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Do Something Incredible With Your City's Obsolete Sports Facility--The Why And How



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What happens when your hometown sports facility becomes obsolete when “the team” relocates—when the prime tenant moves out without another moving in? Fortunately, many cities are coming to understand that this situation doesn't have to be a headache, but an opportunity, as it offers a chance to develop or reenergize an often under-utilized area of town.

The first and most critical step in this redevelopment process is shaping a big, initial vision. What experiences do you want to provide to residents and visitors? What kinds of economic and community benefits are you looking to generate? Starting with strategy and goals allows you to anchor subsequent conversations.

From here, your steps are as follows:

1. Gather data that will help you understand development influences and constraints, as well as community and stakeholders wants and needs
2. Test the market, financial, and physical feasibility of potential offerings
3. Refine your vision
4. Identify funding and transaction structures, exploring the full spectrum of development structures
5. Develop an implementable master plan; it might get broken into short- and long-term plans depending on community and financing needs and constraints

The effort this takes is significant but worthwhile. Look at projects like New York City's High Line, which redeveloped an abandoned railway line into a beloved park/greenway. Likewise here in Washington, DC, the Robert F. Kennedy Memorial Stadium (RFK) Campus redevelopment project—made possible by a variety of development approaches—is transforming an obsolete campus into a vibrant corner of the city. It will feature sports, entertainment, cultural, and recreational programming to benefit both residents and visitors. This same approach can of course be applied to smaller cities, as exemplified by Cohen Stadium in El Paso, Texas, where the city is transforming an abandoned minor league ballpark into a multi-use development.

Whether a city is large or small, this big-picture thinking can leverage a site to create tremendous value.

Bill wrote a more comprehensive version of this piece for American City & County magazine. Read it [here](#).

What It Takes To Remain Among The Best: The Seattle Mariners' Safeco Field Story



Safeco Field, built in 1999, was long considered one of the best major league ballparks in the country. Its downtown Seattle location boasts easy, multi-modal accessibility and the venue is well-integrated into the fabric of the surrounding city. Since its opening, the ballpark has been operated and maintained by the Seattle Mariners under a 20-year lease with the Washington State Major League Baseball Stadium Public Facilities District (PFD)—the public entity that owns Safeco Field.

When the partnership decided a few years ago that it was time for an upgrade, they asked the question all cities ask: perform improvements or build new? While some teams decide to move on (e.g., Tampa Bay Rays, Atlanta Braves), the Mariners were set on staying put.

The partnership called in B&D to maximize their asset by developing a deep, actionable understanding of their long-term capital improvement liability. In short, what would it take to keep Safeco first-class for the next 20 years?

B&D teamed with Populous to direct an interdisciplinary team of experts including Thornton Tomasetti, Inc.; M-E Engineers, Inc.; Diversified Systems, Inc.; and The Bigelow Companies, Inc. This consulting team advised the Mariners and PFD, first looking at the improvements that would be necessary to maintain Safeco Field in a first-class manner through 2036. The recommended improvements included replacing roof components, food service interiors, interior and exterior signage, and the sound reinforcement system. The team also advised on upgrade improvements designed to enhance and maintain the spectator experience and ensure the economic life of the facility—which included expanding the existing parking garage, adding art to the ballpark's exterior, adding a brewpub and "tree house," and reconfiguring the club level. Finally, the team performed a benefits analysis to understand and quantify the economic and fiscal benefits generated by the operation of Safeco Field. [Click here to read the long-term capital needs assessment](#), which goes into greater detail.

This past spring, an update to the initial assessment was released, looking at the long-term capital needs requirements for 2037 to 2041. The long-term cost liability for necessary and upgrade improvements at the ballpark, which were identified by the assessment weighed heavily on negotiations regarding the Lease renewal. In December 2018, the Mariners and PFD announced that they had finalized a [new 25-year ballpark lease agreement](#). The joint Mariners–PFD partnership achieved much of what they wanted, including funding from King County. The partnership is now well-positioned to finalize the terms of the agreement, and move forward.

What Has B&D Been Up To Recently?

Collegiate Athletics Edition

The Venues team is actively engaged around the country on college campuses, advising on the planning and implementation of pioneering projects. We can't talk about these projects in full detail just yet (hence the vague names), but we are excited to share some tidbits of the innovative strategies transforming athletic programs—and sometimes entire campuses. Here's a sample:



1. University in the South

This school is engaged in sports programs strategic planning, ultimately working to increase the enrollment of students who would not typically attend. It is learning how athletics programs—even at small levels—can in fact boost the overall position of the university by positively affecting areas like enrollment, students' health and wellness, opportunities for students' professional growth, campus life, and leadership development.

2. University in the Northwest

This school is reimagining existing conditions. A premium seating and fan experience evaluation will ultimately help position the Athletics Department fund major football stadium renovations. Appropriately planned premium seating concepts and corresponding capital gift campaigns will engage corporations and donors without causing massive migrations from existing products.

3. Another University in the South

An underutilized parcel of land located right at the gateway to campus? Major opportunity. This school is transforming that parcel into a campus-edge, mixed-used development that will fund a new basketball arena. The retail portion of the development has already surpassed market expectations for \$/ft², enabling the school to move forward with next phases: the arena, offices, and a hotel. The arena/hotel combination is expected to draw crowds for sports events, convocations, religious ceremonies, and outside events like concerts and eSports competitions.

4. University in the Northeast

This school's existing fitness center is overcrowded from being shared between athletics and recreation. Now, they're engaging in multiple partnerships to develop a fitness and clinical student wellness center. One partnership, for example, is with a local hospital group that will lease and operate clinical and sports medicine spaces in the center. This project will enable the school to expand academics programs, offer an updated fitness space for students, open time in the existing fitness center and potentially attract creative partnerships to expand athletics amenities.

B&D has three quarterly newsletters (Higher Education, K-12, and Venues). [Learn more.](#)

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