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I have been an avid Minnesota Vikings fan my entire life and a taxpayer in the state of Minnesota. Currently, the team is in negotiations for a new stadium; their lease on the Metrodome expires at the end of this season. Multiple sites and funding plans have been discussed, including staying in downtown Minneapolis and moving to Arden Hills, a nearby suburb. The team has also discussed relocating to Los Angeles if a deal cannot get done. The state legislature will vote on the issue likely before the 2012 election. I am writing an open piece to Minnesotans that will appear in the Minneapolis newspaper *StarTribune*. I hope to convince readers that the stadium should be built in Minneapolis with a certain amount of public funding, and to contact their local representatives.

If You Build It, They Will Stay

What a game on Sunday! Our seemingly hapless Minnesota Vikings went toe to toe against the red-hot Denver Broncos. Quarterbacks Christian Ponder and Tim Tebow, two future National Football League stars, battled it out in what will surely be remembered as one of the most exciting games of the season. Although we did not come out with the victory, this game can be seen as a shimmering ray of hope for us Viking fans across the state. After all, we almost won with our best player, “All Day” Adrian Peterson, sidelined by an ankle injury, which allowed the youth of our team the opportunity to show their skills. Rookie tight end Kyle Rudolph had a fantastic finger tip touchdown catch that graced ESPN’s Sportscenter highlight as one of the best plays of the game. Second year running back Toby Gerhart had 21 carries, averaging a remarkable 4.3 yards per carry (“Box”). And the aforementioned Christian Ponder, our rookie quarterback and the future of our franchise, threw for 381 yards and 3 touchdowns, breaking the Vikings’ single game rookie record for yards (“Box”).

With the memories of 2009 and our magical run to the National Football Conference Championship Game fresh in our minds, we know what it feels like to be so close. The excitement of each game, the national press, the regional pride – it was a Vikings season that will not soon be forgotten. Even non-football fans were caught up in the drama; it truly was the experience of the winter. Although this season has not been one to remember, the youthful performances on Sunday predict a bright future for our team and a return to the promise land of the playoffs.

Recently, as most Minnesotans are aware, the Minnesota Vikings have been discussing plans to build a new stadium. There has also been discussion of the team moving to Los Angeles if a stadium cannot be built. The Hubert H. Humphrey Metrodome in downtown Minneapolis has been the home of the Minnesota Vikings since it was built in 1982 (“Resources”). The Vikings’ current lease with the owner of the Metrodome, the Metropolitan Sports Facilities Commission, is set to expire Feb 1, 2012 (Seifert). Thus, there is a push for legislation to be passed regarding the construction of a new Vikings stadium, as owner Zygi Wilf has said he will not “sign a short-term lease extension at the Metrodome without financing approval for a new stadium” (Seifert). In the past five years, the previous two co-tenants of the Metrodome, the Minnesota Twins and the University of Minnesota football team, have built their own stadiums and moved out. The Twins were able to build beautiful Target Field in downtown Minneapolis. The organization contributed roughly \$130 million of the \$522 million project, leaving the remaining \$392 million financed through a 0.15 percent sales tax in Hennepin county (“Resources”). Thus, public financing accounted for an estimated 75 percent of the project. On the other hand, the University of Minnesota was able to build its \$288.5 million football stadium with 52 percent private funding and 48 percent state funding, an estimated \$137.2 million (“Partners”). Consequently,

many Minnesotans feel there is no money in the state budget to fund another stadium. On the national level, eleven new stadiums have been opened in the past decade around the National Football League (NFL) (“List”). These stadiums are a big factor in providing high annual revenues for their respective teams. For example, Forbes estimates the annual revenue of the Dallas Cowboys, who opened Cowboys Stadium in 2009, to be \$406 million (“#1”).

Comparatively, Forbes puts the Vikings at \$227 million in annual revenue, ranking 28th out of 32 NFL teams (“#28”). Naturally, the Vikings would like to join its peers in earning more revenue.

Vikings representatives and local politicians have discussed multiple stadium solutions; however, there has not been much agreement in these discussions. There are two main issues that cannot be agreed upon: the location of the stadium and the funding. The Vikings organization would like to build the stadium in Arden Hills, a nearby suburb of Minneapolis. Wilf, a commercial real estate developer, sees this as the best option for growth of revenue. On the other hand, according to *StarTribune* staff writer Mike Kaszuba, Minneapolis mayor R.T. Rybak favors the stadium being built at one of three sites in Minneapolis: one by the Farmer’s Market, one on Linden Avenue, or the current Metrodome site (“Rybak”). Rybak prefers a Minneapolis site because the stadium would be “centrally located, publically owned, and would build on significant public investments already in place” (“Rybak”). As mayor, Rybak has seen the tremendously positive effect Target Field has had on nearby Minneapolis businesses, and undoubtedly sees the Vikings stadium as another way to bolster the economy of the city.

Perhaps the more complicated stadium issue is the funding. The total estimated cost for the Arden Hills stadium plan is \$1.1 billion (Helgeson). For Minneapolis, estimates put the Farmer’s Market site and Linden Avenue site to just over \$1 billion, with the Metrodome site at \$895 million (“Rybak”). The Vikings have offered to contribute \$407 million to the Arden Hills

project exclusively (Reusse). Assuming the Vikings would contribute a similar amount for a Minneapolis stadium, this leaves roughly \$600 million to be funded publically. Under the original Arden Hills plan, the state was to provide \$300 million and Ramsey County would provide the remaining \$350 million through an increase in sales tax (Helgeson). However, sales tax increases in Minneapolis and Ramsey county have since been ruled out because they would require a referendum, which would surely fail (Helgeson). Other discussed ways to finance this \$350 million include electronic pulltabs, racino (video slots at horse-racing tracks), a Minnesota State Lottery Vikings scratch-off game, or a new downtown Minneapolis casino (Helgeson). Governor Mark Dayton and Rybak both favor one or more of these gambling solutions, as the state does not have any other sources of money that would realistically be passed through the legislature.

Another financing option that has yet to be discussed at length is the selling of personal seat licenses. Personal seat licenses are sold to fans when new stadiums are built, giving the fans the exclusive right to buy tickets for their seats to events. Seat licenses are becoming a popular way for teams to finance their new stadiums, as the licenses themselves can be sold for tens of thousands of dollars. For example, according to Richard Sandomir, a reporter for the New York Times, the New York Giants sold seat licenses priced \$1,000 to \$20,000 to raise \$367 million for their new stadium. However, this is not the norm; many NFL stadiums do not have personal seat licenses in place.

In the opinion of this life-long Vikings fan, the new stadium should be built. The Vikings are statistically a very popular professional sports team in Minnesota; as such they deserve public funding for a new stadium. Kaszuba interviewed Bill Nielsen, vice president for sales at Scarborough Sports Marketing, who said “the percentage of Minnesotans who watched a

[Vikings] game on television, attended a game or listened to one in a given year consistently tops 60 percent” (“TV”). In addition, Kaszuba states that during a Vikings game, 68 percent of televisions turned on in the market are watching the game (“TV”). These numbers show the devout following the Vikings have among Minnesotans. As loyal Viking fans, we should not be against funding a new stadium for a team that means so much to over half of the state’s population.

However, contrary to the Vikings’ wishes, the stadium should be built in Minneapolis. With the local \$350 million contribution from Ramsey County off the table, the Arden Hills plan is no longer feasible. With the state now required to come up with this \$350 million, the stadium should be built in the place that is best for taxpayers, which is downtown. Arden Hills lacks the infrastructure needed for an NFL stadium. As *StarTribune* sports columnist Patrick Reusse comments, it does not make sense to “build a more expensive dome at a location in need of highway improvements, and where no commuter train will ever be seen”. Downtown Minneapolis currently boasts the infrastructure an NFL stadium requires, considering the Metrodome has operated there successfully for 30 years. A variety of restaurants, hotels, and the ever-expanding Light Rail commuter train system make downtown Minneapolis the clear choice, if the stadium is built on the taxpayer’s dollar.

Hence, the Vikings’ stadium should be funded with a \$400 million (40 percent) contribution from the Vikings and state funding accounting for the rest. This will require the state to implement some of its discussed gambling solutions. Racino, electronic pulltabs, and a Minnesota Vikings scratch game are all viable ways to raise money. State senator David Senjem estimates “racino legislation would raise \$133 million annually” (Helgeson), and the Minnesota Department of Revenue ballparks electronic pulltabs at \$40 million annually (Helgeson). In

addition, Senjem predicts racino legislation could help repay the money that the state borrowed from public schools (Helgeson). Although there will be opponents to using gambling revenues, explains *StarTribune* staff writer Baird Helgeson, such as Tribal groups and legislators who fear the social consequences, it would be a lot more likely to pass through the legislature than other funding methods. One of which is tapping the Legacy Fund, which is money set aside for the environment and cultural programs (Helgeson). Overall, a gambling solution is the best way to help the state fund the stadium.

Now opponents to this sort of funding plan might demand that the Vikings organization, specifically the Wilfs, pay for a larger percentage of the stadium. However, it can be argued that the Wilfs would be paying their fair share. A \$400 million contribution would represent the third-largest private contribution to a new stadium in league history (“Facts”). Additionally, according to Kaszuba, *Sports Illustrated* magazine estimated the Wilf’s net worth at \$310 million, which puts him 27th out of 32 NFL owners (“Vikings”). Thus, the Vikings organization would be making a large contribution, especially when compared to the contributions of other NFL owners to their stadiums.

Another funding option that opponents may wish to explore is personal seat licenses. They may argue that the monetary burden to build a new stadium should fall on those the stadium will directly benefit: the fans who attend games. Although it may sound appealing at first, seat licenses would have an overwhelming negative effect. First, many current Vikings season ticket holders would not be able to afford seat licensing fees in the tens of thousands of dollars. According to Sandomir, one New York Giants fan expressed in regard to seat licenses, “For people like me, these tickets are part of my family heritage...we have excellent seats, so it’s a kick in the stomach to be presented with a plan like this that we can’t afford.” The most loyal

fans should not be punished when a new stadium is built. In addition, seat licenses make it much more difficult for fans who do not have season tickets to attend a game. There would be a fewer number of tickets available to the general public, meaning the prices of the tickets would go up. It is important to continue to provide the average Minnesotan the opportunity to experience a Vikings game on a single game basis. Thus, seat licenses are not a funding solution that should be considered.

In sum, as fans of our Minnesota Vikings, we need to support the effort to build a new stadium. As evident last Sunday, the future of our team is promising, and to continue to compete in the distant future, the Vikings need to start earning revenue on par with the other teams in the league. The Metrodome cannot provide this. The contribution the Vikings are willing to make is a higher percentage of the total cost than the one the Twins made for Target Field and more than most NFL teams have ever made. If the stadium is built in downtown Minneapolis, it will be an investment that does not require the construction of additional infrastructure and will benefit surrounding businesses. The state should implement new gambling technologies to fund the stadium, as these methods would raise a large amount of money annually and could also reduce the state's debt to public schools. The sale of personal seat licenses should not be considered, as it will put ticket prices out of reach for both long time season ticket holders and fans who want to attend a game every once in a while. The Minnesota Vikings mean too much to our great state for us to allow them to move to Los Angeles. Please contact your local representatives and let them know just how much they mean to you! Support public funding for a new stadium; it will be an investment that present and future generations of Vikings fans will enjoy for many years to come. Skol Vikings!

Greg --- [removed by Clauss]
Robbinsdale Resident

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