

TITLE---Batter Up...??

"Neighborhood Speak"-----by Steve Patterson—Federation of SR Neighborhoods

Professional baseball is being proposed by a group called Centerfield Partners for San Rafael. Their goal would be to bring the equivalent of Double-A Ball to San Rafael beginning in May 2012 for 45 games at the Albert Park baseball stadium that borders Anderson Drive, near B St. Centerfield Partners would like to expand seating from 800 seats to 1,500 seats as well as make other stadium improvements. They insist that there would be many family friendly game promotions and the games would be places where moms and dads could bring their children for affordable entertainment. They are still quite a number of issues that need to be addressed and worked out. They include:

- **Parking**—While Centerfield Partners has worked out a parking plan with the San Rafael Corporate Center that has parking right across the street from the stadium. There is still a legitimate fear that if priced too high, the Gerstle Park neighborhood will be overrun with cars. This is a real balancing act to pull off so that it works and does not stifle the edge of Gerstle Park and the close-by neighbors. For the first year, I believe the parking should be free in the parking lot to create positive parking behavior and signify a positive relationship.
- **Alcohol/Security**—How will the serving of beer/wine be balanced to keep rowdy behavior in check? Will tailgate partying be a reality in the parking lot and precisely how will that be managed? If done right and this is a truly family affair, it seems this can be part of the mix.
- **Noise**—If 1,500 people start screaming for their home teams what type of acoustical solutions might be available. PA systems also make noise and neighbors may not want to hear player stats and other particulars of the game involuntarily. Noise also bounces so neighbors on the hillsides could be negatively impacted. Some noise tests need to be piloted to see what the decibel truly might be.
- **Lights**—The lights will likely get expanded and how will ambient light be managed so that people's homes don't get lit up, particular those on the hills.
- **1,500**—Is this number of fans really the number that will work or might fewer attendees be acceptable but still generate acceptable revenue numbers for Centerfield Partners. One wonders what the real number really is.
- It seems the City of San Rafael is receiving only a minimal stipend for renting out this stadium. Some cash flow estimates indicate Centerfield Partners will take in at least \$1.5 million in the course of a season, but will only pay San Rafael less than \$500 per game. It seems odd that for professional baseball the City would not try and generate a bigger revenue stream.

- Other than some PowerPoint slides, not even a site map has been submitted about how and where the expanded seats would be located, no traffic plan, no parking plan with expected costs. So many missing elements to this proposal it is amazing the Park/Rec Commission can even hold a vote.

Many people have indicated a favorable response to the baseball plan. It would bring people to downtown restaurants before a game and provide an expanded customer base for downtown businesses and the "alive after 5" philosophy.

However a smaller group of more immediate neighbors have hired an attorney and called for a full environmental impact report referring to baseball as a "catastrophe waiting to happen". They claim that "alcohol soaked" fans will urinate in public and smash windows after games. The position is a bit extreme and the inflammatory language just alienates people who might share many of their same concerns. Even the substance abusers who are homeless and hang out near the park don't exhibit that type of radical behavior. It appears that some of lesser desirables who hang out at the park might, in fact, move on and the baseball games and the families might create a positive impact for the park.

But all this needs to be studied and analyzed by San Rafael planners. At this point it is not clear when this type of scrutiny will be applied to the potential use. Seems odd, since far smaller proposed land uses receive far greater scrutiny by the City.

In spite of not having full and complete information the Park/Rec commission passed this on to the City Council unanimously. To many people it feels like this is being pushed through, no matter what. Even people who support this baseball initiative question how the Park/Rec could recommend to the City Council with virtually no analysis of the proposal itself. The plot will thicken, so stay tuned...

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