

November 30, 2006

Study Makes Compelling Case for JSU's Own Football Stadium

By Eric Stringfellow

The Tel Com Center and the Metro Parkway are already on line while construction of the convention center and the King Edward project is close. Development on downtown Jackson's western edge, for too long just lip service, is becoming reality and could get a surprise boost.

A major link between downtown and Jackson State University should be a new football stadium, which would attract traffic and be an economic development driver for the university and community, according to a firm the university hired to prepare a case statement for the stadium.

The facility would be equipped with 15 suites as well as standard amenities like a press box, locker rooms and office space. The stadium, expected to cost about \$80 million, would seat 35,000 to 40,000 people.

Such a facility would be great for the city and the university, although some JSU supporters will frown at its proposed capacity. These concerns, however, are more emotional than logical.

CAPACITY SOUNDS SENSIBLE

The case statement was prepared by Brailsford & Dunlavey, a facility planning and program management firm based in Washington, D.C.

It is just a preliminary analysis but makes a rather compelling case for the stadium. This includes freeing up the site of the Mississippi Veterans Memorial Stadium to allow for additional growth by the University of Mississippi Medical Center.

The firm also dissected JSU's current financial arrangement with Veterans Memorial Stadium and looked at other institutions that recently built stadiums as a point of reference. It also used JSU's 25-year average of about 25,000 fans for home games as a benchmark.

This is one reason why the proposed capacity makes sense. It will increase the value of tickets to the games. Because the school currently plays in a 60,000-seat facility, demand for tickets has never exceeded the supply.

UNIVERSITY LOSING REVENUE

The study also concluded that JSU's current agreement with Veterans Memorial Stadium is unfavorable to the university.

"It severely limits the university in fully realizing the financial benefits of consistent strong spectator support as well as important intangible benefits of operating a successful intercollegiate football program at the Division I-AA level."

The university pays the stadium \$15,000 per game or 7 percent of the gate, whichever is higher. It collects 33 percent of concession sales but collects no parking revenues and is responsible for paying the electricity for the stadium lights.

"It is this lost revenue that impacts the university's ability to make enhancements to its athletic programs," the study said.

The proposed stadium, even with 35,000 seats, is a great venture that should create more enthusiasm for JSU football and downtown Jackson, while supporting UMC. This should be difficult for lawmakers to ignore.

To contact metro columnist Eric Stringfellow, call (601) 961-7236 or e-mail estringfellow@clarionledger.com.