assurance that, in

addition to preservation tax credits, an entrepreneur is guaranteed a high degree of foot-traffic during those eighty-one game days, which can be the best (and free) advertisement. While sports bars may be the first to occupy historic buildings near ballparks, loft-dwellers often follow. The new residential element, in turn, spurs retail and restaurants. And so the domino effect begins.

Before delving into this trend, the second chapter of this thesis will explore what led to this point in the history of the ballpark. In keeping with the axiom that trends are cyclical, what one sees today is very much similar to the neighborhood ballpark dynamic that existed in the early to mid 1900s. Ballparks have closely mirrored American society, following the overall patterns of city-dwelling, flight to the suburbs, and then a return to the center city seen over the past 100 years. In the third chapter, examples from a handful of specific cities will show the good and the bad approaches to site selection for a ballpark and the subsequent results. Chapter Four will then take an in-depth look at the impact of Coors Field in Denver, which is considered by most to be a huge success for the city and for historic preservation. The next chapter will show how Montgomery is attempting to replicate Denver's model on the minor-league level.

A literature search for this thesis was conducted using the Avery Index, which is a review of all articles in peer-reviewed architectural journals. Using varying combinations of the terms "ballpark," "stadium," "sports," "revitalization," "catalyst," and "redevelopment," the search produced approximately 45-50 articles found within architectural-related periodicals. Many of these articles were irrelevant to this thesis' topic. For instance, some articles simply discussed the effort of a construction firm to finish a project on time. Others were written about historic ballparks or the demolition of older ballparks, and thus did not fit with the theme of this thesis.

However, the Avery Index did point the way to several articles that were very pertinent to this thesis. Not surprisingly, the cities chosen for this thesis to represent success stories

(Memphis, San Diego, Denver, and Montgomery) were all included in the search results. An article on Memphis and AutoZone Park lauds, "the preservation of historic buildings; the replacement of undesirable businesses; the construction of new commercial, residential, and educational facilities; and the transformation of vacant lots and derelict buildings into contributing parts of the community."[1] A story highlighting the changes in downtown San Diego proclaims that, "the largest single engine of economic growth is the Ballpark Redevelopment project."[2] A profile of Montgomery's new ballpark notes that, "the idea of coupling downtown minor league ballparks with urban redevelopment efforts is one that smaller cities employ with increasing frequency. But can such stadiums actually serve as catalysts for urban revitalization?"[3]

One article found in the *Journal of the American Planning Association* proved to be very useful in the literature review for this thesis. Timothy Chapin, a professor at Florida State University, has conducted research on ballparks as catalysts. His research focuses on the cities of Baltimore and Cleveland and provides a very good companion to this thesis. Chapin found that Baltimore's new ballpark spurred very little ancillary economic development, while Cleveland's new stadium deserves much credit for an economic revival of its surroundings.[4] His research will be discussed later in this thesis as well. Of particular importance for this introduction, Chapin demonstrates the necessity of establishing definitions and/or criteria for "revitalization," which can be a nebulous term for many.

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[1] Takesuye, David, "ULI Awards profile: the Memphis Ballpark District: impetus for redevelopment," *Urban Land*, April 2003, pg. 90.
[2] Skelley, Jack, and Jill Alexander, "Up and running: downtown San Diego scores with a ballpark, a hotel, and residential development," *Urban Land*, May 2004, pg. 104.
[3] Noles, Jim, "Biscuits whet Montgomery, Alabama's appetite for urban renewal," *Urban Land*. July 2005, pg. 81.
[4] Chapin, Timothy Stewart, "Sports facilities as urban redevelopment catalysts: Baltimore's Camden Yards and Cleveland's Gateway," *Journal of the American Planning Association*, Spring 2004, pg. 193-209.

Chapin points out that, "public officials and planners often rely upon tangible signs of redevelopment as indicators of policy and project success. These indicators are therefore an integral part of how planners and politicians understand and measure the success (or failure)."[5] Chapin uses the following criteria to quantify revitalization: reuse of existing buildings or spaces, new construction within the surrounding district, and emergence of a new entertainment or sports district.[6] For the purposes of this thesis, these criteria are slightly modified and built upon. Successful revitalization will be qualified in the following manner:

- Restoration, rehabilitation, and/or adaptive use of historic structures;
- Increase in residential population;
- Increase in active businesses;
- Increases in sales tax revenue; and
- Increases in property values and property taxes collected.

Of course, due to specific circumstances in each city and/or research limitations due to distance and readily available information, all of these criteria might not always be verified in this thesis. Nonetheless, it stands to reason that a majority – but not necessarily all - of these factors can be verified through research in order to define success.

Methods of research for this thesis included utilization of the following resources:

- Books related to the history of the ballpark and the economics of sports facilities.
- Personal visits by the author to many of the cities / ballparks discussed in the thesis.
- Interviews with city, historic preservation, and team officials, along with affected developers and business owners.
- Records of local historic preservation commissions.

[5] Chapin, 195.
[6] Ibid.

- Newspaper articles.
- Journals found in the Avery Index.
- Online articles.
- Awards presented to cities / ballparks discussed.
- Real estate tax records.

Finally, as is often the case – the more that you know, the more you realize that you don't know. The author hopes that this thesis successfully builds upon a 1997 thesis written at the University of Georgia by Alicia Kay Anderson entitled, *Shrines to Sport: American Ballparks*. Anderson's thesis provides a very through developmental history of the American ballpark; it traces the stadium to its first appearance many centuries ago; it delves into the significance of sports facilities; it examines the relationships between American culture and sports; and, it provides a cursory overview of economic impacts of the latest wave of ballpark construction. Anderson's thesis was written during the early years of the boom of new ballparks. As such, she did not have the same access to much of the information included in this thesis. Nevertheless, although this thesis takes the foundation laid by Anderson and includes much more research related to specific economic- and preservation-related impacts, it is still clear that more research can be added to this topic. The final chapter will offer conclusions, along with recommendations for future topics that can further enlighten readers on the ballpark and its power in city planning, economics, and historic preservation.

CHAPTER 2

THE HISTORY OF THE BALLPARK

Early Phases – Baseball in Its Infancy

Before there were ballparks, there was just baseball. The invention of baseball is believed to have occurred in 1845. Alexander Cartwright drew up the first set of official rules for the game in that year, rules which are for the most part still standing today, over 160 years later. Cartwright formed a team and named it the Knickerbocker Base Ball Club of New York. (Today's professional *basketball* team in New York is the Knicks, while the two New York baseball teams go by other names – go figure.) Cartwright's team and set of rules were first put on display across the river in Hoboken, New Jersey at a place referred to as Elysian Fields the following year. A visitor to this spot today will see all that remains of baseball's infancy – a commemorative sign recognizing Cartwright and Elysian Fields.

Figure 1 – Elysian Fields. *Photograph from www.projectballpark.org.*

As one can see from the illustration, the first baseball games featured no seats or grandstands of any sort. The first record of a game played in an actual ballpark is found over fifteen years later in 1862. A crowd of approximately two to three thousand spectators watched the first contest held in Brooklyn, New York at a venue named the Union Base Ball and Cricket Grounds. Later contests were said to have been attended by as many as 6,000 fans.[7]

Other cities grew to feature similar parks, all of which were constructed of wood, during the remainder of the nineteenth century. Wood construction posed two problems – susceptibility to fire and limited seating capacities due to basic structural capacities and/or budgetary constraints. St. Louis was hardest hit with ballpark fires, with six fires taking place during the last decade of the century. Rumors circulated that sabotage was to blame, arising from protests over games taking place on Sundays.[8] At the turn of the twentieth century, the advent of steel and concrete construction practices allowed for a new era of ballparks.

Classic Parks – Baseball as Part of the American Urban Fabric

Without the load-bearing restrictions of wood and the fear of fire damage, concrete and steel opened new doors for baseball. Shibe Park in Philadelphia began a new era of ballparks when it opened for business in 1909. Shibe Park's inaugural game was host to just over 30,000 people, leading the *Philadelphia Enquirer* to pronounce it "the greatest crowd that has ever witnessed a baseball game."[9] The exterior of Shibe Park was an architectural gem, featuring rows of arched windows between columns and topped by a frieze which rested below a mansard roof. The entrance at home plate was punctuated by a Queen Anne style turret with copper roof. It would be the first of many parks that made an architectural statement while also increasing seating capacity.

[7] Michael Gershman, *Diamonds: The Evolution of the Ballpark* (Boston: Houghton Mifflin Co., 1993), 12.
[8] Ibid., 53.
[9] Ibid., 86.

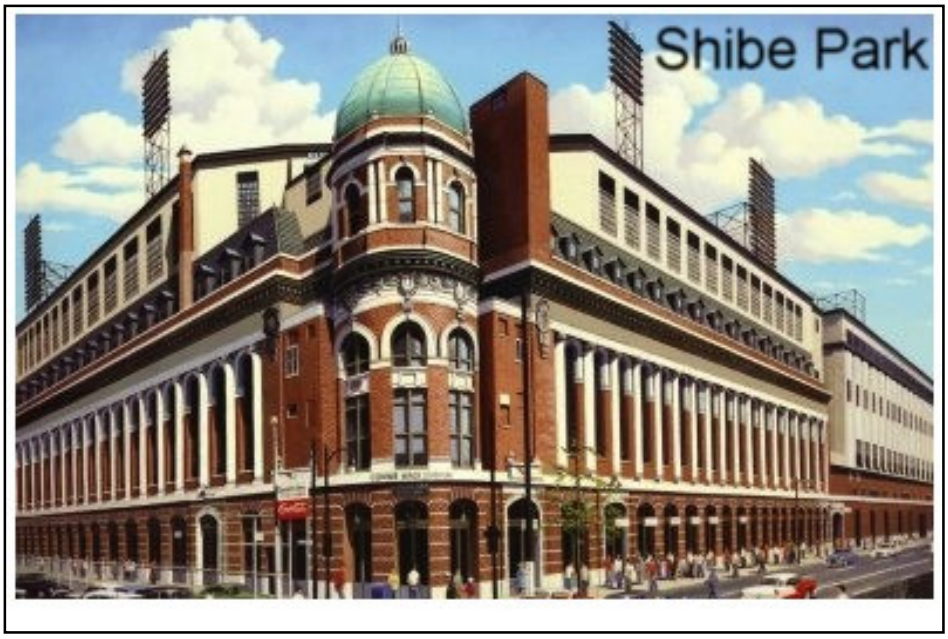

Figure 2 – Shibe Park. *Photograph from www.ballparkpens.com.*

In five short years, the ten following new ballparks sprung up in America's cities: Forbes Field in Pittsburgh (1909), Comiskey Park in Chicago (1910), League Park in Cleveland (1910), Griffith Stadium in Washington (1911), Polo Grounds in New York (1911), Crosley Field in Cincinnati (1912), Fenway Park in Boston (1912), Tiger Stadium in Detroit (1912), Ebbetts Field in Brooklyn (1913), Wrigley Field in Chicago (1914). Each brought drastically increased seating capabilities, and most were situated squarely in the heart of city neighborhoods, usually along streetcar lines. In order to fit the parks into the existing city fabric, these ballparks could sometimes feature rather odd dimensions. For instance, the Polo Grounds left field fence was only 277 feet from home plate, while home runs to left in Ebbetts Field just across town were required to go 419 feet! As such, each park gained its own personality for how it "played," and could perhaps even yield a home field advantage for a player more accustomed to its individual quirks.

Figure 3 – Fenway Park / Wrigley Field. *Fenway Park's Green Monster (left), photograph from www.projectballpark.com. Wrigley Field's ivy-covered wall (right), photograph from www.mlb.com.*

Of these legendary parks, two still remain and are treasured by baseball fans of today – Fenway in Boston and Wrigley in Chicago. When a fan thinks of Fenway, the first thought sure to enter his head would be "The Green Monster," a reference to the thirty foot wall in left field which is painted green. (Most outfield fences are approximately ten feet in height.) On the other hand, mention Wrigley and the first thought will be "Ivy," due to the vegetation that has covered its brick outfield wall for decades. For non-baseball fans, a Boston sportswriter summed up the modern day appreciation for Boston's beloved historic park by stating that, "Fenway is only a ballpark the way the Sistine Chapel is only a church."[10]

Modern Parks - Multi-Purpose in Function, Yet Uniform In Style

After the explosion of new ballparks built during the 1910s, only one new park was constructed in the 1920s (Yankee Stadium in New York) and one in the 1930s (Lakefront Park in Cleveland). No new parks were built in the 1940s, which World War II no doubt had a hand in.

[10] Ibid., 106.

It was in the 1950s that a new era began. A few new parks came online in the fifties – most notably County Stadium in Milwaukee and Memorial Stadium in Baltimore. These parks were considerably larger than those of the teens, with capacities around 50,000 as opposed to the mid-30,000 seat capacity of the previous parks. A real proliferation occurred between 1960 and 1971, however. Eighteen new venues were constructed during this time period.

Whereas the classic parks of the 1910s were characterized by widely varying dimensions on the interior, elaborate architectural detailing on the exterior, and central city locales, this new wave of modern stadiums ran counter to these traits. In Robert Von Goeben's words, "Architectural character took a back seat to perceived functionality, as the new ballpark became a strictly utilitarian object."[11] Many people referred to the stadiums as "concrete doughnuts." A look at the photos below reveals why. A casual observer would be hard-pressed to tell Atlanta and Cincinnati's venues apart. Indeed, as one major league player summed up the new parks, "I stand at the plate and I honestly don't know whether I'm in Pittsburgh, Cincinnati, St. Louis, or Philly. They all look alike."[12]

Figure 4 - Atlanta-Fulton County Stadium / Riverfront Stadium. *The two stadiums in Atlanta (left) and Cincinnati (right) are nearly identical. Photographs from www.ballparks.com.*

This is a case of form over function. Football had taken hold as another heavily attended American sport. As a result, cities sought to build an arena that could house both baseball and football instead of the more costly alternative of having separate stadiums. The product, while

[11] Robert Von Goeben, *Ballparks* (New York: Metro Books, 2000), 54.
[12] Ibid., 68.

beneficial in terms of construction costs, yielded cookie-cutter designs that were by no means ideal for either sport when considered on its own merits. Football games were played on baseball's infield dirt, while foul balls that would ordinarily drift into the stands in a traditional ballpark would be caught for an out in the expanse of foul territory required for a football field in the new stadiums.

One notable stadium in this group of modern parks was the Houston Astrodome – the first domed stadium, which was dubbed the "Eighth Wonder of the World." The Astrodome also gave birth to Astroturf – a term still used today. Clear panes in the ceiling were a part of the Astrodome's design in order to facilitate the growth of natural grass; however, over time, it became apparent that real grass would never grow well in this environment.

Figure 5 – Astrodome. *Exterior and interior views of the Astrodome in Houston, Texas. Photographs from www.ballparks.com.*

These new ballparks often were also sited near interstates for easy access, as the interstate highway had replaced the streetcar as urban America's preferred mode of transportation. Some were even placed in affluent suburban areas, away from downtowns suffering from urban decay. This would usually mean that the stadium was surrounded by a sea of parking spaces instead of tucked into a neighborhood. The environment surrounding the American ballpark had most certainly changed. Gone was the day of the cozy park tucked into a city neighborhood. However, Von Goeben finds a silver lining. "It would be easy to look back at the ballparks of

the 1960s and 1970s and dismiss them as poorly planned mistakes. More significantly, the era was an incredible learning period for today's ballpark architect. As the old cliché goes, you don't know what you've got until it's gone."[13] Sure enough, as the end of the century approached, baseball fans across the country clamored for a return to the "traditional" ballpark of the first half of the century.

Figure 6 – Dodger Stadium. *Dodger Stadium in Los Angeles is completely surrounded by parking lots and devoid of any connection to neighboring areas. Photograph from www.ballparks.com.*

Retro Parks - Everything Old is New Again

As was the case with the previous cycle of ballparks, there was a very distinct lull in new constructions for a few decades before a new wave of parks were built. In this instance, during the two decades from 1971 to 1991, only six stadiums were added. Four of these six were

[13] Ibid, 54.

domed stadiums in locales that virtually required playing indoors – the Kingdome in Seattle due to rain, along with Olympic Stadium in Montreal, the Metrodome in Minneapolis, and the SkyDome in Toronto, all due to prevailing cold. These stadiums were much like the multitude built in the boom era of the 1960s and early 1970s. Most were multi-purpose, circular, and somewhat sterile. However, a new phase would begin in the early 1990s that would mark a drastic change.

Baltimore would lead the next wave of ballpark design. It was a prime candidate because its football team had long since left for another city. As such, Baltimore did not need to construct a venue for two sports. Memorial Stadium, one of the first "modern" stadiums built in the 1950s, had begun to show its age. Unlike ballparks such as Wrigley Field and Fenway Park, which had aged gracefully due to their charm, Memorial Stadium was not held in high regard by the citizens of Baltimore or by major league players.

Architects sought to build a new park that would build on nostalgia for America's traditional ballpark designs of the turn of the century. The opening of Baltimore's Camden Yards in 1992 signaled a shift from pure steel and concrete to brick as a dominant material. Dimensions of the playing field would not be uniform, but rather asymmetrical. "Old-timey" type advertisements appeared to be more decorative than commercial. New life was also breathed into the B&O Warehouse, which became a signature piece of the ballpark's right field. Home run hitters aimed to be the first to hit the warehouse with a towering home run. Team offices were located within the rehabilitated structure. The ballpark was quite the hit and touched off a run of others that harkened back to historic ballpark designs.

Figure 7 – Camden Yards / B&O Warehouse. *Note the historic B&O Warehouse beyond right field at Baltimore's Camden Yards. Photograph from www.ballparks.com.*

Baltimore's Camden Yards began an unprecedented wave of stadium construction. It was the first of nineteen new parks to open between 1992 and 2009, which means that nearly two-thirds of the teams in the major leagues currently play in what can be called a "new" stadium. The following table summarizes the frenzy of activity:

Table 1 – New Ballparks Constructed 1992-2009.

City	Team	Ballpark	Year Built
Baltimore	Orioles	Oriole Park at Camden Yards	1992
Cleveland	Indians	Jacobs Field	1994
Dallas/Fort Worth	Rangers	Ballpark in Arlington (Ameriquest Field)	1994
Denver	Rockies	Coors Field	1995
Atlanta	Braves	Turner Field	1997
Phoenix	Diamondbacks	BankOne Ballpark (Chase Field)	1998
Seattle	Mariners	Safeco Field	1999
Detroit	Tigers	Comerica Park	2000
San Francisco	Giants	PacBell Park (AT&T Park)	2000
Houston	Astros	Enron Field (Minute Maid Park)	2000

City	Team	Ballpark	Year Built
Pittsburgh	Pirates	PNC Park	2001
Milwaukee	Brewers	Miller Park	2001
Cincinnati	Reds	Great American Ballpark	2003
Philadelphia	Phillies	Citizens Bank Park	2004
San Diego	Padres	Petco Park	2004
St. Louis	Cardinals	Busch Stadium	2006
Washington, DC	Nationals	Nationals Park	2008
New York	Mets	Citi Field	2009
New York	Yankees	Yankee Stadium	2009

All of these news parks feature grass playing surfaces that are for baseball only. Cities known for weather patterns which necessitate a dome (Phoenix, Houston, Seattle, and Milwaukee) went the way of the retractable roof, so that games can be played outdoors when weather permits. As one can see from the above table, most of the new ballparks are corporately sponsored, which during the 1990s and into the twenty-first century became a vital key to stadium finance. Many of the new parks were successors of the modern parks of the 1950s and 60s and actually feature a smaller seating capacity than their predecessors. Whereas many of the modern parks seated more than 50,000 spectators, most of the new/retro parks have seating capacities in the mid-40,000 fan range so as to attempt to make the baseball experience more "intimate." Instead of the closed bowl feel of the modern parks, these retro parks feature open outfield vistas that often provide a stunning view of a skyline or natural feature.

Figure 8 – PNC Park. *The ballpark in Pittsburgh offers a view of the river and skyline. Photograph from www.ballparks.com.*

Figure 9 – ATT&T Park. *Long home runs to right field in PacBell Park (now AT&T Park) find their way into the San Francisco Bay. Photograph from www.ballparks.com.*

Most of the new ballparks have some design element that attempts to set each apart from the other. As just discussed, Baltimore incorporated a warehouse into Camden Yards' design. Phoenix has a swimming pool in right field for fans willing to spend enough for their "seat," while fans in San Francisco patiently wait in the Bay in their kayaks for a homerun ball to sail

into the water for what has been dubbed a "splash hit." Houston has a slight incline in centerfield, which poses problems for outfielders on a full sprint who are not accustomed to the terrain. Homeruns in Cincinnati prompt a mock Ohio River steamboat to spew fireworks from its smokestacks. The list goes on and on.

Figure 10 – Great American Ballpark. *A faux riverboat smokestack signals a homerun at the Great American Ballpark in Cincinnati.*

As much as these new ballparks have been a success both architecturally and at the box-office, many have also proven to be economic generators for municipalities. As touched upon earlier in this chapter, many of the new parks have been located snugly in the urban core. As such, the parks have given spectators a reason to venture into the city to a greater degree than with the "modern" parks. It is this subject that will be further explored in the following chapter.

CHAPTER 3

BALLPARK PLACEMENT: THE GOOD, THE BAD, AND THOSE THAT DON'T THINK IT MATTERS

The characteristics of ballparks of the "modern" era greatly influenced not only what happened on the field and in the stands, but also the habits of fans both before and after games. The existence of stadiums which were located outside or on the fringe of downtowns and surrounded by a sea of parking lots meant that most fans drove to the game, then went straight from the car into the game, and finally hopped right back in the car to return home upon the game's conclusion. The stadiums certainly mirrored American society at the time. They were built during the era of urban blight and "white flight." Downtown locations were not high on the priority list of team owners. Likewise, the typical fan was not interested in spending any more time downtown than absolutely necessary.

However, as the new generation of parks arrived in the 1990s, urban planners were looking for opportunities to draw people back into downtown districts still struggling for economic prosperity not seen since the first half of the century. In many, but not all cities, team owners and city officials made a commitment to bringing fans into the heart of the city. The logic of supporters or urban ballparks was that if a stadium could be located in close proximity to hotels, restaurants, and bars, then fans would come earlier and linger longer – thus pumping more money into the local economy. A family of four or a group of men looking for a guys' night out would spend well more than the cost of a ticket, parking, and a hot dog if options were available around the park. This theory is tried and true in places like historic Wrigley Field in

Chicago, where the local neighborhood is flooded with fans for many hours before and after each home game.

This chapter will briefly discuss examples from two cities, Memphis and San Diego, which provide an introduction to how a new ballpark can spur urban renaissance in the immediate surrounding area. While other factors may have contributed to the renewal associated with the ballparks, it is hard to deny that the ballparks themselves went a long way toward drawing people into downtown areas; and, once those people were there, they often saw enough to come back for non-sports reasons. Furthermore, the reintroduction of suburbanites to the urban scene led to an influx of new city dwellers into areas once viewed in a negative light.

On the other hand, some cities have not sited their stadiums as strategically as Memphis and San Diego. Not surprisingly, they have not witnessed the same economic benefits. A few of these examples will be highlighted as well. In addition, in the interest of presenting all viewpoints, this chapter will also acknowledge the many individuals who marginalize how a ballpark can impact a city and ridicule public investment in a private sports business.

Memphis – AutoZone Park

Memphis, Tennessee's AutoZone Park shows that ballparks can be a revitalization tool at not just the major league level, but the minor league level as well. An Urban Land Institute (ULI) story describes the area which AutoZone Park now occupies in its previous state: "Several blocks languished in disrepair. Abandoned buildings, boarded-up storefronts, empty lots, and run-down pornographic shops littered the landscape, robbing the city of its vibrancy. A few bright spots kept the pulse of downtown Memphis beating—the swanky Peabody Hotel, renovated just a decade earlier, and a rejuvenated Beale Street, the home of the Blues. Both projects, while critical to downtown's revitalization, would be no match for what was to

come."[14] Fortunately for downtown Memphis, when Dean and Kristi Jernigan sought to bring a new minor league team to the city, the couple decided that the team's home field should be located downtown.

The ULI story goes on to say how many in the local community ridiculed the Jernigans for passing over more affluent suburban areas, where many of the teams' fans would reside, in favor of a struggling area of downtown Memphis. Kristi Jernigan "insisted the ballpark could help fill a huge void downtown and have an impact that would transcend baseball. She was right. The eight-block baseball project also included the preservation of historic buildings; the construction of new commercial, residential, and educational facilities; and the transformation of vacant lots and run-down buildings into viable space."[15]

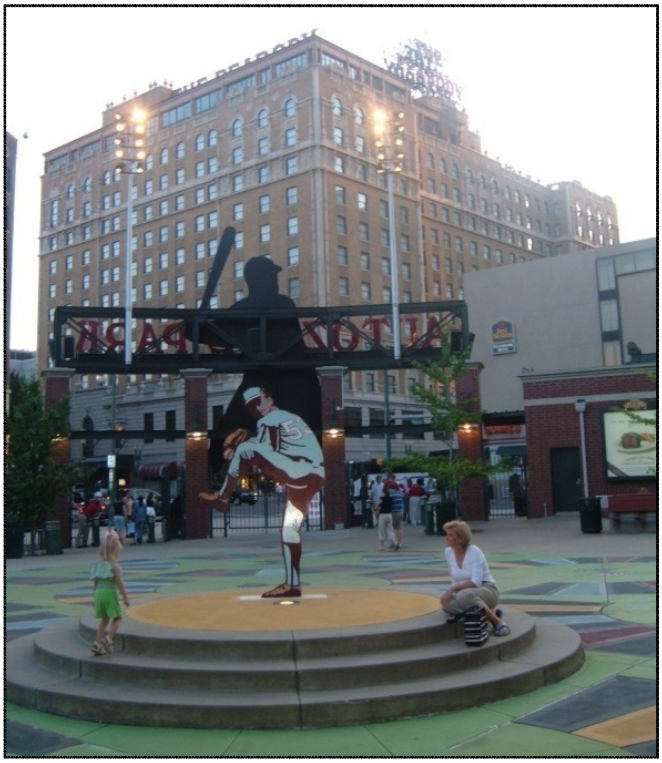

Figure 11 – AutoZone Park, Entrance. *The entrance to Memphis' AutoZone Park in the shadow of the historic Peabody Hotel.*

[14]Urban Land Institute, "Community Builders Profile: Dean and Kristi Jernigan"; available from *http://www.uli.org/AM/Template.cfm?Section=Search_Urban_Land&template=/CM/HTMLDisplay.cfm&ContentID=14731; I*nternet; accessed January 16, 2006.
[15] Ibid.

After no banker would finance their venture, the couple used their own money in tandem with funds made available by the city in order to make a downtown ballpark a reality. The ULI award given to the Jernigans comments that, "No one's laughing now. Today, the Memphis Ballpark District, a 20-acre site, includes Autozone Park —which opened in 2000—renovated office space, a 315-unit apartment building, a parking garage, and a public elementary school. Sanford estimates development worth $75 million to $100 million is now taking place in the Ballpark District, which was the recipient of a ULI Award for Excellence in 2002." 'Dean and Kristi's vision has been instrumental in the turnaround of downtown Memphis,' said Memphis city official Jeff Sanford. 'Their decision to locate the Triple-A ballpark downtown proved not only to be the right one but a catalytic one."[16]

Figure 12 – AutoZone Park, Rehabilitated buildings. *Rehabilitated historic buildings behind the left field stands of a sold-out AutoZone Park*

[16] Ibid.

San Diego – Petco Park

On the West Coast, San Diego provides one of the most recent success stories of a new ballpark as catalyst for economic growth in a historic area. "A sweeping redevelopment zone has emerged in San Diego around the three-year-old baseball stadium built for the San Diego Padres, a neighborhood that has come to be known as the Ballpark District. This urban development zone combines new construction with new uses for older buildings, such as the addition of two new stories of office space to a Depression-era produce market. San Diego joins other cities that have used baseball-park construction to help redevelop downtown areas."[17]

Petco Park also used a tactic found in a few other recent ballparks (and touched upon in Chapter 2) – actually incorporating a historic structure into the new park itself. In this case, the Western Metal Supply Co. building provides a cornerstone of Petco Park. The 1910 building can be accessed from street level and is used for a gift shop, group suites, a restaurant, and rooftop seating. It is a dominant visual feature inside the park, anchoring the leftfield corner with its brick façade.

Figure 13 – Petco Park / Western Metal Supply Building. *Petco Park's Western Metal Supply Co. building as seen from exterior and interior of ballpark. Photographs from www.sandiego.gov/petcopark.*

[17] Morris, Newman, "Square Feet: The Neighborhood That The Ballpark Built," *New York Times,* April 26, 2006.

The building that now provides a defining element to San Diego's new ballpark nearly met its demise. An article published by the Urban Land Institute states that, "by 1972, the once thriving old industrial neighborhood and warehouse district had declined into disrepair. The McKenzie family sold the business in 1972. The Western Metal Supply Company filed for bankruptcy in 1975. In 1977, the vacant building was purchased by the Hom family, and eventually designated as a historic site by the City of San Diego. Years later, the Western Metal Supply Co. Building was scheduled for demolition to make way for construction of a new ball park in downtown San Diego, the PETCO Park. With the Padres commitment to preservation of historic resources, this one hundred-year old historical brick building was preserved and adaptively re-used."[18] The decision to keep the historic structure and incorporate it into the new ballpark came after a lengthy negotiation process between team and city officials and historic preservation groups, which eventually resulted in a signed memorandum of agreement on how historic resources would be affected by the ballpark redevelopment project.

A San Diego Business Journal Article said that the East Village area, now home to Petco Park, "was once labeled 'the needle exchange area,' due to its popularity among drug users."[19] Peter Hall, president of the Centre City Development Corp., said that the "ballpark project, once referred to as 'the jewel in the junkyard', has more than fulfilled the redevelopment agency's expectations."[20] In giving out Smart Growth Awards in 2005, Reese Jarrett, a partner in San

[18] The City of San Diego, "Featured URM Historic Building: Western Metal Supply Co. Building" available from *http://www.sandiego.gov/development-services/industry/urmwestmetal.shtml* ; internet; accessed February 12, 2007.
[19] Urban Land Institute, "Billions of Dollars Later, Downtown Is A Diamond" available from *http://www.uli.org/AM/Template.cfm?Section=Search&template=/CM/HTMLDisplay.cfm&ContentID=16375;* Internet; accessed February 12, 2007.
[20] Ibid.

Diego-based development firm Carter Reese & Associates stated, "I see Petco Park having a significant impact on the East Village. It accelerated development there by at least 10 years."[21]

These two cities each serve as powerful examples of the positive impact that a new ballpark can have when placed in an area in need of a catalyst for growth and/or reinvestment. The ballparks may not have been a cure-all, but they brought foot traffic to formerly neglected areas, which in turn led to increases in retail establishments, restaurants, bars, and residences in the area. Important to preservationists is the added bonus that historic buildings in these areas were rehabilitated rather than demolished - sometimes even becoming part of the ballpark itself.

Location, Location, Location – Atlanta, Philadelphia, and Seattle

At the other end of the spectrum lie examples of ballparks that did not take advantage of a strategic location to parlay the cost of stadium construction into ancillary economic benefits. Sometimes, other factors override location as the determining factor in where a new ballpark is located. Access to a highway, ease of land acquisition, or opposition by NIMBYS (not in my backyarders) represent a few such examples.

The Atlanta Braves began play at Turner Field in 1997. The Braves' ballpark was converted to a baseball configuration from the former Atlanta Olympic Stadium. The team previously played in Atlanta-Fulton County Stadium, which was located immediately north of Turner Field. The old stadium has such expansive parking lots that the Olympic Stadium was built within one of the lots; and, then after the old stadium was demolished, the parking was restored.

It is not clear whether the team, City of Atlanta, or Olympic officials ever seriously discussed alternate locations. When decisions were being made in the early 1990s regarding

[21] Urban Land Institute, "ULI Presents Inaugural Smart-Growth Awards" available from http://www.uli.org/AM/Template.cfm?Section=Search&template=/CM/HTMLDisplay.cfm&ContentID=27362 ; Internet; accessed February 12, 2007.

locations for a new stadium, the trend of building a retro-ballpark in the urban core had yet to begin. However, the idea of building a new stadium on vacant land already owned by the city certainly would have been the least expensive option on the table.

Interestingly enough, parking never really became an issue during the 1996 season in which games were played in the old stadium while former parking lots became a construction site and then a neighboring stadium. (The author attended many games during this season, and thus speaks from experience.) Attendance was high, as the team was the defending World Series champions and advanced to the World Series again that year. Regardless, fans seemed to find other parking or opted for mass transit options.

This background is given to show the irony that exists more than a decade after the first pitch at Turner Field. The City of Atlanta in 2006 proposed the creation of a Tax Allocation District (TAD) to revitalize the historic neighborhoods around the ballpark. A central aspect of the report was the need to convert Turner Field's massive surface parking lots into mixed-use development. Currently, 47% of the 372 acre TAD area is covered by surface parking.[22]

With Interstate 75/85 on its western boundary, expansive surface parking to the north, and smaller parking lots followed by single family residences to the east and south, the opportunities for ancillary economic development around Turner Field are greatly reduced. Fans attending a game have nowhere within a fifteen minute walk in which to have dinner or a drink before the game. They will not find themselves passing by a window display that might make them want to return for holiday shopping. And the adjacent historic neighborhoods of

[22] The City of Atlanta, The Public Schools Board of Education, The Fulton County Commission, "Tax Allocation District Redevelopment Plan for the Stadium Neighborhoods, Atlanta, Georgia" available from http://www.atlantaga.gov/client_resources/government/planning/tad/stadiumreporttadredevelopmentplan-final.pdf; Internet; accessed August 16, 2009.

Summerhill and Mechanicsville have only the revenue from unofficial parking lots to show as an economic benefit.

Figure 14 – Turner Field Aerial. *Atlanta's Turner Field is in lower portion of this aerial photo. The baseball diamond silhouette of the former Atlanta-Fulton County Stadium can be seen in the parking lot north of Turner Field. Interstates 75 and 85 border the new ballpark to the west, an expanse of parking separates the park from downtown Atlanta to the north, and smaller surface lots buffer residential neighborhoods to the east and south. No significant commercial development is near the ballpark. These factors combine to eliminate any opportunity for ancillary economic benefits as a result of the ballpark. Aerial photograph from Google Earth.*

Philadelphia's Citizens Bank Park, which opened in 2004, presents a similar scenario. As with Turner Field, it is largely surrounded by surface parking lots and interstate highway. As was the case in Atlanta, it was built next to the stadium it replaced; and the location of the demolished stadium was subsequently paved for surface parking. Unlike Atlanta, city and team

officials in Philadelphia originally sought in-town locations for the new ballpark.[23] After dealing with resistance from those who feared negative impacts - namely traffic - officials opted for the path of least resistance. Parking spaces, after all, cannot oppose a new ballpark.

Reaction to the park's location has been largely negative, ranging from the average fan to the architecture critic. Take, for instance, this viewpoint from a fan-based website for ballpark reviews: "If you've read my review of Petco Park, then you know I love its location. I wish I could say the same about Citizens Bank Park, but I can't. After seeing what Camden Yards, Coors Field, and Jacobs Park did for their respective downtowns, I became convinced that there's no reason for a Major League ballpark to be situated in a sea of asphalt. Unfortunately, that's where CBP is located."[24]

Meanwhile, the Philadelphia Inquirer's architecture critic pulled no punches when sharing her perspective:

> The Phillies' new ballpark may sit on a regular city block. It may be faced in regular city brick. It may be the size of a regular city building. But don't be fooled: It will be a baseball mall surrounded by enough parking to satisfy shoppers on the day after Christmas. Despite the best efforts of the architects to give Philadelphia the kind of urban-scale ballpark that can be found in a dozen other big-league towns, the design presented Thursday was undermined from the start by three obvious problems: location, location, location. … But, thanks to a lack of political leadership, the Phillies were allowed to take the cheap and easy way out. Rather than struggle with a tight urban setting and anxious neighbors, they picked a 21-acre site in South Philadelphia's Stadiumland, a spot whose greatest physical asset is its proximity to a highway interchange. … Philadelphia dithered for more than a decade over whether to build a downtown stadium, even as other cities around the country managed to accomplish the feat with much less angst.[25]

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[23] New Urban News, "A Tale of Two Ballparks, San Diego outdistances Philadelphia," available from http://www.newurbannews.com/BallparksJul04.html; internet; accessed August 4, 2009.
[24] "Philadelphia's Citizens Bank Park – Setting," available from http://www.baseballparks.com/Citizens1.asp; Internet; accessed August 16, 2009.
[25] Saffron, Inga, "Right Park, But Wrong Place: Problem Is Home Plate Will Be Nowhere Near Where The Phils Should Call Home – Downtown Philadelphia," *Philadelphia Enquirer,* July 1, 2001.

Figure 15 – Citizens Bank Park Aerial. *Philadelphia's Citizens Bank Park is even more isolated than Turner Field. The adjacent football stadium and basketball arena necessitate over 20,000 parking spaces. Otherwise, the parking is surrounded by highways, industrial development, and recreational fields. Again, the opportunity for ancillary economic development has been effectively eliminated. Aerial photograph from Google Earth.*

Seattle provides a different lesson than what transpired in Atlanta and Philadelphia. Seattle at least attempted to locate its new ballpark in an area that would allow it to become an economic catalyst. City and team officials saw parallels with the success stories in cities such as Denver when they located their new ballpark - or so they thought. On the surface, Safeco Park has several things going for it. It is about six blocks east of the Puget Sound waterfront. It is also just six blocks south of Pioneer Square Historic District. Nonetheless, the positive impacts many hoped for have yet to transpire.

The *Washington Post*, in an article written to shed light on the location of a new park in the District of Columbia paints this picture:

> John Kazdal and other property owners thought their ramshackle industrial neighborhood was about to be reborn when it was selected as the site for a new major league ballpark. County leaders said the stadium would trigger commercial investment, just as supporters of a new D.C. ballpark say their plan will transform the Anacostia waterfront.
>
> But five years after the opening of Safeco Field here, Kazdal's plan to remodel his old, brick warehouse into a fancy three-level brew pub has gone nowhere. He still is selling used restaurant equipment from his building. And the streets around the ballpark remain marked by empty buildings, covered windows and "For Lease" signs.
>
> "This would be the perfect place to loosen your tie and have a couple of brewskis before a game, you know?" he said last week, looking out from his rooftop, less than a block from the stadium. "I thought this area would take off."[26]

So, here we have a city that locates it park in an urban setting, with hopes of revitalizing a depressed area that features historic buildings. It is located near the waterfront and also near a high profile historic district. City leaders even changed zoning to encourage restaurants and shops in the vacant buildings near the ballpark. What went wrong? A quick glance at an aerial map tells the story. It is an issue of connectivity. Those six short blocks from the ballpark to historic Pioneer Square are occupied by a large parking structure, a football stadium, and a huge surface parking lot. Thus, there is no opportunity for development that can seamlessly tie the ballpark to the historic district. Similarly, the waterfront – although close – has no accessibility. An active industrial shipping yard separates a Seattle Mariners fan from the Puget Sound. Finally, the zoning changes, while encouraging businesses to occupy historic buildings, did not allow for residential uses due to concern over the nearby high intensity industrial activities.

[26] Whoriskey, Peter, "Ballparks in West Offer D.C. Divergent Lessons," *Washington Post,* November 15, 2004.

"Seattle totally blew it," said John Pastier, a design critic and ballpark consultant who worked on that city's ballpark. "It was basically too far away from the downtown."[27]

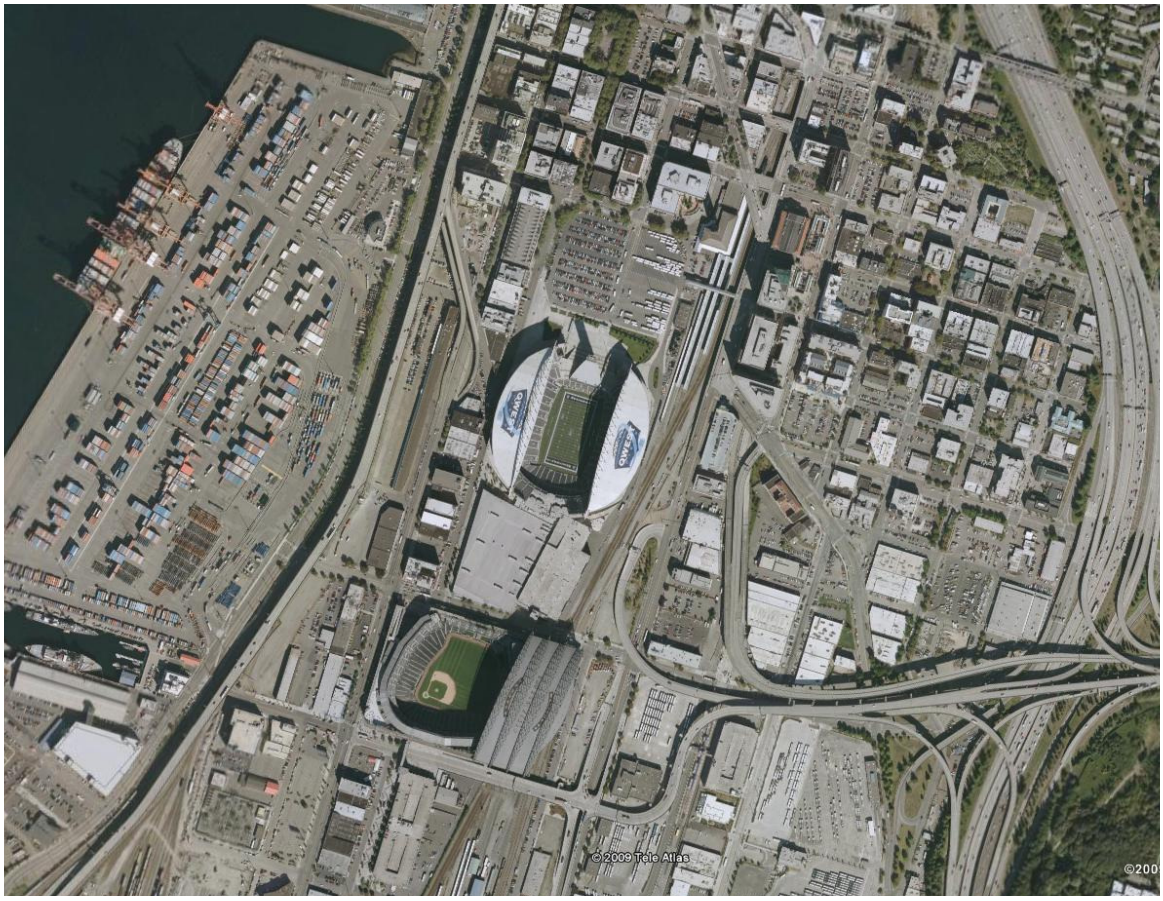

Figure 16 – Safeco Field Aerial. *While not nearly as isolated as the ballparks in Atlanta and Philadelphia, Seattle's Safeco Field deals with several challenges. A large parking deck, a football stadium, and a large surface lot all separate the ballpark's northern side from nearby Pioneer Square. Heavy industrial to the west eliminates any linkage to the nearby waterfront. Interstate highway overpasses loom to the east. The row of warehouses seen at the southwestern corner of the ballpark has no linkage to the rest of the city, and has not seen any measurable investment.*

Opponents Who Argue Against New Ballparks as a Revitalization Tool

This chapter concludes with an acknowledgement of those who think that ballparks have no value to a city, no matter where they are located. There have been many books published which seek to shoot down the notion of the ballpark as a catalyst for economic development.

[27] Ibid.

With names such as *Field of Schemes* and *Public Dollars, Private Stadiums*, they certainly seize on the opportunity to point out those cities in which hoped-for ancillary development did not occur. For instance, a new ballpark built in Detroit in the early part of this decade has not resulted in a notable revitalization of that city's downtown. However, a city such as Detroit is currently suffering from severe depression across the board to a degree that a ballpark simply cannot supply the jolt needed.

The angle most vigilantly pursued in these texts is that public money spent for a stadium built to benefit a privately-owned baseball team is inherently wrong. These authors argue that this is an example of government fat-cats helping wealthy team-owners to line their pockets, thus making the entire exercise an insult to democracy. What is conveniently glossed over is that in most instances, voters decide whether to move forward with construction of a new ballpark. And there are certainly cases in which the public votes "no." The citizens are indeed deciding what to do with their dollars. The authors also often go to great lengths to point out flaws in the planning process and in the political and business personalities involved. Of course, any project on the scale of building a ballpark for a quarter of a billion dollars will run into obstacles and roadblocks and have its share of high-profile personalities.

Chapin, whose research was discussed in the introduction, does a particularly good job of addressing the preponderance of opponents to new ballparks as catalysts. He says that, "many of these studies largely miss the mark in assessing the rationale for public investments in sports facilities," and cites a shift in how impacts are viewed. Ballpark opponents, he points out, often look at very broad, city-wide economic indicators such as gains in per-capita income or overall job creation. He discusses how arguments are no longer based upon, "the concept that a new

facility is a metropolitan economic development tool (in terms of jobs and taxes), but that the facility is a catalyst for the *physical redevelopment* of portions of the city's core."[28]

In addition to focusing on the worst-case scenarios which have played out across America, many anti-ballpark books also manage to present a rather skewed version of the stories from cities with ballparks that are considered to be revitalization *success* stories. While this thesis does not take the approach of specifically disproving the critics, the final section of the following chapter (See: "The Domino Effect" in Chapter 3) will examine what the authors of *Public Dollars, Private Stadiums* had to say about Denver's success (or their perceived lack thereof). Their research was conducted four years after Denver's new ballpark opened. It pointed to an area adjacent to the ballpark in which ancillary development had not occurred. However, three years after his visit, the area became a locally designated historic district. The designation came about largely due to development pressure in the area directly attributed to the ballpark; and today there are dozens of historic buildings which feature new businesses or residences, to go along with former surface parking lots which have been replaced with compatible infill construction projects.

It would appear from this example that the naysayers may sometimes make their judgment too early. The full impact of a new ballpark in a historic area cannot always be accurately gauged in just four to five years, as the next chapter will show. Books written in opposition to new ballparks as a revitalization tool are primarily attacks against fiscal policy and municipal politics. In the end, this thesis is written to examine how new ballparks have affected historic districts, not how taxpayers' money is best spent.

[28] Chapin, 194.

CHAPTER 4

ROCKY MOUNTAIN REVITALIZATION

Introduction

Coors Field opened in Denver, Colorado in the spring of 1995. The stadium was one of the first retro parks to come into service, and most agree that it is still one of the best baseball parks in America – standing tall next to the fifteen parks that have come after it. It features a high-level of architectural detail, stunning vistas of the Rocky Mountains, and a cozy environment for the spectator. It incorporated a historic building within its right field area, which is used for a brewpub and restaurant. Its lower deck is below street level, creating a façade that has a surprisingly low-profile scale for a 50,000-seat stadium. When walking a sidewalk alongside Coors Field, it blends in quite nicely with surrounding three and four-story warehouses in the Denver's Lower Downtown (LoDo.) More than anything, it stands as the poster child for how a ballpark can serve as an economic catalyst to adjacent historic districts.

Figure 17 – Coors Field façade. *The exterior façade of Coors Field blends well with buildings on each side. Photograph from www.ballparks.com.*

Since Coors Field's construction, quotes from a range of individuals - from Denver's mayor to local business owners – suggest that the LoDo area has exploded with growth in both the residential and commercial arenas. What was referred to during the 1980s as "skid-row" by the locals is now considered the hippest part of town. As a resident of Denver who spent his first two years in the city living in LoDo, the author is obliged to point out just how often the term "skid row" is used to describe LoDo in the years before 1990 or so. A Washington Post newpaper article states as much when it says that, "the area was known for its abandoned buildings, bars that opened at 7 a.m. and homeless people sleeping on the sidewalk. And the area east of the ballpark was the worst. 'This was crack central,' said Josie Koontz, owner of Josie's Pawn, a few blocks east of the stadium."[29] (The area east of the ballpark will be discussed later as a direct rebuttal to detractors of ballparks as a revitalization tool; and, a photo of Josie's Pawn and its restored façade is featured.)

Coors Field's Conception

Before Coors Field's impact is discussed further, let us first take a look at the process that led to its construction and strategic location. Major League Baseball (MLB) announced in the late 1980s that it planned to add two new expansion teams. Denver, which already claimed professional football and basketball franchises, threw its hat into the ring. In order to be considered by MLB, a candidate city was required to either have a baseball only stadium (not the multi-use stadiums made popular in the 1970s) built or planned for construction. In preparation for its bid, Denver area residents passed a 0.1% sales tax increase intended to raise the necessary $215 million for construction of a new, baseball-only ballpark. The referendum allowed for the special sales tax to be levied for twenty years, but the robust economy of the mid-to-late 1990s

[29] Ibid.

allowed the tax to be retired after just ten years.[30] With the pieces in place in 1990, Denver and edged out Tampa/St. Petersburg, FL; Washington, D.C.; Buffalo, N.Y.; and Orlando, FL to join Miami, FL as the newest MLB franchises.[31]

After securing the franchise, a Downtown Ballpark Development Committee was formed in 1991 to search for the best location for a new baseball stadium. The committee focused on a large tract of available land at the northeastern corner of downtown. Its mission statement was to, "make recommendations to the City and the Baseball Stadium District for mitigating impacts and capturing the opportunities for the surrounding neighborhoods and greater community associated with the development of the ballpark." Subcommittees of the task force included: Urban Design, Transportation, Parking, Economic Development, Land Use and Zoning, and Ballpark Management and Operations. During its nine-month existence, the committee worked tirelessly to ensure that Denver took the best possible course to take advantage of the impact that a new ballpark can offer, holding seventeen public meetings and nearly forty subcommittee meetings. The committee's final report stressed priorities such as: limiting new parking lots and structures, utilizing existing transit services, preserving historic structures, designing the ballpark to fit the scale of its surroundings, and encouraging year-round commercial and residential uses in adjacent areas.[32] With few exceptions, the committee's goals were realized.

[30] Kelly, Guy, "Taxpayers to Get Off Hook Early: Stadium Tax To End by December 2000," *Rocky Mountain News,* February 20, 1994.
[31] Paul Parker (Historian, Colorado Rockies Baseball Club), interview by author, August 28, 2009, Denver, CO.
[32] The City of Denver, "Downtown Ballpark Development Committee Recommendations" published June 1992.

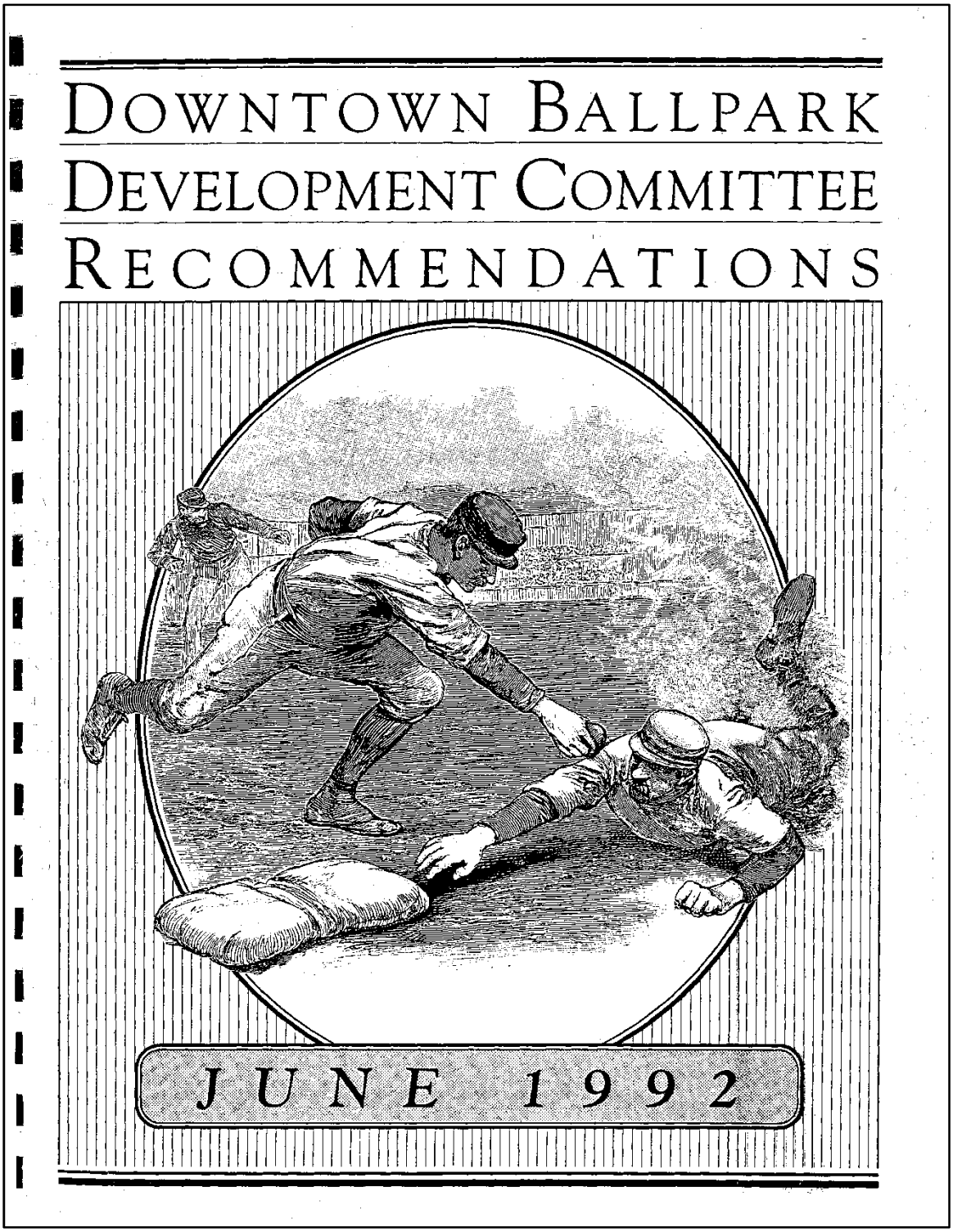

Figure 18 – Downtown Denver Ballpark Development Committee Report Cover.

Historic preservation was a hot topic during the planning for the new ballpark. The two most prominent sides of the ballpark would border the Lower Downtown Historic District on its

third base side and what would later become locally designated as the Ballpark Historic District on its first base side. Architects and city officials had many decisions to make regarding historic structures. The first base side of the ballpark presented two options. The first option was for a row of warehouse / industrial buildings along Blake Street to be retained and adaptively used. According to the Ballpark Neighborhood Influence Study, this approach presented, "problems created by maintaining the structures which include accessibility, life safety, renovation costs, market for reuse and architectural quality and image."[33] Reports listed most of the structures as being in poor condition, requiring extensive monetary commitment to retain. Ingress and egress of spectators would be difficult, as access on this particular side of the ballpark would be limited to the alleyways between buildings. Aesthetically, the opportunity for the ballpark to anchor the corner of Blake and 20th Streets would be limited because the park would be recessed from the streetscape. In the end, the second option was chosen, in which only one of the warehouse buildings was kept and now is home to an in-park brewpub called the Sand Lot.

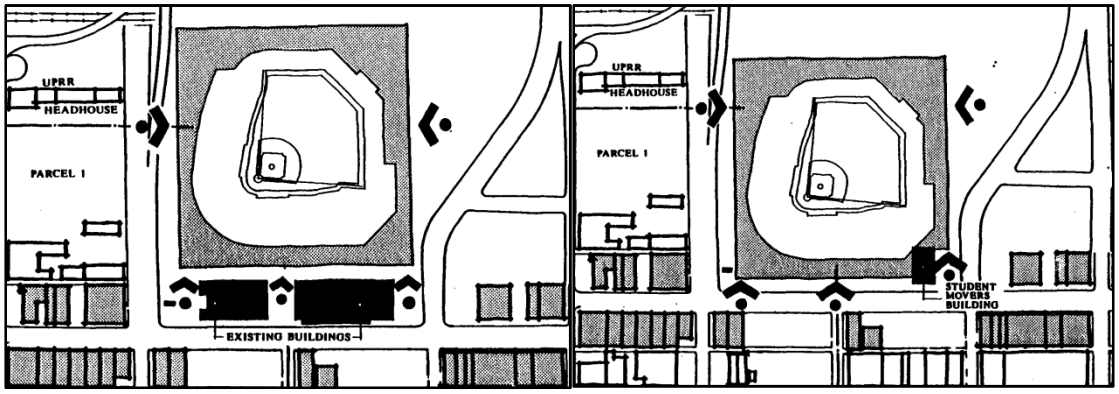

Figure 19 – Preliminary Coors Field Site Alternatives. *At left, plans for the ballpark if historic buildings along Blake Street (running east-west, immediately south of the ballpark) had been kept and rehabilitated. At right, plans for ballpark with only the Student Movers Building remaining. As was the case east and west of the baseball diamond, the land behind the row of Blake Street warehouses was largely vacant, characterized by viaducts, rail lines, and rail yards.*

[33] The City of Denver, "Ballpark Neighborhood Influence Study," published October 1992.

The move no doubt disappointed many preservationists. As will be seen with Montgomery's example in the following chapter, however, sometimes a few buildings must be lost in order to facilitate the greater good of revitalization for dozens of other structures. In addition to the historic structure that was incorporated into the actual ballpark, the most prominent adjacent historic property – the Union Pacific Headhouse – also became a priority for preservation. All reports emphasized the necessity of its adaptive reuse, stating that, "the Headhouse has been classified by the State Historic Preservation Office as contributing to the character of the District … and set a precedent for the scale and quality of future development in the area."[34]

A Rocky Mountain News article from a year before the opening of Coors Field heralded the reuse of the Headhouse:

> Baseball has put a new spur in an old railroad. Largely because of Coors Field construction, a historic part of the city is going through a rapid and dramatic renewal. For example, take the Union Pacific headquarters building near the ballpark. Built in 1923, the two-story "classical revival" building is one of the most prominent reminders of Denver's rail history. … Now, a $4.2 million project is underway to give the "Headhouse" new life with restaurants and possibly a museum and offices.[35]

Today, the Denver Chop House and Brewery is the primary occupant of the former Headhouse and has been in business for more than 15 years. Several other restaurant/bars occupy the space, while high-end residential lofts have filled out the property.

[34] Ibid.
[35] Kelly, Guy, "Ballpark Spurs Renewal," *Rocky Mountain News,* 17 April 1994.

Figure 20 – Union Pacific Headhouse. *The Union Pacific Headhouse as seen after its rehabilitation.*

The new ballpark's scale and design was a priority of architects and city officials. It was to blend seamlessly into the surrounding urban fabric, with a report stating, "the new ballpark must fit into its context in terms of its height, scale, orientation to the street and views, materials, detailing, and colors." In this respect, the ballpark was a great success. One can stand a block or two away and look down Blake or 20th Streets without seeing a monolith towering above the historic warehouses. Even the brickwork of Coors Field was patterned after nearby buildings. The distinctive masonry of the iconic Icehouse building at 18th and Wynkoop, two blocks from the ballpark, was incorporated into Coors Field. This is but one example of the attention to detail insisted upon by decision-makers.

Figure 21 – Icehouse / Icehouse Brickwork / Coors Field Brickwork. *Top – The Beatrice Cold Storage Warehouse, better known as the Icehouse. Bottom left – the distinctive brickwork pattern of the Icehouse. Bottom right – brickwork at Coors Field.*

LoDo's Evolution

Returning to the oft-used "skid row" phrase mentioned earlier, Denver planner Karle Seydel used it in this assessment of LoDo prior to Coors Field: "It was the last remnants of Skid Row," said Seydel, the planner. "You had to step over people on the sidewalk."[36] An Associated Press article described it thusly: "Denver had hit a low point when the bottom fell out of oil and gas prices, crucial to Colorado's economy, in the 1980s. The recession made shells of downtown office buildings. What is now affectionately known as LoDo became a forgotten - if not feared - area of junked rail yards and abandoned Victorian warehouses. A series of viaducts allowed drivers to avoid the area, bypassing its empty, brick-lined streets."[37]

Seydel keeps track of historic buildings in the surrounding blocks which have been rehabilitated. He says that between 1991 and 1999 – four years time before and after the ballpark's construction, 59 buildings were renovated or built new, and 12 others were under construction or planned.[38] Numbers such as these make LoDo's revival a clear fact. However, the question is sometimes posed, "Can just a ballpark trigger such a change? Or was it bound to happen anyway?" The debate can be akin to the chicken versus the egg. In the end, the truth most likely lies somewhere in between. Most agree that LoDo was already turning around before Coors Field was conceived as an idea. Critics of ballparks pounce on this aspect. In *Public Dollars, Private Stadiums*, the authors state their argument as such:

> The relationship between Coors Field and the surrounding neighborhood is much more complex than stadium proponents sometimes acknowledge. The LoDo area has seen a great deal of economic development in the 1990s and is now considered one of the trendier entertainment areas of Denver. That development, however, began well before Coors Field was built and before the Rockies were awarded a franchise. Stadium advocates have tried

[36] Whoriskey.
[37] Merritt, George, "Coors Field Has Brought Denver Long Way," *USA Today,* October 25, 2007.
[38] Whoriskey.

> to take credit for this economic rejuvenation that was already present before the arrival of Coors Field.[39]

The remainder of this chapter relates personal stories, discusses current observations, and examines economic data, e.g. - taxable sales, property values, and property taxes collected. This research refutes the argument that ballpark advocates seek undue credit for LoDo's success. It also accounts for the transformation in the adjacent Ballpark Neighborhood that occurred after the writing of *Public Dollars, Private Stadiums*.

The Personal Side of Revitalization: Joyce and Jed

Joyce Meskis and her husband Jed Rulon-Miller moved to LoDo before the ballpark opened and their story offers a great testimony to the overall process. In the early stages of LoDo's transformation, they bought a loft from John Hickenlooper, the man who would later become Denver's mayor. At the time, Hickenlooper was a laid-off geologist deciding what to do with his severance package. His idea was to start a brewpub and pool hall on the ground floors of an empty warehouse and to sell lofts in the floors above it. To give an idea of how many people found value in the abandoned structures in Denver's downtown, Tom Clark, executive vice president of the Metro Denver Economic Development Corporation, recounted the story that, "We had an auction for office space downtown, and one of the buildings was auctioned off at 14 cents a foot."[40] Hickenlooper was turned down by dozens of bankers. After telling one that he was trying to be an urban pioneer, he was told by the banker that, "Everyone knows the pioneers get the bullets. It's the settlers who get the land."[41] Undeterred, Hickenlooper secured the loan

[39] Kevin J. Delaney and Rick Eckstein, *Public Dollars, Private Stadiums: The Battle Over Building Sports Stadiums* (New Brunswick, NJ and London: Rutgers University Press, 2003), 115.
[40] Merritt.
[41] John Hickenlooper (Mayor, City of Denver), public speech at Colorado Preservation, Inc. annual conference, February 8, 2007, Denver, CO.

under the condition that all of the lofts above the brewpub would be pre-sold. In spite of the challenge that the still-gritty LoDo presented to him, Hickenlooper met the condition. Joyce and Jed later became two of the buyers.

Hickenlooper, Meskis, and Rulon-Miller were three of a handful of visionary individuals who had a soft spot for downtowns, saw potential in the vacated historic buildings of LoDo, and had the gumption to invest in the district's future. Meskis opened the Tattered Cover Bookstore in a historic building four blocks from the ballpark, one year before the first pitch. Rulon-Miller became an investor in and now runs the Wines Off Wynkoop wine shop in the alley adjacent to his wife's bookstore. Both of these businesses are located in buildings in which Hickenlooper and other investors used historic preservation tax credits to finance rehabilitation work.

In a newspaper interview, Meskis gave credit to Coors Field for helping her business to grow. "Lower Downtown was an area that had been unfamiliar to a lot of suburbanites. It looked like a war zone. It was seedy." In fact, her husband's wine shop used a marketing campaign in its early days that poked fun at LoDo's reputation. Posters in the window promised "Free Nunchucks" to all those brave enough to venture into the alley. However, according to Meskis, the combination of new businesses such as her bookstore, along with foot traffic generated by sold out baseball games contributed in a way that LoDo "lost its scariness" to those suburbanites.[42] The Tattered Cover is now considered one of the nation's best independent bookstores and has since opened a new location in an adaptively-used historic theatre in the nearby in-town neighborhood of Capitol Hill.

[42] Ibid.

Figure 22 – Morey Mercantile Buildings Before and After. *At left, before photo of the Morey Mercantile buildings in the early 1990s. At right, the rehabilitated Morey Mercantile buildings are now occupied by the Tattered Cover bookstore, Dixon's Restaurant, Wines Off Wynkoop, and affordable rent loft residences. Photographs from Joyce Meskis, Tattered Cover owner.*

Mayor Hickenlooper

Meanwhile, Hickenlooper's brewpub provides data that bears out the impact of Coors Field and the exposure that it gave Denverites to the evolving LoDo historic district. The Wynkoop Brewing Company had been open for seven years before the first pitch was thrown two blocks away, and the business had been profitable. The author of *Public Dollars, Private Stadiums* might easily stop at this point to show that the business started before Coors Field was even on the drawing board and that it had succeeded. However, not only did the opening of Coors Field provide a very significant surge to the business, it kept people coming back even after the season was over. In an interview with *Business Week* magazine, Hickenlooper provided strong evidence of how the ballpark specifically affected his business. "In 1995, the first year that Coors Field opened, it sold out every game," he said. "Eighty-one dates sold out, with 50,000 people coming down there to every game. The Wynkoop's sales went up 50%. I went from being successful to affluent in the space of six months. What was amazing was that when baseball season ended in October, our sales stayed up through November, December, and January. All the people that came down and hadn't come downtown in a decade suddenly liked

what they saw and said, 'God, this is a cool neighborhood, this is a neat restaurant, and there are some other neat restaurants here.'"[43]

Hickenlooper went on to explain that, while the ballpark is not the sole reason for LoDo's success, it served as an incredible catalyst. "Here's the thing. We opened the brew pub in 1988. Denver wasn't awarded a baseball franchise until 1991. They didn't decide to build Coors Field in Lower Downtown until 1993, and it didn't open until 1995. So before they ever located there, we turned out to be very successful, and there were a couple dozen restaurants that had already opened. So the neighborhood was already coming. What happened was that Coors Field became the gasoline poured on the fire -- it became a huge accelerant."[44]

Joe Blake, president of the Denver Metro Chamber of Commerce, echoed Hickenlooper's assessment. "This baby gets placed there and boom, everything takes off," he said.[45] Numbers supplied by the Downtown Denver Partnership back up this assertion. In the ballpark's first season, sales tax in the LoDo district increased by 86%. Even more profound, assessments of properties immediately surrounding Coors Field skyrocketed from under two dollars per square foot to nearly thirty dollars per square foot. Those calling LoDo home quadrupled in the ten years after the ballpark's inception.[46] Data provided in a *Rocky Mountain News* story written as the Rockies began their second season at Coors Field very definitively shows that the ballpark did not simply continue an upward trend in LoDo. It resulted in a spike. See the following graph:

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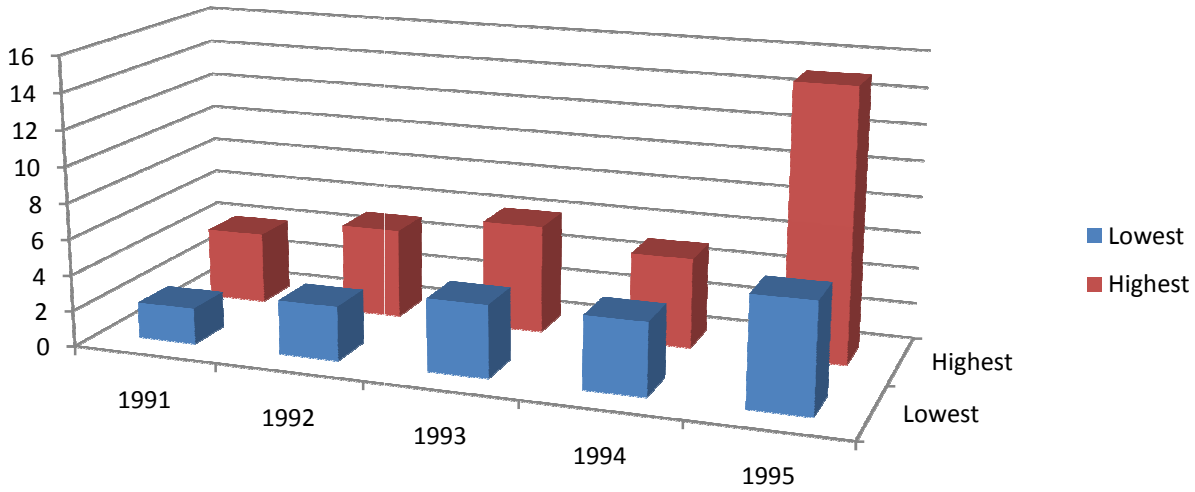
[43] Kurtz, Rod, "Stadiums 'Can Only Do So Much'; Denver Mayor John Hickenlooper Says They Can Help Retail Development, But It Takes A Thriving Neighborhood To Keep Customers Coming Back," *Business Week,* February 18, 2005.
[44] Ibid.
[45] Merritt.
[46] The Downtown Denver Partnership, "Coors Field's Impact" available from *www.downtowndenver.com/coorsfield* Internet; accessed 21 February 2007.

Table 2 – Total LoDo Monthly Taxable Sales, Highest and Lowest Months, 1991-1995.
(Coors Field opened in 1995)



The *lowest* monthly taxable sales total during Coors Field's first season was 50% higher than the previous best achieved in both 1993 and 1994. The highest monthly total was *150% higher* than the previous best achieved in 1993.[47] The chart shows what all can agree upon – LoDo was headed in a positive direction well before Coors Field. However, even the most negative naysayer cannot argue that the opening of the ballpark resulted in a very distinct and significant upward spike in spending in the LoDo area – both during low and high months of economic activity. The effect that Hickenlooper described at his Wynkoop Brewing Company was felt throughout LoDo. It truly was gasoline poured onto a fire. As has been pointed out, sometimes it takes more than just a few years to see the true impacts of a new ballpark. In this instance, however, the effects were seen immediately. The data verifies what many had alluded to – that LoDo was already in the midst of a very positive rebirth. However, it also shows that the rate of change (if sales tax data is used as a barometer), was greatly accelerated by the

[47] Conklin, Michelle, "LoDo Says Batter Up," *Denver Post,* 8 April 1996.

opening of Coors Field. As a postscript, Hickenlooper would later parlay his civic participation and downtown development success into the subsequent election as Denver's mayor in 2003.

The Urban Land Institute (ULI) formally recognized Coors Field's impact, stating that, "Coors Field has enjoyed an enviable economic success since its opening year of 1995. Its presence has led the impetus for an amazing redevelopment in the LoDo region. Between 1993 and 1996, the number of restaurants in the area increased 140 percent, and the number of brewpubs grew from four to nine. None have gone out of business since Coors Field opened. The 945 residential units built downtown in 1996 were more than the entire four previous years combined."[48]

The award went on to state, "Although Denver's Lower Downtown (LoDo) already was a neighborhood on the rise when Coors Field was completed, the major league ballpark has accelerated and solidified LoDo's growth. Its presence has created the critical mass that every neighborhood needs to become self-sustaining. Coors Field has been well integrated into LoDo; it is at once the centerpiece and a part of Lower Downtown."[49]

The Domino Effect

A truer litmus test of the revitalizing power of a ballpark can be found in what is now referred to as the "Ballpark Neighborhood" of Denver. LoDo is situated on the west/southwest side of Coors Field, while the Ballpark Neighborhood is on its east/southeast side. This area was regarded as stagnant both before and after Coors Field opened. As just discussed, the impact of the ballpark was felt in LoDo immediately, which is likely due to the incrementally positive changes that had already occurred there in the early 1990s. However, as was also mentioned

[48] Urban Land Institute, "Coors Field; Denver, Colorado; Official Statement of Special Award"; available from http://www.uli.org/AM/Template.cfm?Section=Search_Urban_Land&template=/CM/HTMLDisplay.cfm&ContentID=9456; Internet; accessed January 16, 2006.
[49] Ibid.

earlier, sometimes patience is required to fully witness a transformation. The Ballpark District exemplifies this aspect well. A planning document for the area, published in 1995, referred to it as a, "long overlooked area, now coming into focus because of its most famous asset, Coors Field."[50] *Public Dollars, Private Stadiums* was published in 1999 – four years after Coors Field opened. During the authors' reconnaissance of the Ballpark neighborhood, they observed that, "economic development is completely absent east of Twentieth Street and beyond the ballpark (moving away from central LoDo). In a two-block area adjacent to the stadium, we saw four pawn shops, a few active warehouses, and numerous surface parking lots. There were also many abandoned warehouses, empty lots, and transients."[51] A property owner in the neighborhood echoed this sentiment in a 1996 *Denver Post* article. "For decades, Denver stopped at 20th Street, and this area was the other side of the tracks," he said.[52]

However, as LoDo reached a saturation point of redevelopment, the Ballpark Neighborhood presented the next "domino" for developers to "knock over." Should the authors return today, they might draw a very different conclusion on the ability for a ballpark to transform a neighborhood. Revitalizations cannot always happen overnight. For Ballpark, it took ten to fifteen years for efforts to take hold and produce easily recognizable results. The effort began in the early 1990s, when city leaders foresaw the development pressures that would inevitably reach to this neighborhood. Denver historian Tom Noel wrote an opinion piece in the Denver Post in 1993 advocating for the designation of a Ballpark local historic district. He encouraged citizens to attend city council meetings in support of such a motion so that the area

[50] The City of Denver, "Northeast Downtown Neighborhood Plan," published December 2001.
[51] Delaney and Eckstein.
[52] Jackson, Margaret, "Ballpark Neighborhood," *Denver Post,* November 25, 1996.

would not succumb to what he referred to as the "parking lot disease" many stadiums infect similar neighborhoods.[53]

Noel saw the potential in the area, but also acknowledged the inherent challenges the neighborhood presented. The Burlington Hotel building, today a centerpiece of the revitalized neighborhood, was described in 1993 by Noel as not having, "greeted anyone but trespassers and police for years. Long vacant and boarded up, this Romanesque gem with a welcoming arched entry was almost demolished by the city as a nuisance. Once a handsome, respectable railroad hotel, it became the most notorious flophouse in Denver. Residents were murdered for spare change and a few drops of whiskey or wine."[54]

As it turned out, the city and its citizens weren't quite convinced. Another 1993 Denver Post article discussing the potential designation of a Ballpark local historic district featured an interview with an angry property owner within the potential district who did not mince words. "I think it's a bunch of b------- from these preservationists," bristled a pawn shop owner. "They're causing a lot of grief and delaying growth and progress. These buildings are old and decrepit."[55]

[53] Noel, Tom, "'NoDo' Gets Into The Renewal Game With A Ballpark Historic District," *Denver Post,* April 3, 1993.
[54] Ibid.
[55] Searles, Denis, "Larimer Street in Bottom of the Ninth," *Denver Post,* February 28, 1993.

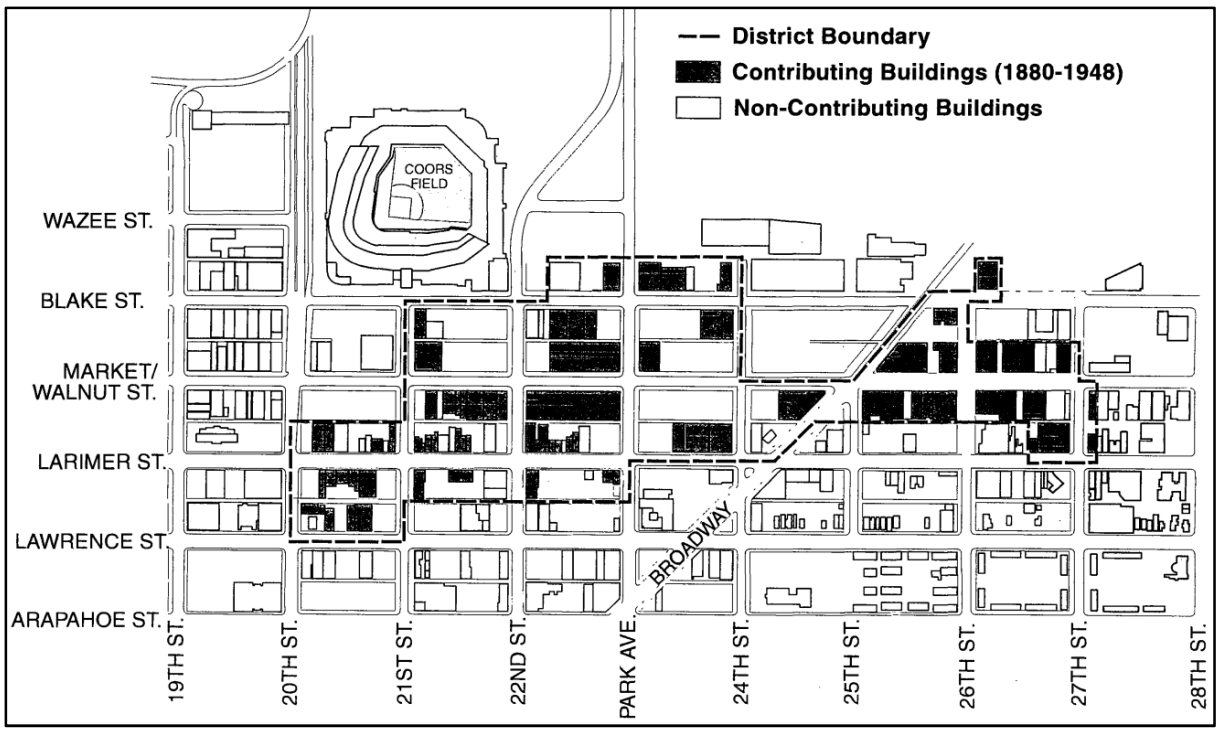
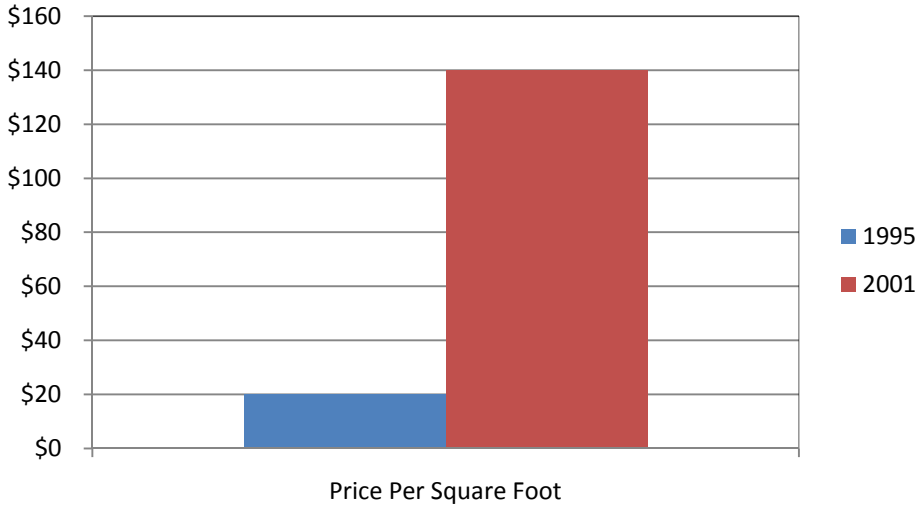


Figure 23 – Ballpark Neighborhood Historic District Map. *The Ballpark District's contributing and non-contributing structures. The graphic shows a high ratio of contributing buildings among the structures surveyed in the early 2000s. As of 2009, several of the vacant lots shown in this graphic have been redeveloped with new construction adhering to design guidelines.*

Nevertheless, supporters of historic preservation in the Ballpark were indeed correct in their foresight. Those sharing the angry pawn shop owner's opinion won the battle in the early 1990's, but did not ultimately win the war. As neighboring LoDo exhausted its opportunities for development, pressures shifted to Ballpark around the turn of the millennium – shortly after the dismissive anti-ballpark quotes from *Public Dollars – Private Stadiums* were published. A 2001 Denver Post article stated that, "a rising tide of construction … could eventually bring more residents to the neighborhood than currently live in its better-known neighbor, LoDo. … Developers there are running out of places to build or warehouses to convert and have started to look to the Ballpark neighborhood." The article also pointed to property values which, even on the cusp of Ballpark's renewal, were still remarkably impressive – a *seven-fold increase in six*

years.[56] Those "old and decrepit buildings" that were standing in the way of "progress" became *exponentially* more valuable in less than a decade. See the following graph:

Table 3 – Value of renovated buildings in the Ballpark Neighborhood in 1995 and 2001.
(*Coors Field opened in 1995 and Ballpark was designated as a historic district in 2002.)*



In 2002, the Ballpark Historic District was formally designated by the City of Denver. The designation application stated that, "the district reflects the development and heritage of Denver through its unique collection of buildings, building uses, and associations. Three development trends are evident: 1.) early commercial and illicit activity, 2.) active retail and entertainment uses, and 3.) industrial development." The application noted the importance of Coors Field as well, stating that, "The geographical importance of the neighborhood is also based on a variety of relationships, most recently to one of Denver's newest landmarks, Coors Field. The ballpark was carefully designed to fit into and complement the neighborhood."[57] A review by the author of Denver Landmark Commission archival files found that the second attempt at

[56] Arellano, Kristi, "Dreams Take Root Near Coors Field," *Denver Post,* November 27, 2001.
[57] The City of Denver, Denver Landmark Commission, "Ballpark Neighborhood Historic District Designation Application," 2002.

designation resulted in letters of support from affected property owners outnumbering letters of opposition by a 10-1 margin.

Figure 24 – Ballpark Neighborhood Historic District Signage. *After failing to pass in a 1993 effort, Ballpark became a locally designated historic district in 2002.*

Today, the blocks of the Ballpark Neighborhood show very tangible impacts that have resulted from both the strategic location of Coors Field and the impact of local historic district designation and the protection and financial incentives that accompany it. While there is still much work to be done to complete its metamorphosis, the neighborhood is host to both renovated warehouses and inspiring new construction, while also featuring a wide area of mixed uses.

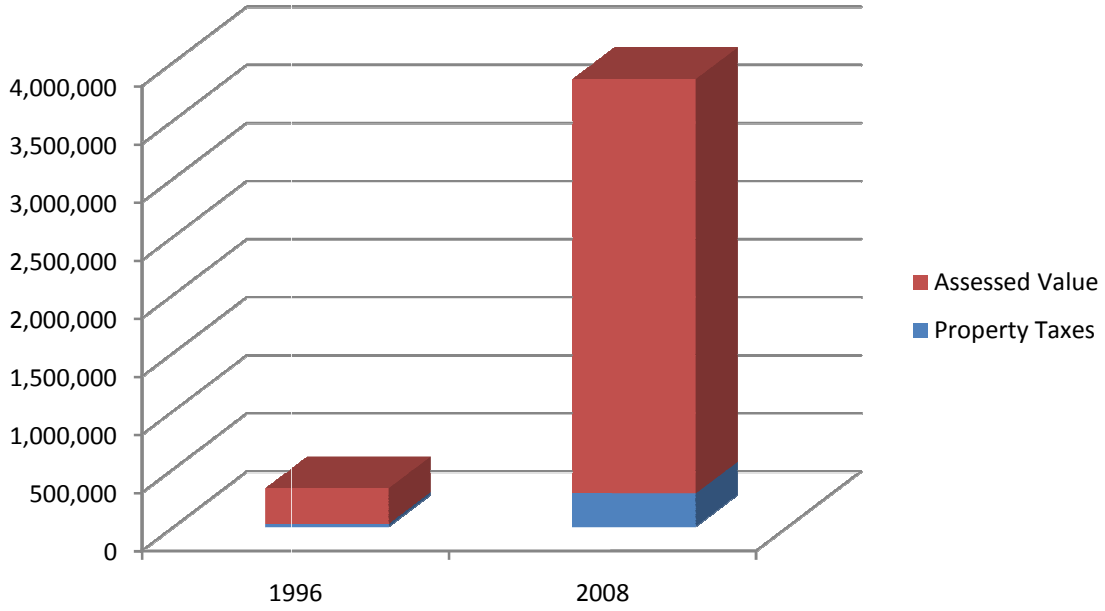
Figure 25 – Benjamin Moore / Piggly Wiggly Warehouse Rehabilitations. *The former Benjamin Moore Paints and Piggly Wiggly warehouses are two of the Ballpark Neighborhood's more notable adaptive uses.*

Figure 26 – New Construction in Ballpark Neighborhood Historic District. *Design guidelines within the historic district ensure that new construction is appropriate.*

The improvements in the Ballpark Neighborhood Historic District aren't just seen in aesthetics, however. The City of Denver is reaping the benefit of an increased tax base, as well. The block which calls the Burlington Hotel building home – the hotel once dubbed the

"Slaughterhouse" – has seen the assessed value of its nine parcels increase by just over 1,100% from 1996 to 2008. Even the most pessimistic person must admit that such an increase over just a dozen years is staggering. The block bounded by Market, Larimer, 22nd, and Park Avenue, once ridiculed as the example of why stadiums cannot spur revitalization, has seen an absolutely staggering increase in property value. As a reward for its investment in Coors Field, this block now contributes an exponentially higher amount of property taxes to the city coffers, as evidenced in this graph:

Table 4 – Assessed Value and Property Taxes in Dollars of All Parcels Bounded by Market, Larimer, 22nd, and Park Avenue in 1996 and 2008.



This block serves as a great example for several reasons. In addition to the gains in property value and taxes collected by the city, it also has benefited from other aspects highly valued by city planners – mixed uses and increased density. The Premiere Lofts building has added hundreds of residents to the area, many of which can walk to jobs downtown. The added pedestrians increase safety in what was once an unsafe area, as the "eyes" on the sidewalk have

been multiplied exponentially. Meanwhile, the pawn shops lamented by the authors of *Public Dollars, Private Stadiums* remain on this block – three of them, in fact; but, they are now mixed with other uses. Three restaurants, a salon and boutique, a cigar shop, a coffee shop, a bar, a consulting firm office, a tattoo parlor, and a barber shop all serve to offer a diverse mix of uses on just this one block.

Figure 27 – Burlington Hotel. *The formerly derelict Burlington Hotel is now a City of Denver Landmark property, and shares the block with a modern residential structure bringing hundreds of new residents to the block.*

Figure 28 – Ballpark Neighborhood Street Scene A. *The block bounded by 22nd, 23rd, Larimer, and Market Streets boasts a wide variety of uses. At left, a barber shop and cigar store. At right, a private consulting firm.*

Figure 29 – Ballpark Neighborhood Street Scene B. *A salon and boutique sits just a few doors down from a tattoo parlor. Both are located in rehabilitated historic structures.*

Figure 30 – Ballpark Neighborhood Street Scene C. *One block over, the scorned pawn shop element in the neighborhood remains. This particular pawn shop, however, now sits between a pilates studio and a coal-fired pizzeria.*

Figure 31 – Ballpark Neighborhood Street Scene D. *In a neighborhood once used to refute the idea of the ballpark as revitalization catalyst, even the pawn shops feature restored facades. The owner of Josie's Pawn Shop, picture here, was quoted earlier in this chapter.*

In returning to the criteria set forth for revitalization, the impacts seen in Denver can be summarized as such:

- *Restoration, rehabilitation, and or adaptive use of historic structures* – The ballpark itself includes an adaptively used structure; several examples were showcased in the Ballpark district that exemplify restoration of a historic structure (such as Josie's Pawn shop) or a large-scale adaptive use (such as the Benjamin Moore Paints building which now is a residential structure.)

- *Increase in residential population* – Loft developments in buildings such as the Burlington Hotel or in new structures such as the one seen behind it (Figure 27) are commonplace in both the Ballpark District and in LoDo.

- *Increase in active businesses* – the businesses found within the block bordered by Larimer, Market, 22nd, and Park Avenue are not just an isolated example. From pizza

parlors to pilates studios, there are dozens of new businesses in the Ballpark District that have opened within the past five years.

- *Increases in sales tax revenue* – Sales tax increased dramatically in LoDo during Coors Field's first season. Many of the businesses in the Ballpark District are located in structures which were formerly vacant; therefore, it is reasonable to expect that sales tax revenues there have or will see significant increases as well.

- *Increases in property values and property taxes collected* – The sample block explored in the Ballpark District showed increases in both property values and in property taxes collected of over 1,100% in a dozen years.

In conclusion, the Ballpark Neighborhood Historic District is a historic preservationist's and city planner's ideal. Over a dozen historic buildings have been rehabilitated within the past decade. Former surface parking lots now are home to new residential development, which has greatly increased population density. Long-standing businesses now stand alongside new ventures. Streets seem safer. The city recoups ten times more taxes than it did a decade ago. Just as in LoDo, one can argue that the general movement of people back to the city center was bound to transform this neighborhood eventually. However, it is the catalytic nature of a ballpark that can so radically transform an area in a short amount of time. The author, a citizen of the city, knows no other area which has transformed so quickly – especially during an economic downturn. Denver has truly become an excellent example of the influence of a strategically located ballpark.

CHAPTER 5

MONTGOMERY: MINOR LEAGUE TOWN AFTER BIG LEAGUE SUCCESS

Many cities have aspired to follow the Denver model of success. This chapter will examine Montgomery's Riverwalk Stadium in detail, as the Alabama city continues its attempt to replicate such positive results. With few opportunities remaining for new major league ballparks, minor league cities represent the next and final arena for this revitalization tool to take hold. This chapter will follow Riverwalk Stadium and its impacts from the ballpark's conception through the baseball team's fifth season. First, the chapter focuses on the broad development plan put in place by a collaboration of local planners, civic leaders, and others. Then, the actual "birth" of the ballpark will be discussed. Community input will be covered – both in terms of the entire populace and the preservationists of Montgomery. Moving on, the chapter looks at the nuts and bolts of the actual design for adaptive use that created Riverwalk Stadium. Finally, the effects of the ballpark within the adjacent Lower Commerce historic district will be examined.

The Riverfront Development Plan

The Montgomery Biscuits christened Riverwalk Stadium in the spring of 2004, ending a long hiatus in which no minor-league baseball team called Alabama's capital city home. The Montgomery Rebels played the last minor-league game in town in September of 1980 before moving to Birmingham. There had been talk of attracting a new team in the late 1990's, and the election of Mayor Bobby Bright placed the issue in the forefront, as a major plank of his

platform was the redevelopment of downtown that would include a baseball team.[58] It was about this time that the Montgomery Riverfront Development Foundation was formed to come up with a cohesive plan that would lead to revitalization of downtown Montgomery. Local architect John Chambless Jr., characterizing Montgomery's past said, "We had a long period of anti-planning. It was very frustrating for architects who understand that a master plan helps define the context for designing projects and assures that they add up to something greater."[59]

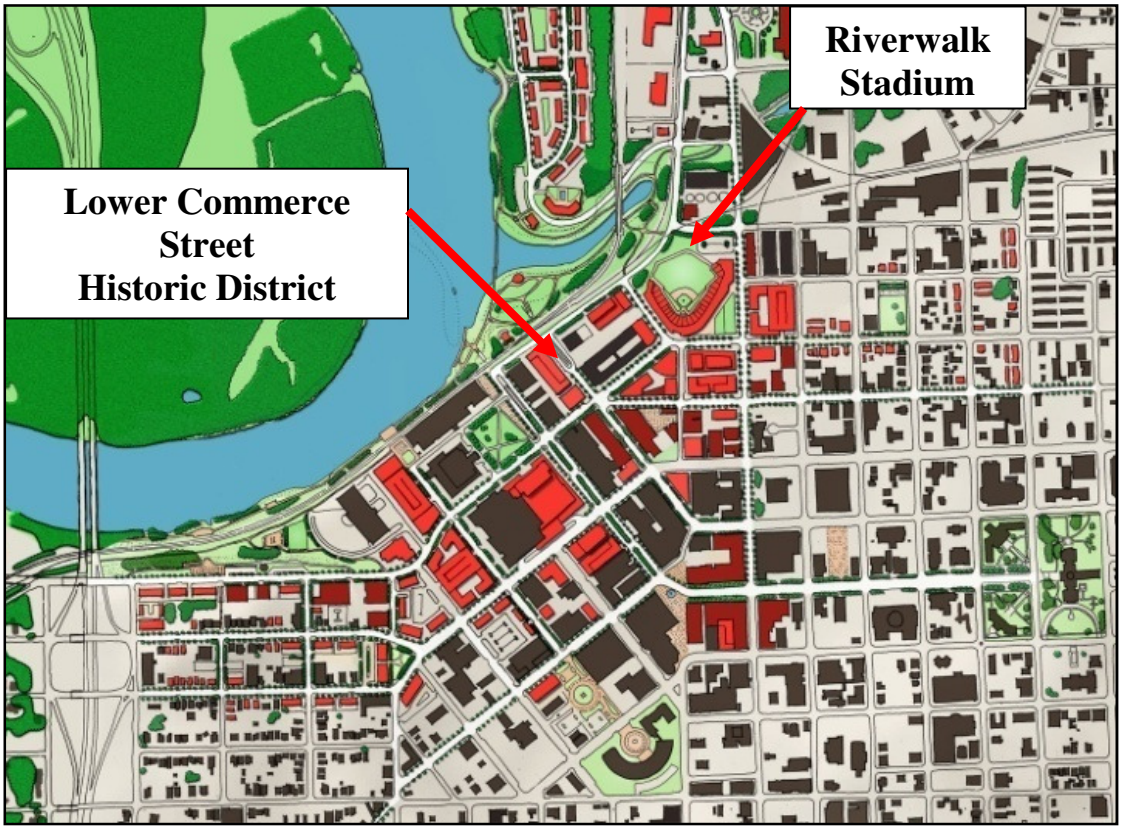


Figure 32 – Montgomery Riverfront Development Map.

In short order, a team of architects, planners and engineers – some local and others not – were brought in to formulate a master plan that would transform a somewhat neglected area of downtown in hopes of stimulating economic growth. Over decades, the part of downtown that

[58] Montgomery Biscuits, "History of the Montgomery Biscuits"; available from http://www.biscuitsbaseball.com/history.html; internet; accessed August 14, 2004.
[59] Clifford, Gina, "Montgomery Riverfront & Downtown Master Plan," *Design Alabama,* Spring/Summer, 2004.

borders the Alabama River had been virtually forgotten about, largely because rail lines created a disconnect. The assembled team drew up a master plan that included a new hotel to coincide with renovation of the existing convention center, a riverfront park highlighted by an ampitheatre and fountain, and the ballpark itself.

Birth of a Ballpark

The stadium was originally slated to come along later in the riverfront development process. However, when team owners came calling the city could not resist, and decisions had to be made. Two of the more important choices were where exactly to put the new ballpark and how to pay for it. Interviews make it clear that a baseball stadium in the historic downtown and near the river was a priority. "We did not want to make the mistake that Mobile made or Charleston made," explained Don Brown of Chambless Brown Architects. "Charleston's Mayor Riley is a champion of preservation, but he will be the first to tell you that they made a big mistake because they put the ballpark out in the middle of nowhere. You get in your car and go, and then you get in your car and you leave. It generates no additional commerce."[60] Sommerville Hill, an associate with Chambless and Brown's firm put it simply, "We wanted to bring the people to the park, instead of taking the park to the people." This meant bringing Montgomerians into the heart of downtown rather than placing a new ballpark in the suburbs.[61]

[60] Don Brown (architect, Chambless Brown Architects), interview by author, 27 August 2004, Montgomery, AL.
[61] Sommerville Hill (architect, Chambless Brown Architects), interview by author, August 27, 2004, Montgomery, AL.

Figure 33 – Riverwalk Stadium Exterior. *The exterior of the ballpark features portions of the original Western Alabama Railway depot.*

The original site for the ballpark, while being downtown and close to the riverfront, presented a problem when further examined. "The original site has a telephone switching facility that would have cost too much to replace," said Brown. "But moving one block means it's still in the designated area and actually connects better to the waterfront."[62] This one block shift did, however, pose quite a challenge. A century old rail depot was in the way. Nonetheless, the firm of Hellmuth, Obatta and Kassabaum Architects - better known as renowned ballpark specialist HOK – had been hired by Montgomery and had quite a bit of experience with such situations. Indeed, Baltimore's Camden Yards incorporated a historic railroad building into the park and is a hallmark HOK achievement. HOK saw this as an opportunity rather than a dilemma. While the plan would incorporate a wing of the depot into the ballpark, it would also require the demolition of the other wing.

As this situation caused a stir amongst preservationists, another debate raged in the Montgomery community at large. How would the stadium be funded? The final price tag on Riverwalk Stadium was around $26 million, and many were skeptical of the use of public funds for a baseball team. In an interview with the Alabama Historical Commission's Deputy Historic Preservation Officer Elizabeth Brown, she indicated three factions of the public that opposed the

[62] Clifford.

plan for a downtown ballpark. First, there were preservationists that were simply against any plan that included demolition of even part of a historic structure. Second were those that were leery of any government expenditure that could be a waste of taxpayer dollars. And third were those that wanted any additional funds to go toward more worthwhile causes than baseball – education for instance. However, a majority saw in Ms. Brown's words, "an opportunity to do something big downtown."[63] With an exciting riverfront vision in place and a popular mayor lending his support, an increased hotel tax paved the way for the necessary money to build the ballpark.

Adaptive Use

As just mentioned, the preservation community in Montgomery was not united in support of the ballpark project. The plan called for adaptive use of the existing railroad depot, but would also require the demolition of a little over half of the existing structure. The depot was roughly in the shape of a "U," and the north wing (closest to the railroad tracks and river) would eventually become the diamond of the baseball field. The south wing (closest to the street), on the other hand, would be modified to accommodate luxury suites. Staunch preservationists were not pleased, while others were more accepting of a plan that would at least put part of the structure to good use. Other projects had attempted to revitalize the depot – offices, apartments, and a hotel, but each had ultimately failed.

With the likelihood that part of the depot would be demolished to accommodate the new plan, many meetings and agreements between preservationists and developers paved the way for the project to continue while protecting the primary street viewsheds. At the insistence of the

[63] Elizabeth Brown (Deputy Historic Preservation Officer, Alabama Historical Commission), interview by author, August 27, 2004, Montgomery, AL.

Alabama Historical Commission, which had an easement on the property, Historic American Buildings Survey (HABS) Level One Standards documentation was completed before demolition. This consisted of measured drawings, large format photographs, existing conditions, and narrative history. The Commission would also conduct design review to ensure proper treatment of the structure in accordance with the Secretary of the Interior's Standards. The Commission stated that it would, "provide timely review and may not unreasonably withhold its approval of design and treatment that typically conform to the Standards and is faithful to the mainstream interpretation of the Standards."[64] Other stipulations were included to mitigate the wing's loss and spur additional preservation activity in the downtown area, such as a revision of the city's building code to accommodate mixed-use projects downtown and a revised historic preservation ordinance that would foster city-wide preservation.

Once the partial demolition of the depot became inevitable, the biggest challenge became how to properly treat the southern wing that would remain. Of primary concern was the accommodation of luxury suites that have become a necessity in the sporting world to generate revenue. The final designs required that part of the depot be cut away for projecting balconies, however this became palatable because the view from the street remained unchanged. Placing the playing field below grade made this possible.

[64] The Alabama Historical Commission, Montgomery, AL, "Minutes of Special Called Meeting of the Alabama Historical Commission," December 18, 2002.

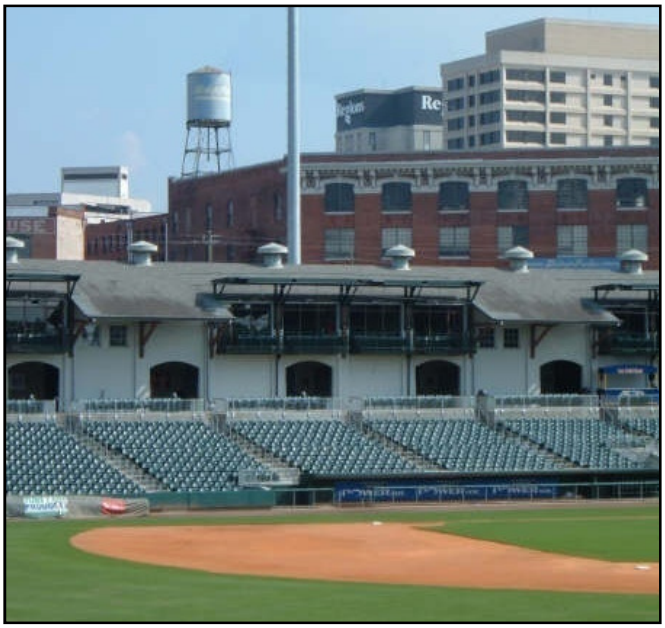


Figure 34 – Riverfront Stadium Balconies Within Former Depot. *Balconies for suites project from the historic depot, but are not visible from street viewsheds.*

Site restrictions also made it necessary to have a high fence in left field to counterbalance the fact that the fence could not be far enough from home plate due to the railroad tracks that obviously could not be relocated. Similar factors nearly a century earlier led to the famous "Green Monster" outfield wall in Boston's famed Fenway Park. The proximity of the rail lines also led Montgomery's mayor to offer a reward to the first player to hit a homerun into a train – something the fans and players found more interesting than the railroad operators.

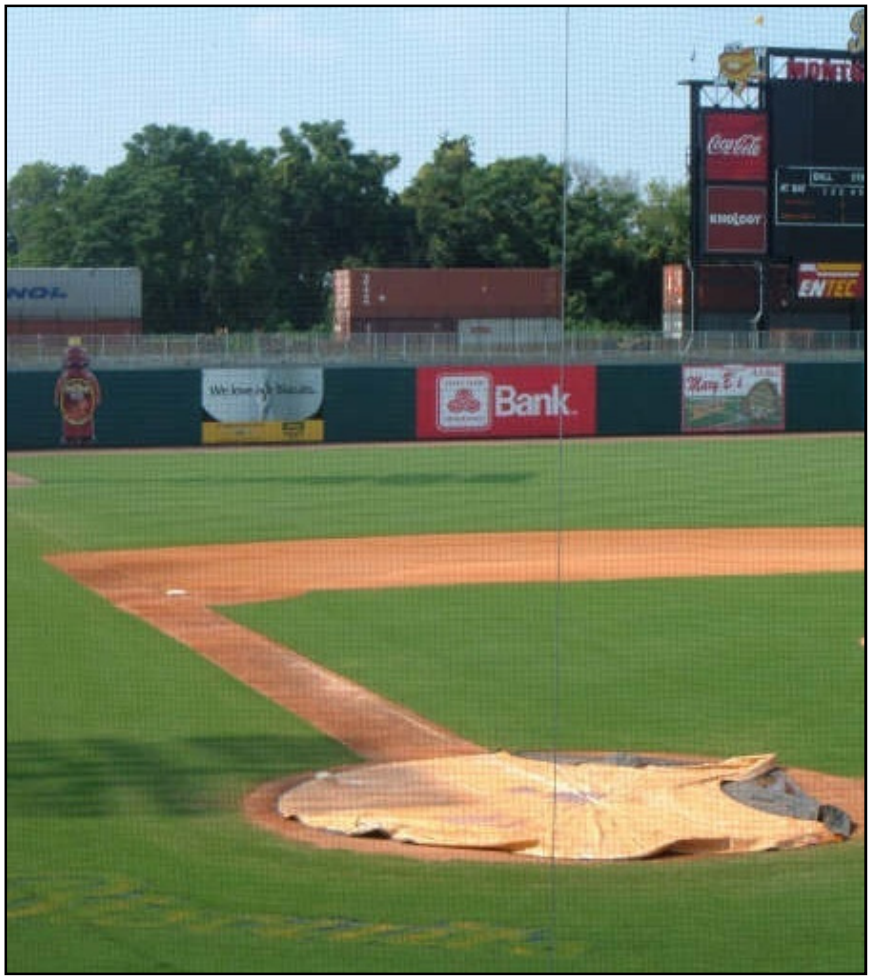


Figure 35 – Riverwalk Stadium Left Field Wall / Railcars. *Railroad cars travel past left field wall. The mayor of Montgomery paid $1,000 to the first player to hit a train with a home run ball.*

Excavations during construction also revealed parts of Montgomery's past lying beneath the surface. Remnants from both a cotton press and from a gas works were discovered during preparation of the site, and it is hoped that an interpretive display can be included in the park to represent this to entering fans. "We would like to be able to represent to the public what we found when we did the digging, so that they can appreciate how a town develops. This ballpark represents an evolution," said Mr. Brown.[65]

[65] D. Brown.

One of the more interesting facets of the adaptive use of the depot can be found where the old meets the new. Rather than making a clean break, architects made it very obvious where the demolition took place so that anyone visiting can have an understanding that the building once extended past what is there now. According to Hill, "The architects with HOK wanted to make a gesture at the connection to acknowledge that the wing had been torn down."[66]

Figure 36 – Riverwalk Stadium Façade Break. *Where old meets new, a clear demarcation is made for the observer to understand the structure's former life.*

Hill's colleague, Mr. Brown, commenting on the loss of the northern wing, added, "Architecturally, I have no second thoughts about how this was handled. It was the right thing to

[66] Hill.

do. It was a small sacrifice to make to revitalize downtown."[67] Ms. Brown agreed, "No one liked bending the rules, but after seeing the project they were carried away."[68]

Impact on Montgomery

The Montgomery Riverfront Development Foundation has drawn great praise for its ability to set forth a vision that is the result of a public-private cooperation. Its president, Judge Mark Kennedy explained, "It always helps to have a nonprofit group serving as advocates, marketers and cheerleaders when a city is trying to do a complex job like revitalization. Most people in Montgomery are truly excited about the prospects. These initiatives represent a paradigm shift. People who haven't been to Montgomery in a while are astounded."[69] As the three major phases of the plan were in place, the smaller details also began to come into play. For instance, zoning was updated so that mixed-use developments can be undertaken, especially in some of the warehouses near the ballpark. New parking decks were planned in order to allow surface lots to be used for infill projects. The Foundation's website listed development opportunities in Montgomery's downtown to encourage investment.

While the first season was not a great success on the field for the Montgomery Biscuits, with the team planted firmly in the bottom of the standings, the box office told a much different story. According to Kenneth Groves, Montgomery's chief planer, the economic pro-forma for the ballpark was met before the midpoint of the season, making the first season an "unmitigated success."[70] The pro-forma was established to ensure payment of bonds that financed the project and anticipated three years of high return followed by a reasonable taper after the newness of the team and the park wears off. Team owners signed on for a twenty year lease of the ballpark,

[67] D. Brown.
[68] A. Brown.
[69] Clifford.
[70] Kenneth Groves (Chief Planner, City of Montgomery), interview by author, August 27, 2004, Montgomery, AL.

which can be used by the city for other purposes during the off-season. The city also receives a percentage of concessions and retail sales as part of the agreement.

Figure 37 – Riverwalk Stadium Interior Concourse. *The interior of the depot wing is now used as concourse and concession area.*

Commercial activity around the ballpark also picked up. Groves reported that three loft apartment developments entered the planning phases during the first season, and added that land in the vicinity is now a hot commodity. "I think we'll attribute a great deal of the success to the ballpark. For the first time, we've got thousands of adult Montgomerians coming downtown

after dark, having a great time in safety and security. And that's done wonders for us," he said.[71] Indeed, informal surveys of license plates in surrounding parking lots have indicated that many baseball game attendees are coming to downtown from Prattville, a suburb long regarded as home to people that wanted to flee downtown Montgomery for greener pastures. Groves said, "This indicates that the ballpark can be a very powerful force."[72] Ms. Brown added that, "there needed to be something down there that was a trip-generator and a reason to get out of your car."[73] Both agreed that it's not so much about baseball as it is just having a place for people to gather downtown. "I'm not wild about baseball, but I'll go out there and drink beer and eat hot dogs with the best of 'em," said Ms. Brown.[74] "This isn't about baseball. It's about family entertainment," Groves chimed in.[75]

Activity in the Historic District

One method to assess the impact to the adjacent Lower Commerce Street Historic District in Montgomery is to examine agendas and minutes that show the property owners who appeared before the local preservation commission seeking certificates of appropriateness (COAs). Given that any exterior alterations or new construction within a locally designated historic district requires design review, a look at these COAs provides a good overview of activity. The following represents all applications for COAs from January 2002 to June 2009:

[71] Groves.
[72] Ibid.
[73] A. Brown.
[74] Ibid.
[75] Groves.

Table 5 – Activity in the Lower Commerce Street Historic District.

Applications for Certificates of Appropriateness (COAs) in the Lower Commerce Street Historic District (2002 – 2009)		
Month, Year	Property Address	Project Description
January – December 2002	NA	No Applications for COAs
June 2003	234 Commerce Street	Exterior renovations; new three bay storefront façade; fenestration which was filled in with brick or metal was returned to historic appearance.
August 2003	241 N. Court Street	Façade restoration; garage door replaced with storefront entry
Riverwalk Stadium Opens		
July 2004	246 N. Court Street	Restoration of storefront appearance; brick cleaned and/or repointed where necessary, pressed tin cornices restored; ADA compliance work.
January 2005	12 E. Jefferson Street	Storefront configuration restored; second floor restored to its original interior configuration.
July 2005	100 E. Commerce Street	Installation of cellular antennae.
February 2006	241 N. Court Street	Basic signage.
January – December 2007	NA	No applications for COAs.
January 2008	300 Water Street	Basic signage.
February 2008	100 Commerce Street	Signage and awnings for a hotel project which was a historic preservation tax credit project.
August 2008	184 Commerce Street	Basic signage.
February 2009	101 Tallapoosa Street	Exterior renovation including new windows; restoration of metal cornice; and installation of balconies.

Applications for Certificates of Appropriateness (COAs) in the Lower Commerce Street Historic District (2002 – 2009)		
Month, Year	Property Address	Project Description
February 2009	130-138 Commerce Street	Removal of non-historic storefront and subsequent installation of historically accurate storefront; installation of balconies on alley side; addition of rooftop garden
April 2009	138 Commerce Street	Basic railing, awning, signage.
May 2009	101 Tallapoosa Street	Basic signage.
May 2009	138 Commerce Street	Basic signage.
May 2009	166 Commerce Street	Balcony addition in alley and basic signage.
June 2009	121 Coosa Street	Window and door replacement.
June 2009	130-138 Commerce Street	Minor changes to previous COA submitted in February 2009
June 2009	150 Commerce Street	Basic awnings, signage, and paint.

** records prior to 2002 were not available from the City of Montgomery*

The trends seem to indicate two items. First, there was little to no activity in the district before the ballpark was opened. No COAs were filed during 2002. Next, a small but measurable increase in activity can be seen in the years before, during, and after the Biscuits first season. While the preservation commission only averaged reviewing slightly over two COAs per year, this is still a significant increase over 2002; and, a closer look shows that most of the COAs involved what appears to be significant façade restorations. Finally, it would appear that the happenings within the district from the first pitch in 2004 to a point five years later (similar to the time span seen for Denver's Ballpark District to truly begin its renaissance) inspired a very noticeable spike in COA activity in the historic district. There were as many COA filed with the preservation commission in the *first six months* of 2009 as were filed between 2002 and 2008 *combined*.

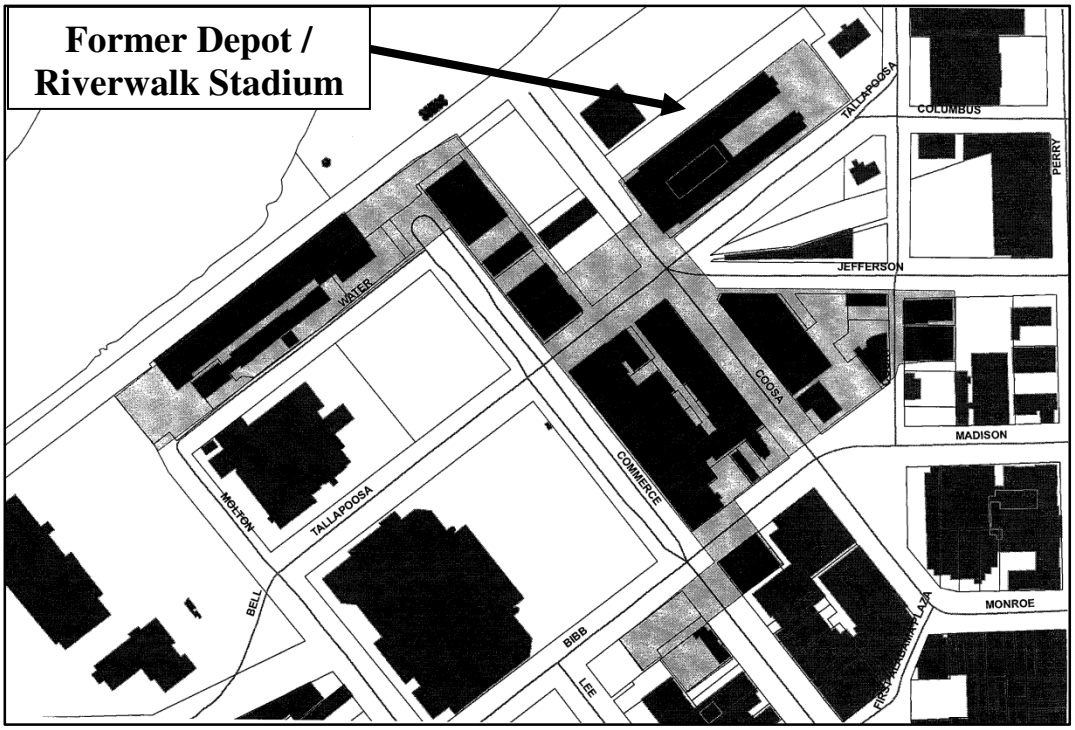


Figure 38 – Lower Commerce Street Historic District Map. *The locally designated historic district is shaded in this map. The ballpark is at its northeastern corner. (The footprint of the former depot is still depicted in the graphic.)*

A cover story from Montgomery Living over the summer of 2009 highlighted the positive changes evident in the historic district next to the ballpark. To demonstrate how far the area has come, the author spoke of a new downtown restaurant whose, "walls are lined with historic photos that show a vibrant area, a place bustling with life. Ten years ago, you could have truthfully claimed that these images captured our downtown's heyday, a time long gone, probably never to return." The author went on to state that the ballpark "unquestionably played a large part in downtown's rebirth," and also cites "a flood of renewed activity in the heart of the city."[76]

[76] *Montgomery Living*, "Alley Oop"; available from http://www.montgomeryliving.com/online/alley.asp ; internet; accessed August 21, 2006.

Later in the article, a property owner bragged about the adaptive use of his building, which is listed on the National Register of Historic Places. In 2009, the Alleyway development has resulted in the addition of two new restaurants, a bar, and an event center – all of which are located in adaptively used historic structures. Nearby, Hampton Inn opened its newest location in a historic building also within the historic district. It is important to note that all of these events have transpired during a time that is regarded as the worst economic climate in three generations.

Figure 39 – Lower Commerce Street Historic District New Businesses. *Top left – Dreamland Barbecue. Top right – an event center located in a former grocery storage facility. Bottom – the new Hampton Inn. All are adaptive reuses of historic structures within the downtown historic district and follow on the heels of Montgomery's new downtown ballpark. Photographs from http://www.montgomeryliving.com/online/alley.asp.*

In returning to the criteria set forth for revitalization, the impacts seen in Montgomery can be summarized as such:

- *Restoration, rehabilitation, and or adaptive use of historic structures* – The former depot is being adaptively used; COA activity indicates increased restoration and rehabilitation activity in the Lower Commerce Historic District

- *Increase in residential population* – Montgomery has yet to see a significant increase in residential population.

- *Increase in active businesses* – Several new restaurants, an event space, and a hotel have opened within the Lower Commerce Historic District since the ballpark opened.

- *Increases in sales tax revenue* – Sales tax data was not accessible due to distance; however, a majority of the new businesses within the historic district filled spaces which were formerly vacant. Therefore, it is reasonable to expect that sales tax revenue for the district will show significant increases.

- *Increases in property values and property taxes collected* – Historic tax assessor records such as those reviewed in Denver were not accessible in Montgomery due to distance. However, it is reasonable to expect that recent renovations and rehabilitations within the district (some of which resulted in the return to usage of formerly vacant or underutilized structures, including the ballpark itself) will result in increased property valuations, and thus taxes collected by the city.

It is clear that the ballpark has benefited Montgomery in many ways. It has given new life to a historic structure. It has generated wider community backing for the entire riverfront development plan. And perhaps most importantly, it has brought people from all over the region and pulled them from their cars and onto the downtown sidewalks. The difference in foot traffic will help businesses that are already there. And as history is beginning to repeat itself from similar ballpark projects across America, new investment is following to reform a once-struggling historic section of downtown Montgomery, even in difficult economic times.

CHAPTER 6

CONCLUSIONS AND RECOMMENDATIONS

From Memphis to Denver to Montgomery to San Diego, new ballparks have sparked the revitalization of once dormant urban cores and the rehabilitation and adaptive use of long-vacant and derelict historic structures. Cities with the foresight to strategically place a new ballpark in an area that offers the correct mix of needed elements have reaped huge gains in commerce, tax revenue, improved safety, and renewed architectural vistas.

Chapter Two showed that the ballpark has very much paralleled American urban patterns in general. Just as American culture has cycled from an emphasis on downtowns, to a flight to the suburbs, and then back to a renewed focus on downtowns over the course of the past century, so too has the ballpark mirrored these trends. Chapter Three provided an introduction to the renewing power a new ballpark can offer the surrounding neighborhoods. However, it also revealed that a ballpark in the wrong place can result in hundreds of millions spent with no ancillary economic benefit. Chapter Four took an in-depth view of perhaps the best example of a ballpark's transformative power, the one found in Denver. Even an area targeted by the opponents of new ballparks as a reason *not* to believe that revival is possible is now a newly-minted locally designated historic district in the midst of a marked improvement which includes rehabilitation of historic structures and high-quality new construction. Chapter Five showed how a similar strategy can work in a smaller city with a minor league team. Montgomery is reaping the benefits of a new ballpark with an unprecedented level of activity in its downtown historic district even in spite of hard economic times.

Given the wave of new ballparks built in major league cities in the past two decades, it is the minor league cities such as Montgomery in which this model can work in the coming years. There will always be those who find the idea of living near a ballpark attractive, and any city can enjoy the increased foot traffic and subsequent free advertising that comes with a ballpark. The author recommends that those looking to follow in Denver's footsteps take a close look at not only how Denver reached its goals, but also at how other cities failed in the same pursuit.

Denver's example worked for several reasons. First and foremost, it located its park *immediately* adjacent to a historic district. There are no surface lots, parking decks, highways, or any other obstacles separating LoDo from Coors Field. The connectivity factor is of the utmost importance, as Seattle's example showed. Secondly, Denver was able to capitalize on the fact that a measurable degree of progress had already been made in LoDo. The enormous increase in exposure given to the adjacent district can either be a city's biggest asset or liability. If there is nothing positive happening, revitalization may be slow to come or never even happen. People need to see a reason to return on a day when there is no baseball game. In Denver, the base of businesses and residences was strong enough to provide a firm foundation for the explosion of growth that followed. Finally, Denver continues to see positive impacts even fifteen years after Coors Field opened because it had not only the emerging LoDo on its west side, but also what would become the Ballpark Neighborhood on its east and south sides. Baseball fans wouldn't have found much to like in this area during the first few seasons at the new ballpark. However, once the snowball started in LoDo, it was able to cross over into Ballpark.

Of course, simple geography may not always permit a city to follow the Denver model. Nevertheless, proper planning can allow for a city to locate a ballpark in the area that allows for the highest degree of positive impacts. Look back to the Philadelphia Inquirer columnist who

rues her city's lack of vision to see the regret some cities have in having lost a golden opportunity.

The realm least explored in the topic of ballparks as a catalyst, in which the author encourages further research in, is that of the failed experiments. In the research conducted for this thesis, it was relatively easy to find an abundance of sources for those cities that have seen success stories. On the other hand, cities that have *not* seen a great degree of positive impacts from their new ballparks (Detroit, for example) posed difficulty in finding sources which could indicate the reasons why. For instance, we know that connectivity is important; however, just what are the thresholds at which proximity shifts from a positive to a drawback? Without a travel budget, research on cities experiencing negative or negligible impacts was difficult. It is quite likely, though, that planners and preservationists could learn as much or more from these cities as from Denver, Memphis, or San Diego.

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