

**NEBRASKA TAXPAYERS FOR FREEDOM ISSUE PAPER:
NEW OMAHA BASEBALL STADIUM WOULD CLOBBER TAXPAYERS.**

BACKGROUND. Omaha Mayor Mike Fahey and his allies, Creighton University and the Omaha Chamber of Commerce, are **pitching** a plan to build a new baseball stadium near the Qwest Center and use a wrecking ball on historic, famed Rosenblatt Stadium. Building a ball park fits into the mayoral plan to redevelop this North Downtown area, a 2005 plan designed by HDR, with a study paid for by the Omaha Chamber, which continually supports taxpayer funding for school bonds, etc., that would financially benefit its Big Business members. To calm an opposition uproar, the mayor in Oct. 2007 appointed a committee of several community leaders, most of whom are his acquaintances and always have supported tax-paid expansion of city facilities, to “take a fresh and unbiased view” of the situation and examine alternatives for recommendation, but he included no taxpayer advocates. Committee objectives were to evaluate and recommend the best alternative to serve the College World Series (CWS) “within available funds.” Consultants to the committee included HDR, an architectural engineering and consulting company, and HOK, a leading sports architecture firm that has designed over 125 baseball stadiums. Both companies could win contracts to help construct a new stadium in this redevelopment.

FUNDING MAYHEM. After delaying for months and continually changing the figures, Mayor Fahey finally announced a total cost of almost \$140 million for a new stadium following his previous estimates of \$55 million and \$100 million. This cost will rise as it rose for the Qwest Center. District of Columbia officials determined final costs for their new stadium would reach more than \$700 million, more than \$100 million above the original estimate of the city chief financial officer.¹ Private contributions supposedly would total about \$43 million, or about 31% of the bill. Stadium revenues allegedly would bring in \$37.6 million, or about 27% of the costs. Public funding would total about \$59 million, or about 42.5% of the costs. Fahey would hike the hotel/motel tax by 1%. This total Omaha tax would reach 17.5% of a total \$125 daily tab, higher than in Kansas City and St. Louis, MO., Lincoln, NE., Carter Lake, Council Bluffs, and Des Moines, IA., and Minneapolis, MN.² Tourists, visitors, and conventions therefore would have incentive to lodge in these competing venues. Those renting cars for any amount of time would pay \$2 more rental tax, reaching \$8, plus the 22.6% tax charged by other taxing authorities. Our car rental tax would total higher than that in Des Moines and Council Bluffs, IA., Lincoln, NE., St. Louis, MO., and Minneapolis, MN.,³ offering additional incentives for tourists and businessmen to take their dollars elsewhere. Perhaps the mayor believes it preferable to have probable opponents restricted to specific businesses instead of incurring the wrath of property taxpayers in general. His hotel/car rental tax proposal as the single greatest revenue source for a new stadium would pave the way for an increase in these taxes to a higher percentage or for their expansion to other services, should stadium operating costs escalate higher than forecast. The mayor understands well that occupation taxes like his proposal do not require a public vote or state approval. Examining total city, state, and local taxes, Omaha embarrassing has a 16.5% hotel tax, 5th highest in the nation. The Fahey hike would set the tax highest among the 50 largest convention cities. These rates explain why so many visitors to our metro area sleep in Council Bluffs. Passage would negate the infusion of thousands more to the Omaha tourism bureau, meant to attract more visitors, and dampen enthusiasm for hotel expansion. The local hotel/motel association vociferously opposes this tax plan. The BSG study implies that taxes and fees levied on selected targets, like hotels and car rentals, may receive less public resistance.⁴ The mayor would renege on his standing agreement with Douglas County when up for renewal in 2011, gaining \$2.13 million annually for his stadium from county keno proceeds. The mayor believes that a combination of public and private dollars will pay for his new stadium, *despite this same formula* failing to entirely fund our convention center/arena in 2000. He prefers to issue revenue bonds instead of general obligation bonds, because the latter we support mostly by property tax revenue, and citizens must vote to issue them. The mayor cannot accurately forecast how much revenue from a Downtown Stadium would apply against the revenue bonds issued. Anticipated project revenues pay for revenue bonds. If insufficient revenue, property taxpayers pay! Revenue bonds required to fund construction carry 20+ yrs. payoffs. Before buying such bonds, investors want to understand that the main facility utilizers (CWS) that bring crowds to concession stands and seats will not go elsewhere before the loan term expires. Revenue obligation bonds are more complex and *less secure* than general obligation bonds, admits the BSG study.⁵

¹ Washington Post, 12-6-2005.

² Omaha Stadium Project, Vol. II, Technical Report, BSG, LLC, p. 203.

³ *Ibid*, p. 208.

⁴ Omaha Stadium Project, Vol. II, p. 174.

⁵ Omaha Stadium Project, Vol. II, Technical Report, BSG, LLC, p. 179.

NO PROMISES. The mayor pledged that he would not propose a new stadium *without a signed 20-year contract* from the NCAA to keep the CWS in Omaha, but such contract *does not exist yet*, despite NCAA acquiescence in a new stadium. If the NCAA was so intent on a new stadium, it could relocate to Victory Field in its Indianapolis hometown. No one in city government can guarantee that the CWS will remain in Omaha, if we build a new stadium. The NCAA-CWS comes to Omaha for a few days and leaves, but taxpayers permanently will **catch** the bills from a new stadium, especially if the NCAA **throws us a curve** and leaves. We continually will have to compete with other new stadiums across the nation for the CWS.

SINKING IN DEBT, BILLS DUE. The mayor, in **pitching** his proposal, is standing on a **mound** of quicksand.

Our current city bond debt stands at \$842 million, the convention center/arena construction debt totaling \$206 million, the convention center Hilton Hotel debt \$110 million, and riverfront development debt \$49 million. The much higher payment schedule on the convention center/arena debt will come due in 2010. Other major burdens include a probable \$1.5 billion cost over 20 yrs. for sewer improvements and \$400 million in unfunded liability for city pensions over 30 yrs., especially for spiked increases in fire and police pensions. Fahey cleverly backloaded onto future fiscal years the huge payments for all these expenses, so that he will have left office when the fiscal havoc occurs. Adding so much to our bonded and other indebtedness could risk losing our AAA bond rating. A new stadium cost would include the \$12 million carryover Rosenblatt debt.⁶ Over the last 12 yrs., the city has completed over \$36 million in improvements to Rosenblatt.⁷ Factor in interest on debt. Our city parks, playgrounds, and streets are deteriorating badly and require urgent attention. In June, 2006, a mayoral assistant admitted that the city was struggling to provide basic services with present revenues, so a new stadium would have to win a guaranteed percentage of private funding. Fahey declares that he would use property taxes *only as a last resort* to fund this folly. We heard similar pledges from our previous Mayor Hal Daub, who promised no rise in property taxes to pay costs, but property taxpayers became yoked with a heavy property tax liability for his convention center. Now, we own a hotel losing money. Property taxpayers will pay for shortfalls, as happened with the convention center/arena fiasco. Fans from all over the nation attend the CWS games, but local taxpayers pay the annual bills for maintenance and renovation.

ADDED COSTS. The estimated cost of reconstructing sewer pipes at the downtown site is \$1.03 million.⁸ Closing a section of 12th Street would necessitate widening 13th and 14th Streets to accommodate added traffic, and convert them to 2-way, thus further confusing motorists driving through downtown. Dense heavy truck traffic would concentrate on fewer streets. Additional street conversions might become necessary to allow more efficient traffic flow. The Omaha Police Dept. believes that closing 12th Street will adversely impact existing parking lot access. The city must build new access points to several Qwest parking lots.⁹ The Fahey plan would require construction of 500 new parking lots at the Pinnacle site, demolition of the building there, and more at other locations, to add 726 replacement parking spaces.¹⁰ A possible parking garage next to the stadium and parking at other sites were not factored into the cost equation. Downtown city streets and Interstate entrances and exits would require expansion and reconstruction in order to handle additional traffic flow. Preliminary investigations determined that a high water table exists on the downtown site, additional abatement costs likely during the construction period.¹¹ Millions will fund environmental testing at the site, excavating 1 ft. of dirt to remove lead, under EPA oversight. Fahey failed to mention that Royals and Creighton U. baseball teams cannot share a new stadium because of team overlapping schedules, thus lowering utilization time. Charging \$10 to park a car there would drive off some potential fans. Operating expenses for a new stadium the study expects to increase by \$400,000 annually because of added staffing, utilities, routine repairs and maintenance, and insurance.¹² Capital repairs funded by the city the study budget did not include, e.g., scoreboard, seat replacement, concessions equipment, field repairs, and parking lot repairs.¹³ Fahey has not addressed how relocation would financially and economically damage the Rosenblatt/South Omaha area. The convention center would lose many dollars, if concerts became banned during CWS days. The city is spending additional dollars for Qwest updates to remain competitive with other venues that are hosting conventions, etc. that are not coming to Omaha; the same will occur with this stadium.

⁶ CWS Stadium Project Press Briefing, 2-27-08, p. 30.

⁷ Omaha Stadium Project, Vol. II, p. 13.

⁸ CWS Pre-design Study, p. 35.

⁹ Ibid, p. 36.

¹⁰ Ibid, p. 178.

¹¹ Ibid, p. 198.

¹² Omaha Stadium Project, Vol. II, p. 163.

¹³ Ibid, p. 164.

MAJOR INCONVENIENCE. Consultants to the mayoral committee admit that, though the stadium would displace 896 parking spots and replace them with 1,800 spots, these spaces would exist farther away, forcing Qwest Center/stadium patrons to walk farther, 12 minutes away in some instances. Some might hesitate to walk that far in that neighborhood at night. Closing 12th Street between Cuming and Webster Streets would further congest already heavily trafficked streets and parking in the downtown maze. A renovated Rosenblatt would offer about 5,063 parking spaces compared to about 5,698 downtown, and attendees would have to walk farther from some of the latter spots.¹⁴ There is no planned downtown parking for the legendary string of RVs now flocking to Rosenblatt.

SHAKY ASSUMPTIONS. A key assumption made in the study and by Fahey financial balancing was that the Omaha Royals team and Creighton U. would sign on as full-season tenants, bringing in \$7.1 million from the leases and generated revenues, though there exist no concrete pledges.¹⁵ The stadium never would pay for itself if used only for the CWS. The Royals have discussed with Sarpy County and Council Bluffs officials locating a new ballpark in their areas.¹⁶ Information for the BSG study came from sources believed reliable but not audited or further verified.¹⁷ The market analysis and resulting financial analysis was somewhat limited in scope, because BSG did not conduct general public or corporate surveys or use focus groups. It analyzed demographics of comparable markets, though admitting difficulty in identifying comparable markets because of the unique nature of the CWS.¹⁸ The study analyzed performance of comparable facilities with baseball teams, though admitting difficulty in identifying comparable facilities because of the unique nature of the CWS.¹⁹ This market competition study based on a review of limited available public information.²⁰ BSG made significant assumptions related to downtown ball park operating revenues and expenses,²¹ like other entertainment venues, which occurred with the convention center/arena, local market conditions, and tenant mix.²² The study implies the possible need for additional funding sources, such as an entertainment, sales, or property tax.²³ Further, it offers *only estimates* of historical or future revenues, rents, expenses, net operating income, mortgages, debt service, capital outlays, cash flows, capitalization rates, their accuracy in no way guaranteed and not for construing for predictions from BSG analysts. Covering its posterior, BSG admitted its work based in part on information provided by *unrelated sources that it could not assure us as accurate*. It would not guarantee that it had knowledge of all factors that might influence the operational potential of the facility. Because of rapid change in external factors, actual results *might vary significantly* from estimates presented in its report. Its report did not constitute a projection of financial performance or an audit of the proposed facility *in accordance with generally accepted audit standards*.²⁴ The study assumed an annual growth rate in hotel tax revenue of 3%, assumed an annual car rental tax growth rate of 2%, and assumed a yearly growth rate in keno funds of 2%, funds which could continue to subsidize the current stadium,²⁵ all despite an expected economic recession. Liberal state senators are pushing a bill (LB 697) to allow establishment of entertainment zones that would permit part of the sales tax generated in such a zone to subsidize a new stadium. The Omaha Chamber endorsed this bill, showing its bias and casting doubt on the impartiality of the study it funded. This bill, however, is languishing in committee. There are no guarantees that Omaha could find a private entity to pay for gaining naming rights. Fahey declares that hiking taxes on car rentals and hotel rooms would impact visitors and not Omahans. He ignores the probability that visitors and conventioners may choose hotel rooms **across** the river in Council Bluffs and rent their vehicles there, spending more of their dollars in that locality, depriving our private merchants of anticipated revenues. It is clear now why Mayor Fahey declined to offer details of his plan to the public, avoiding public input, before he briefed the NCAA. We need **extra innings** to gain more credible facts, because BSG **ballpark figures** are too fluid!

FAULTY COMPARISONS. Appendix B in the BSG Vol. II study compares funding of similar facilities with the Fahey Folly, but these comparisons are **off base**. Huntington Park stadium received \$7 million in state grants, which we will not receive.²⁶ Coca Cola Ballpark in PA. issued both taxable and tax-exempt bonds, different from this venture.²⁷ Raley Field

¹⁴ Press Briefing, p. 25.

¹⁵ Omaha Stadium Project Vol. I Exec. Summary, by Barrett Sports Group LLC, 2-18-08, p. 3.

¹⁶ BallPark Digest, 2-6-08.

¹⁷ BSG Summary, p. 7.

¹⁸ Ibid, p. 8.

¹⁹ Ibid, p. 9.

²⁰ Omaha Stadium Project, Vol. II, p. 69.

²¹ BSG Summary, p. 10

²² Omaha Stadium Project, Vol. II, p. 121.

²³ BSG Summary, p. 36.

²⁴ Ibid, p. 37.

²⁵ Omaha Stadium Project, Vol. II, pp. 200, 205, 211.

²⁶ Ibid, p. 244.

²⁷ Ibid, p. 246.

in Sacramento issued special tax bonds and gleaned redevelopment agency grants.²⁸ Fifth Third Field in Toledo gained \$5.4 million in state grants, county cash funds of about \$11 million, and county bonds totaling almost \$9 million.²⁹ AT&T Brockton Ballpark in Oklahoma City won funding from sales tax, which voters extended.³⁰

ROSENBLATT FACTOR. While Fahey is splurging dollars on his new stadium, Omaha taxpayers would pay off an existing \$18.38 million debt through 2019 for Rosenblatt Stadium renovations, if private donors decline, renovations for naught if the wrecking ball destroys the facility. Renovating Rosenblatt would not accrue costs for environmental testing. The NCAA appears quite content with a reconstruction plan that would include more parking, vendor areas, and a zone for only NCAA wares and not available to private merchandising or advertising. Construction in phases would not force the CWS to relocate. In 2007, a comprehensive master plan for Rosenblatt and the South 13th Street corridor underwent city and NCAA inspection. The plan included renovating the stadium and making necessary capital improvements to the surrounding area. The NCAA considered this plan acceptable. Basic infrastructure here already is in place to serve the facility. There exists good vehicle access to I-80 and L Street. No street closings required. There is sufficient planned parking within a 12-minute walk and adequate proximity to existing mass transit. The facility would continue to maintain the CWS tradition.³¹ Rosenblatt renovation public construction costs would total only \$39.9 million compared to \$77.6 million for the Fahey stadium, parking construction costs \$400,000 compared to \$4.6 million, infrastructure construction costs \$3 million compared to \$7.7 million, architecture and engineering costs \$4 million compared to almost \$8 million, testing and surveying costs \$230,000 compared to \$530,000, concessions equipment costs \$1 million compared to \$2 million, startup costs \$1.5 million compared to \$2 million, and fundraising and project management costs \$3 million compared to \$3.5 million. Total project costs for Rosenblatt would total \$72.5 million compared to almost \$128 million for a downtown stadium.³² Adding the existing Rosenblatt debt would peak these costs at \$84.5 million compared to \$140 million.³³ One study shows that renovation investment in Rosenblatt would cost less than half the amount to construct a new stadium and make it modern enough to suit the NCAA. The city recently spent \$20 million to renovate our stadium and still owes \$15 million in unpaid bonds for stadium improvements already finished. Renovating Rosenblatt can spur neighborhood redevelopment and investment there. Moving the facility would cause residential and commercial economic downturn in the neighborhood, with resulting loss of property tax revenue.

ADDITIONAL TAXES. To replace current \$2.4 million keno revenues cleverly filched by the mayor, Douglas County would raise our property tax by 2/3c per \$100 of valuation. Thus, Omaha taxpayers, all of whom reside within Douglas County, would pay higher property taxes to continue funding the county health center. Omaha property taxpayers also would see a hike, if alternative funding for the stadium fell below projections and did not cover construction or operational costs. Ticket prices could rise to pay new stadium costs, pricing some out of attendance. The plan would include 18 skybox suites, seating most taxpayers cannot afford. Suite seating, positioned closer to the play, escalates construction costs and reduces regular accommodations, meaning higher ticket prices for most fans. Such pricey features cause spiraling costs, soaking taxpayers. Omahans would pay increased taxes to build a new facility and more to demolish the old one.

NO ECONOMIC BENEFIT. Sports facilities now typically cost a host city more than \$10 million a year. Proponents claim that sports facilities improve the local economy 4 ways, first, by creating construction jobs, secondly, by those attending games or working at a facility, generating new spending in the community and expanding local employment. Thirdly, a stadium supposedly attracts tourists and companies to a city, further increasing local spending and jobs. Finally, all this new spending creates allegedly a multiplier effect, as increased local income spurs still more new spending and job creation. Advocates contend that new stadiums spur so much economic growth that subsidies become offset by revenues from ticket taxes, sales taxes on concessions, and spending around the stadium. Such arguments contain faulty economic reasoning that leads to overstatement of benefits. Economic growth occurs when community resources, people, capital investments, and natural resources like land become more productive. Constructing a stadium is positive for a local economy, only if a stadium is the most productive way to make capital investments and use its workers. Case studies of the effect of specific facilities and comparisons among cities that have sunk hundreds of millions of dollars into sports development evidence this same conclusion. A new sports facility has a very small, sometimes a negative effect, on overall economic activity and employment. No recent facility earns a reasonable return on investment. No recent facility

²⁸ Ibid, p. 248.

²⁹ Ibid, p. 250.

³⁰ Ibid, p. 252.

³¹ CWS Pre-design Study, pp. 92-93.

³² Omaha Stadium Report, Vol. I Exec. Summary, p.14.

³³ CWS Media Briefing Presentation, p. 30.

has become self-financing regarding impact on net tax revenues. Promotional studies overstate the economic impact of a facility, because they blur gross and net economic effects. Most spending inside a stadium is a substitute for other local recreational spending, like movies and restaurants. Similarly, tax collections inside a stadium are substitutes for ones from entertainment businesses that decline in sales. Diehard fans, mobilized by teams and local interests that benefit directly from a stadium, comprise the base of political support for subsidized sports facilities. The tendency of sports entities like the CWS to generate bidding wars has intensified from new stadium technology. The ordinary multipurpose facility of the 1960s and 1970s has bowed to elaborate, single-sport facilities that feature numerous new revenue options like luxury suites, club boxes, grand concessions, catering, signage, advertising, theme activities, and even bars, restaurants, and apartments with a view of the field.³⁴ Yet, evidence continues to add from independent studies that public investment in sports stadiums is a financial dud and usually sees a negative return on investment, though the ploy on sports fever persists forever. Fool people to think they cannot live without a CWS, that it is an indispensable part of their lives and history.³⁵ Dennis Zimmerman, from the Congressional Research Service at the Library of Congress, reports that supporters of municipally-owned sports stadiums distort facts to convince the gullible, touting that the sports will generate sufficient economic growth to pay for themselves. However, there are never sufficient taxes generated to make it painless for taxpayers because of overestimated economic benefits and understated economic costs. Proponent arguments contain faulty economic theories that lead to overstatement of benefits and blurring of true costs over the years. His study examined publicly-funded sports stadiums costing \$200 million or more, similar to costs projected by the Fahey plan, in Baltimore, Charlotte, Cleveland, St. Louis, Tampa, and other cities. Library of Congress economists discovered that a new sports facility has a very small effect on total economic activity and employment, nullifying proponent contentions that a new stadium would bring in corollary businesses that would contribute tax dollars and help the economy. Remember that convention center/arena supporters also boasted about how much revenue would filter in, but taxpayers became yoked with expenses and costs never offset. Sports stadiums do not attract new industries. Voters rejected ballot issues for public-funded stadiums in Milwaukee, San Francisco, San Jose, and Seattle.³⁶ The mayor cannot guarantee that revenue gleaned from naming rights, advertising, seat taxes, and leases would pay off 20-yr. bonds used for stadium construction. Certainly, tax \$\$ will generate from ticket sales, concessions, parking, and items sold at the stadium. However, attendees who purchase things during events probably would have spent their dollars plus tax elsewhere in the metro area. Therefore, revenues generated inside the facility would not classify as new revenue, even if specifically meant to subsidize the stadium. Impact studies that claim ripple effects of each dollar spent on sports events will spill over into the community wider economy overstate this contribution and do not differentiate between net and gross spending. Such studies ignore the substitution effect, whereby when sports and stadium activity increases, other spending by attendees drops. Stadium spending merely displaces spending that would have happened elsewhere, thus no net benefits.³⁷ Economic activity that occurs in the stadium vicinity represents lost revenue to entertainment outlets in other parts of the metro. Most spectators are residents of our metro area, plus most consumers face a limited budget restrained by household income to spend on entertainment, no matter their residence.³⁸ Bradley Humphries, a professor of sports at the U. of Illinois and U. of Alberta, opposes public financing of sports facilities on the basis of erroneous conjecture that they will become engines of economic growth, create thousands of new jobs, and raise taxpayer income, on the false premise of boosting civic pride.

UNNECESSARY FLUFF. The Fahey proposal envisions 28 private suites, compared to 10 at Rosenblatt, overlooking the ball field, which is fine for those who can afford the \$50,000 annual price or \$1,715 for a season ticket for a balcony club seat.

LET THE TEAMS PAY. Wherever the location, place more of the financial burden on facility users, from revenues from luxury or club boxes and personal seat licenses. Attendance has steadily fallen at regular Royals baseball games, current average attendance standing at 1,500. A new stadium will not guarantee that the Royals team will play better. A new stadium will not increase baseball-generated revenue from our AAA Royals team. Rosenblatt never fills to capacity except for CWS games. Yet, this team has declined to offer funding, even if utilizing a new ball park, because such facility would exist as a larger and more expensive one than usually used by a minor league team. Billionaire Warren Buffett owns part of the Royals team. He easily could pay for either Rosenblatt renovations or an entirely new stadium. If the Royals team and Creighton U. are so enthusiastic about a new stadium, they should fund it. To alleviate cost concerns, Major League Baseball agreed during D.C. stadium lease negotiations to contribute \$20 million toward stadium

³⁴ Sports, Jobs, and Taxes, by Roger Noll and Andrew Zimbalist.

³⁵ USA Today, 6-17-05.

³⁶ The Fresno (Daily) Republican.

³⁷ Bradley Humphries tracts while a professor at U. of Ill. at Urbana-Champaign.

³⁸ Bradley Humphries testimony before the House Subcomm. on Government Reform, 3-9-07.

construction.³⁹ Mayor Fahey, upon his return from visiting this tax \$\$ vortex, neglected to mention this fact. High school teams can pay to play at our stadium. Obtain signed pledges from all facility users to fund renovation or new construction. If the NCAA is so enthusiastic about the city building a new stadium with every amenity for the CWS to use only 10 days per year, it should contribute. The CWS has played at Rosenblatt for over 50 years; 300,000+ attended these college games in 2007 during a 10-day period.

THE REAL REASONS. Mayor Fahey undoubtedly wants a new facility to generate new revenues to hopefully offset the Hilton Hotel and Qwest Center facility and parking revenue shortfalls. The city zoo and its benefactors want Rosenblatt demolished, to expand parking facilities now too small to handle heavy attendance days. Supporters desire a new stadium to boost North Downtown redevelopment in which they have a stake. These real estate developers who purchased surrounding land and buildings in anticipation of civic construction would see a financial windfall for their initial investments, as the project briefing indicates that a downtown site would act as a catalyst for North Downtown development.⁴⁰

PUBLIC IGNORED. The Omaha World-Herald conducted a poll last June with this question, “Do you think the CWS should leave Rosenblatt Stadium?” 81% of respondents replied NO; 19% said YES. This newspaper, however, has declined to conduct another poll to discover if taxpayers would support another bond issue for a new stadium. Currently, a majority vote of city councilmen must support the mayoral initiative, as the council assumes responsibility for approving contracts and spending. The taxpaying public deserves the right to vote on this issue, despite the mayor using a threat that the CWS will abandon Omaha as his leverage. The mayor steadfastly refuses to allow a citizen vote, despite his admission that the city under his administration faces serious financial challenges. He believes such a vote would be “divisive” to the community; actually, he fears a huge majority vote to retain Rosenblatt Stadium and distrusts the public. Because several other cities have implemented targeted taxes to subsidize stadiums, sometimes with voter approval, the mayor should not conclude that Omaha voters would vote likewise. Forcing a downtown ballpark on citizens seriously would alienate much of the local civic and sporting community.

BETTER ALTERNATIVE. The press briefing noted a renovated Rosenblatt would have new metal decking and seats, a new main entry, elevators, and stairs to all levels.⁴¹ This alternative would see increased parking facilities, increased seating, and updated dugouts, locker rooms, rest rooms and hallways. The Rosenblatt location would offer the same improved concessions areas, number of permanent seats, the identical square footage for bathrooms, and 4 team locker rooms with the same square footage. This stadium offers the same number of total seats as a proposed new facility, 24,000. The city recently invested dollars in new seats, home plate netting, new paint, new photojournalist area, and a renovated umpire room, yet future renovations stay on hold. Projected renovations would cost only \$26 million. Taxpayers have not yet received our money’s worth from previous improvements. Baseball legends like Wrigley Field and Fenway Park have survived nobly with periodic renovations. Rosenblatt area citizens have proposed redevelopment plans for retail, park, and hotel initiatives, attracting local folks and tourists, proposals hinging on maintaining this stadium as a magnet. Use the site of a proposed new facility instead to attract businesses that will contribute to our local tax base.

LOBBY YOUR COUNCILMAN. Obviously, the mayor still lacks majority citizen support for his boondoggle, an element critical for NCAA approval. Final contract terms for NCAA contract extension are months away. **Step up to the plate!** Mobilize your friends and neighbors to do the following: 1) contact your city councilman to reject the Fahey financing proposal, and 2) pass an ordinance requiring a vote of the people on re-locating the stadium and raising taxes to fund it. Councilman Jim Suttle, in the 10-6-07 issue of the Omaha World-Herald said “I cannot support giving the mayor a blank check on the downtown stadium nor a Rosenblatt renovation/reconstruction without a vote of the people.” Councilmen must vote on increasing the hotel and car rental taxes, the construction bonds, and the NCAA contract extension. They have authority to veto the issuance of mayoral general revenue bonds that will return to haunt property taxpayers. Tell your elected city officials you do NOT want your taxes raised for a new ball park stadium! Its financing provisions should elicit a “Field of Screams” from taxpayers. Councilmen suffer under tremendous pressure from powerful, special interests to vote YES on this boondoggle. If the NCAA balks, Fahey must accept responsibility for promoting his unpopular plan. Attend public information forums. We desperately need to hear taxpayer voices, as Fahey and his community leader supporters will use public meetings to propagandize his plan. **Help taxpayers hit a home run! Help strike the mayor out!**

³⁹ Washington Post, 12-13-05.

⁴⁰ CWS Press Briefing, p. 10.

⁴¹ *Ibid*, p. 20.

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