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# VIEWPOINTS

An American City & County Blog

## Do something incredible with your city's obsolete sports facility—the why and how

by American City & County Contributor in Viewpoints

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RSS

By William Mykins

Cities from Atlanta to Oakland are facing the same concern: What happens when your hometown sports facility becomes obsolete when “the team” relocates? Because it can happen—and for many cities, it already has. Perhaps the fan base outgrows the stadium. Perhaps the owner sees more economic possibility elsewhere. Regardless of the reason, when the prime tenant moves out it is not necessarily a given that another can fill its place.



Fortunately, many cities are coming to understand that these facilities do not have to be liabilities; they can be immense opportunities, offering 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 an initial vision. Before diving into what the physical space or budget will allow, think big. What experiences do you want to provide to residents and visitors? What kinds of economic and community benefits are you looking to generate? What existing assets can you leverage, such as cultural, recreational, or commerce? What could you do with a potentially large tract of land—something that likely doesn't exist elsewhere in the city? Starting with strategy and goals allows you to anchor subsequent conversations, preventing you from going down one path only to realize it was the wrong one.

With a vision in mind, gather data. You want to understand development influences and constraints, while also engaging with the community and stakeholders to understand their wants and needs. Next: testing the market, financial, and physical feasibility of potential offerings; coalescing that information into a refined vision; identifying funding and transaction structures (this is key!); and lastly developing an implementable master plan based on that vision. In reality, that plan might best be broken into short- and long-term plans given community and financing needs and constraints.

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Government News, Issues & Trends

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That process may sound like a tremendous amount of effort, and it is. But the payoff can be significant.

Of course, not only is the effort significant, so is the investment. To make projects possible, cities can explore the full spectrum of development structures, from “self-develop” to “public-partnerships” with local and national public sector entities, to “public-private partnerships” with heavy private sector involvement. Consider that in a multifaceted redevelopment project, *each* facet can have a tailored development approach to ensure the best product possible at the best price possible.

Do not let the complexity of such a project dissuade you. The results can be impressive and *important*. The High Line in New York is a good example. After New York redeveloped an abandoned railway line into a park/greenway, residents and tourists flocked to the immediate and surrounding areas, breathing new life into it.

In Washington, I have been able to contribute to the redevelopment of the Robert F. Kennedy Memorial Stadium Complex (RFK). This project—made possible by a variety of development approaches—is transforming an obsolete campus into a vibrant destination offering an array of sports, entertainment, cultural, and recreational programming that can attract residents and visitors alike.

The prior examples are located in large urban cities, however the same approach can be applied to smaller cities. Look at the Cohen Stadium redevelopment project located in El Paso, Texas, where the city is forming partnerships to transform an abandoned minor league ballpark into a multi-use development, including recreational opportunities, restaurants, retail, and a large urban plaza, among others amenities. Regardless of the size of your city, there's opportunity.

If your community has obsolete/neglected assets, or brownfield sites lying dormant / underperforming, there are ideas you can take from the High Line, RFK, and Cohen Stadium redevelopment—the importance of thinking “big,” leveraging the site's asset value, and developing relationships with partners. Perhaps the biggest idea, though, is that these problematic assets don't have to be seen as problematic. They're opportunities—sometimes significant ones.

As cities come to understand this reality and decide to make something of these opportunities, their communities will benefit. If we're lucky, if some cities take the opportunity to heart and think strategically about what will best advance their community, we might get inspirational projects that impact and inspire us all.

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