

## What a Ballpark Will and Will Not Do...

Contributed by Mark Winston  
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I would like to voice my strenuous opposition to the proposal to build another taxpayer-financed ballpark in Winston-Salem.

Public projects which benefit a specific demographic are undeniable failures across our country. The laws and policies used by cities and governments to obtain and clear land for their use are almost universally biased against poor inner-city communities in favor of "bringing in" populations from outside the affected community.

Most arguments to promote 'redevelopment' in Winston Salem are based on the pretext that the city must attract 'young professionals' and make downtown more active. This is a fine goal, but should not be the primary thrust of city policy, as it is becoming in most cities that state it as a goal.

Winston Salem has a huge number of senior residents, poor suburban residents, immigrant residents, and student residents, all of which are groups with limited choice when it comes to where they live, shop or travel; and any of these demographics independently far outweigh the current or near-future potential number of 'young professionals' which the city might obtain for pro-clearance policies which annihilate our city's history. The City's energy should be focused on its actual residents here and now, not on some dream of attracting (or at least 'concentrating' in a specific preferred area) a class of individuals who are highly fickle and transient, and will have nothing near the attachment to our city shared by long-term residents and seniors who have retired here. In addition, it is unconscionable to place the interests of young professionals with discriminatory locational tastes over the interests of poor residents who live here now, who have little choice in their location.

By building this park, we will be wiping out a neighborhood. It is a neighborhood which needs rehabilitation, densification and diversification - but it does not need replacement. The stated position of the city to should be to improve the neighborhood they are investing in, not removing it in favor a more desirable demographic. If the demographic must evolve to result in rehabilitation, the existing population should be enlisted to help with this. Sorting out of people through redevelopment is no different than sorting them out through Jim Crow restrictions.

This park does not benefit us all, it benefits only:

1. People who enjoy baseball
2. People who are young, fit, and wealthy enough to attend (please - no arguments about how certain organizations will help the handicapped and poor attend - this item holds true for the vast majority of people who can't easily make it to the park and pay to get in)

It does not benefit:

1. The former property owners of the stadium site, who will lost their property value as the neighborhood deteriorated, and sold it on the cheap to someone who had the brilliant idea of obtaining city subsidies to finance a windfall equity margin from this property.
2. The current residents of the stadium site, who are being unceremoniously removed for relocation in a more appropriate neighborhood (eg, a neighborhood that is nor presently trying to redefine itself as a new yuppie haven).
3. The finances of the City (please give me specific examples of cities whose coffers have seen a net long-term fiscal benefit specifically from a stadium (sorry - surrounding development doesn't count - that can be done anywhere and doesn't require a stadium or large-scale clearance), and I'll sell you a pet purple dragon)
4. The long-term commercial, residential and historical health of the City

Clearance is not needed here. The residents and neighborhood in question can be rehabilitated using the beneficial fact that so many of the homes are widely spaced and there is lots of existing vacant land. Building smaller buildings with older structures interspersed is much better at incubating diversity and vitality than wiping the land clean and installing

monolithic projects. The current mish-mash of ages and spacings between structures in this place is a benefit that should be exploited, not an excuse for demolition of what's left.

Clearance has destroyed so much history in American cities that it makes me ill when I think about it. Untold quantities of beautiful commercial districts and residential neighborhoods have been wiped clean because they were not lively enough for the latest fad favored by young, moneyed interests. Historical preservation should not be limited to coveted gentrifying white neighborhoods from the early 20th century, nor to mid-century commercial architecture that is faddish and hip today. Historical preservation cannot be selective and it cannot be random - if it is to serve the purpose of preserving history, it must acknowledge what actual history was - with all its errors, oddities, and eyesores. It doesn't need to mean no replacements or rebuilding, but it does mean avoiding clearance and the never-ending story of resorting to the planner's red-line.

We need to save everything we can - not churn through development as if it's a Macy's petite department. "Redevelopment" should be a slow, organic process which occurs as buildings are rehabilitated, converted to new uses, and as the needs and demographics of the nearby community slowly change due to an aging population and aging construction. Replacing a worn-out building here and there is how lively districts maintain their vitality, not slash-and-burn development which leaves no historical connections or native community. The best defenders of the safety and longevity of a neighborhood are neighbors who care about their neighborhood, intend to stay even if they have the money and opportunity to leave, and work hard to keep that neighborhood vital.

'Revitalizing' communities never works when you clear them and build something in their place. New York from 1950 to 1980 experienced the largest scale clearance and replacement projects in history, and the only result was moving poor populations or high-crime neighborhoods from one poor part of the city to whatever was the next poor place available once removed. Relocating inconvenient neighborhoods is not the answer to crime, poor property maintenance, or poor commercial performance of a district. Better policing, community outreach and well-focused grants aimed at achieving realizable short-term social mobility are needed to revitalize poor or 'blighted' neighborhoods.

A ballpark won't do that.