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Statement on Preservation of Waterfront Park And Rays Owners' Proposal for New Stadium

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The following statement has been approved by the Board of Saint Petersburg Preservation.

Saint Petersburg Preservation appreciates the nearly 100-year tradition of major league spring training baseball in St. Petersburg, and more recently the location of the Rays Major League Baseball franchise in our city. We recognize that major league baseball has greatly enriched the quality of life in our community since 1914.

We also recognize the importance of our wonderful downtown Waterfront Park system. This too has been a tradition and important legacy dating from as early as 1909. It is one of our city's most important historic sites. The present Waterfront Park system was the vision of William Straub, editor of the *St. Petersburg Times*, the developer C. Perry Snell, and the Board of Trade among many others. Both Straub and Snell appreciated art and beauty and advocated the preservation of the natural beauty of the downtown waterfront. And they were both part of a major struggle over whether the downtown waterfront was to become primarily a commercial port, or a waterfront park for use by tourists and as an amenity for adjacent residential areas. As an alternative to the downtown waterfront, they advocated for the location of shipping and other commercial uses further to the south in the vicinity of what is now Bayboro Harbor. After a hard fought fight, final arrangements were made for acquisition of the downtown waterfront for parkland on Christmas Eve, 1909. Upon that occasion William Straub stated in the *Times* that acquisition of the waterfront for parkland was "the best Christmas present that St. Petersburg ever had." The Waterfront Park continues today as the nation's finest and most extensive public waterfront.

A major departure from this vision of our early city leaders is now being considered with the Rays Owners' proposal to build a new 34,000-seat stadium on the downtown Waterfront Park. While it is the case that major league spring training stadiums have been located in the Waterfront Park since 1922, none of these stadiums have been anywhere near as large as the proposed stadium, and none have been used for regular season baseball. The seating capacity of the proposed stadium is five times the size of the current Al Lang spring training stadium. The building façade of the stadium on First Street is proposed to be 80 feet high, with roof height of up to 200 feet, and a mast of 320 feet. The footprint of the stadium also requires further expanding the Al Lang site by filling in a portion of the adjacent bay.

The City's Comprehensive Plan intended to preserve the original 1909 vision for our

waterfront. The Plan describes the waterfront as “a unique amenity and recreational asset.” “Preserving and enhancing the integrity of the waterfront for the citizens of St. Petersburg is an ongoing priority.” The Plan calls for development along the waterfront that is “sensitive to the aesthetic quality of the waterfront by addressing design issues related to building heights terraced away from the water, building orientation, scale and mass; creating open spaces and view corridors; and creating a pedestrian oriented, human scale environment at street level.”

Were it not for the Rays Owners’ proposal, it is likely the Al Lang Stadium site would have been included in the new Waterfront Park zoning and the proposed stadium would not meet the mass and scale limitations of that zoning. Under the Waterfront Park zoning any structures in the park cannot be higher than 75 feet.

Over the years significant portions of our open Waterfront Park land have been lost as buildings and parking areas were allowed to encroach into the Waterfront Park. While these encroachments were for uses perceived at the time to benefit the public, cumulatively they have significantly eroded our downtown waterfront open green space. The construction of the proposed stadium would constitute the largest encroachment on the Waterfront Park. It also sets a negative precedent for perhaps even larger projects at some future date.

Saint Petersburg Preservation does not believe William Straub, Perry Snell, and others associated with the creation of our Waterfront Park ever envisioned or intended a structure of this size on the waterfront. Also, we do not believe this is what the Comprehensive Plan intends. The mass and scale of the proposed waterfront stadium is far beyond what may be reasonably accommodated at the Waterfront Park site. The scale of the project is such that it would overpower and interfere with other nearby historic park amenities and residential areas.

It is nearing 100 years since the creation and dedication of our City’s Waterfront Park. Saint Petersburg Preservation strongly supports maintaining an open waterfront reflecting the vision of Straub and Snell for the next 100 years. We recommend the Rays Owners consider alternative sites, or further enhance the current stadium.