

# Safeco Field: Field of Dreams to Shape Public Space

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Property of Museum of History & Industry, Seattle



## Historical Context:

In July 1994, The Kingdome begins to fall apart when roof tiles fall before a Mariners game. The rest of the team's schedule would be played on the road, but the '94 strike cancels the end of the season early. This leads towards a greater push from the Mariners to build a new baseball-only stadium.

During the following season and the recommencement of baseball, the Washington State Legislature passes a series of bills in 1995 to amend the state code to accommodate public funding for a retractable-roof stadium.

→**Senate Bill 6049** (3/1/95) - Senators Prentice, Finkbeiner, Snyder and Pelz

-Sec. 7: "This act is necessary for the immediate preservation of the public peace, health, or safety, or support of the state government and its existing public institutions...."

In September 1995, King County voters decided upon a cumulative tax package to fund the new stadium: Referendum 48. That ballot measure failed after absentee ballots narrowly decided the final tally, and just weeks before Mariners came back in the standings to win the A.L. West in their last regular season game.

Governor Mike Lowry convenes a Special Session of Legislature to pass a new state funding package for King County to build the stadium. Final provisions include: a sales tax credit to the county; state Lottery Commission fundraising assistance through gaming; and vanity license plates for \$30 each.

→**Engrossed House Bill 2115** (10/14/95) – An act to finance a Major League Baseball Stadium

*Passed in House: 66-24; Affirmed by Senate: 25-16*

On October 23, 1995, King County approves funding package and establishes the Washington State Major League Baseball Stadium Public Facilities District (PFD) as per code approved by Legislature in Special Session.

-Dates and timeline provided by *The Seattle Times*, “About Safeco Field”

## Design and Planning - The Impact Study:

Prior to the construction of Safeco Field, the PDF undertook an Environmental Impact Study (EIS) to determine the feasibility and impact of building a \$500 million dollar stadium next to the existing Kingdome. Part of this process involves accepting public comments for consideration in determining the appropriate site, potential challenges and most acceptable arrangement for the community. The following comments were included in the EIS. Based upon present-day observations, a case could be made that these comments legitimately influenced the decision-making process for the Public Facilities District. (Courtesy of the University of Washington Libraries Gov. Publications)

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Major League Baseball Stadium  
EIS Comment Summary – 2/27/96  
Scoping Summary: 22-day comment period

### Environmental Issues:

#### Aesthetics:

“How will design/scale impact the [character] of the surrounding area?” (Eric R.)

#### Land Use:

- Economic impact concerns (10 comments)
- Historical/character impacts to Pioneer Square plan (7 comments)

#### Parks and Recreation:

“Impact on ten park facilities in vicinity of stadium should be considered. Other parks... will have impacts to their views and have code provision protection from view blockage and shadows from large development (Seattle Department of Parks & Recreation)

#### Public Services/Safety:

- Impact of pedestrian traffic on sanitation; receptacles for garbage
- Pedestrian access and safety concerns

### Siting Issues:

#### Site Preferences:

- Site A (**Against Main St.; closest to Pioneer Square**): 13 ←
- Site B (**West of/on Occidental**): 2
- Site C (**Current location: Royal Brougham and 1<sup>st</sup> Ave**): 4
- Out of proposed areas/**Other**: 10 ←

\*Radical Women/Freedom Socialist Party proposed “No Action”

### Miscellaneous:

“How will visual artists be involved in design of facility?” (Eric R.)

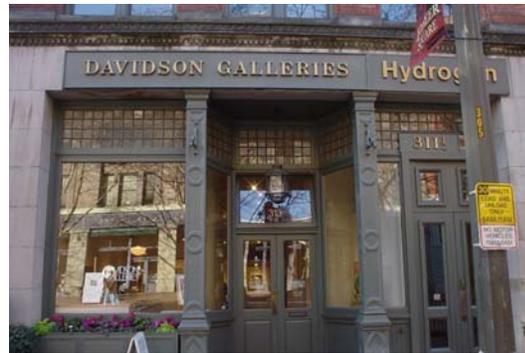
-Proposal for multi-use facility w/community center, retail, housing, etc.



Wing Luke Asian Museum

# Pioneer Square and Occidental: "The Pedestrian Spine"

**Historic Pioneer Square:** Feb 8<sup>th</sup> – Tuesday Afternoon/mid-workday



The pedestrian-only section of Occidental Ave. experiences its highest levels of pedestrian traffic on event days, serving fans from Downtown parking and transportation services. The retail-oriented businesses along this promenade tend to cater primarily to high-income consumers, considering most of the items for sale are artistic and cater to the expendable income that may be challenged by the stadiums. However, speaking with the owners of *The Artists Gallery* on Occidental there is not a significant conflict with the event crowds – with baseball games actually increasing sales by a slight margin.

Beyond event days, the numerous cafés are usually busy with the work-day crowd, with lunch seeing a slight increase. Most of the larger food-services are along 1<sup>st</sup> Avenue, but their close proximity to several consulting and marketing firms provide a quick drink or bite to eat during the day. During my observation period, several of the metal table and chairs were occupied by well-dressed men and women, while homeless wandered up and down Occidental Park and tourists; an interesting juxtaposition for sure.

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## Pioneer Square -- it really has three sides

*Friday, March 16, 2001*

By KERY MURAKAMI

SEATTLE POST-INTELLIGENCER REPORTER

*Hot debate about the soul of the square has come up before -- when, at the neighborhood's insistence, the City Council approved civility laws aimed at keeping the homeless from peeing in public, panhandling aggressively and sitting on the sidewalk, and*

*again with last year's fight over a failed ordinance aimed at muffling noise from the clubs....*

*The demand for a more civil square is likely to grow as the place changes. Since 1998, the number of apartments and condos in the neighborhood has risen from just over 700 to 916, with at least 150 more planned or under construction. Some sell for as much as \$2 million.*

*Not everyone sees the neighborhood as a place that needs to pipe down and dry out.*

*Some see it as a place for revelry, not only on Fat Tuesdays, but stormy Mondays or any other night. And still others see it as a place to find a free bowl of soup and a friendly doorway for camping out of the rain.*

*It's clear that Pioneer Square isn't just one neighborhood. In the 24 hours after Patrick Smith starts work, the face of the square will change almost by the hour.*

*It's also clear that not even the dedicated cleaner and his powerful machine can clean up the messy, competing visions for the birthplace of Seattle.*

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The store fronts were well-kept and exhibit historical character with urban/modern façade and interior design. Even while the buildings are noticeably into a century old, it is clear that the high traffic patterns along this corridor influence the need for renovation and modern amenities. One particular instance of this phenomenon was evidenced on the corner of Occidental and S. Jackson, seen below. The building had evidence of historical significance, based upon the faded store name of a shoe manufacturing company painted on the side. Currently, there is a Starbucks occupying the corner and a sports memorabilia store mid-block.

However, on the second level there is a “For Lease” sign prominently displayed. While the building receives high traffic on event days due to its proximity to the stadium, there is apparently no market for non-retail manufacturing. In other words, the stadium traffic does not benefit businesses which do not directly meet event traffic (like the first floor, corner Starbucks) or are not along this specific corridor leading to the ballpark.



An even more dramatic example of the impact of high pedestrian traffic is seen just one block east of Occidental, on 2<sup>nd</sup> Ave (below). The majority of the buildings are vacant and undergoing renovations. Sidewalks are not well-preserved and some intersections are even closed to pedestrian traffic during the slow construction schedule – a low-priority since there is no traffic disruption due to lack of traffic in the first place. This is in stark contrast to the brick-lined walk and pedestrian-friendly preservation along Occidental.



## Transportation Improvements

### Pedestrian improvements: Feb 10<sup>th</sup> – Thursday Afternoon/mid-workday

The most direct regional improvement that can be tied to the construction of Safeco Field is the sidewalk widening and repave of Occidental, south of Jackson Street to Main Street. The Public Facilities District, as part of their funding, dedicated \$1.3 million to improving pedestrian access on this stretch of Occidental – formerly a standard roadway. It would appear that the PFD and Mariners ownership considered this primary access route to be important enough for event traffic to improve this additional block of classical ambience. The new features include three additional feet of brick sidewalk along the roadway and about ten feet at the intersection (as seen below). Strangely, it would appear the PFD work did nothing to improve the existing sidewalk, as there is a clear demarcation of new work. The road itself is also paved with bricks now, and trees have been planted the length of the street.



Another walkway improvement through PFD funding is on 1<sup>st</sup> Ave from King Street to Royal Brougham Way, at Safeco Field. 1<sup>st</sup> Avenue at this point is a major access way to the Alaskan Way Viaduct (Highway 99). Due to the heavy vehicle traffic, it appeared that several decades had passed without any pedestrian improvements. This is likely due to the fact that the former baseball/football stadium, the Kingdome, was further north than Safeco Field and there was minor foot traffic along this route. With the relocation of baseball games, more fans park downtown or along Alaskan Way and have to walk along 1<sup>st</sup> Ave to the stadium. Beyond extending the east sidewalk several feet and improving bus stop sites, the 1<sup>st</sup> Ave median through Pioneer Square was extended to Railroad Way - approximately mid-block to Safeco. This portion of the roadway, with the exception of a condominium complex next to the football stadium, appears desolate and void of commerce or activity. This appears to be due to displacement from the footprint of Hwy 99.

▪Photos: March 8<sup>th</sup> – Tuesday morning



## So What?

The underlying principle of my research was directed by a quote from a local resident in the Front Porch Forum held before the 1995 Stadium Vote:

*"It really gets back down to that basic simple question: Is Seattle better off or is Seattle worse off if you vote yes or no... Is it worth it to say no?" -Clint G., Totem Lake*

With this idea as a foundation, I compared the physical alterations and the dialogue surrounding Safeco Field to seek out answers. Unfortunately, I could not conclude within the framework of my project whether the construction of a baseball stadium, with public funding covering more than 90% of costs, actually benefited the region in a cumulative manner. That is, do the total gains from having a team add up to outweigh the financial and social losses, assuming that there were considering the objections found in the public commenting period. What I was able to do is answer each question (better or worse?) with fact, allowing for value judgments to determine the actual result.

### Better off?

- The presence of professional sports teams permit for national and international exposure for the city and region during television coverage. *For example:* MLB All-Star Game '01, Baseball playoffs in 2001 & 2002 drew additional visitors to the city with “free tourism advertisements” during national TV broadcasts. A secondary effect of covering baseball games leads to other points of tourism experiencing larger crowds.

- Television coverage highlights compelling features of city, tourism. Image is the key for higher ratings: a successful team draws more coverage. Increased coverage of high-class stadium reflects upon city commitment to civic/social events and perpetuates social themes:

*"We lost a lot of what made Issaquah special. Now Issaquah is like Bellevue. Like them or hate them, I think the Mariners help make Seattle, Seattle. . . . It's part of who we are and I'd hate to see them go." -Bonnie E., Issaquah (Seattle Times Front Porch Forum)*

\* **Local bars/food services:** Did not directly interview, but noticed an increase in number of bars in Pioneer Square district since construction (Cowgirls Inc., Juan O’Riley’s, etc.) in addition to continued presence/high patronage of several historical taverns (Triangle, F.X. McRory’s, Central Tavern & Saloon, J & M Café).

\* **Artists Gallery of Seattle:** Interviewed a gallery manager. Reports increase in business/patrons during baseball games. More so than football even though store is across from Qwest Field gates approximately 50’ away. She suggested that a different demographic attended football than baseball, with a high expendable income going to Mariners games (plus having 81 home games versus 6 for football).



Map courtesy of City of Seattle

▪Photos: March 5<sup>th</sup> – Saturday Midday



VS.



Worse off?

“Financial benefit” may be only a redistribution of discretionary income (Lipsitz, “Silence of the Rams”). Especially considering the large bill for building the stadium, it would

be no surprise that funding was lost from other public services. Beyond budgetary constraints, the economic impact of the stadium is felt among business owners competing for the same “entertainment dollar” that the Mariners have sought. However, as seen on the “Current Land Use” map (above, top right) there is minimal “Open Space” classified in the South Downtown district, and the only significant entertainment presence is Safeco Field itself. The only possible examples of impacts to businesses are marginal at worst, since the ultimate cause of demise/failure was not able to be determined in the scope of my project:

\* ***Shalimar Oriental Rugs:*** Reports less business since construction of stadium, however it is possibly due to economic recession since 2000. But, he stated that stadium events do not contribute to business more than non-event days.

\* ***King St. Kafe:*** Does not see pre-game increase for baseball games – outside beverages prohibited. Football games: slight increase due to tailgating in N. Lot. Post-game traffic is low – fans want to leave as soon as possible w/ traffic and end of event.

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*My stadium's better than your stadium*

*Wednesday, July 14, 1999*

*By ANGELO BRUSCAS*

*SEATTLE POST-INTELLIGENCER REPORTER*

*Safeco Field also was built despite failing with voters at the polls, but that was because the 1995 state Legislature stepped in and approved the combination of tax increases and lottery proceeds after owners stepped up their threats to sell the team.*

*"Some people pay a lot for things that other people want really bad. That part of the deal we shouldn't really be surprised by," Fort said. "People say 'no' just as many times as they say 'yes.' Take a look at Safeco. The voters said, 'no.' But for the stadium proposals that fail, over half of them find alternative funding paths anyway."*

*Fort notes that no baseball team has actually moved since 1971 when the Washington Senators moved to Texas and became the Rangers. But that doesn't keep owners from threatening to uproot a team to get a new stadium deal that can provide the millions in added revenue from luxury seats and suites, naming rights, seat licenses and other amenities.*

*Fort doesn't blame owners for playing the game that baseball has set up.*

*"To me it all boils down to the fact that the leagues have absolute sovereignty as to where they put a team," he said. "But they always keep a couple of very nice places in reserve, which gives the owners leverage that current teams need against their host cities. So the threat to move is very real."*

*"Pittsburgh is on the decline, somebody else is on the make," he said. "So either the people of Pittsburgh or the state of Pennsylvania will come up with an outlandishly large and crazy funding mechanism to keep the (Pirates) in town, or they will hit the road and move to someplace else."*

*The new ballparks are not just built for baseball any longer. They are made to make money for the team at every nook and cranny. After they open, new baseball stadiums can generate \$20 million to \$40 million in additional revenue for owners.*

*"They're actually becoming malls, and you're going to be seeing that more and more and more," Fort said.*

*Safeco, however, is far less mall-like than Bank One in Phoenix, which has a new car showroom in its suite level as well as a number of commercial eating establishments attached to the ballpark.*

*Dave Moore, director of Coors Field administration and development in Denver, doesn't mind that his field has set the standard for Safeco and other ballparks. Take away the politics and he sees a stadium boom that just keeps getting better and better for baseball fans.*

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## Conclusions

### Evaluation of Findings:

My initial reaction to the question of whether Greater Seattle is better off for spending the money to keep the Mariners is a biased “absolutely, yes.” While watching games in the half-empty Kingdome in 1993 little did I know that the concrete bowl nicknamed “The Tomb” by out-of-town sportswriters would be replaced by one of the most visually-appealing stadiums in the country. However, an objective analysis of the visual data would point to aesthetic and functional improvements to the Stadium/South Pioneer Square area as clear improvements over the decaying infrastructure dated to the 1950’s. However, following Lipsitz’ concern over financial redistribution it is possible that the nature of the transportation infrastructure and key placement of pedestrian access points may lead to strange patterns of development and imbalanced division of the public space.

It is clear that private interests are most responsible for arranging these patterns of development. The impetus for building the stadium - and thus increasing traffic to the district – began with the Mariners’ ownership group and did not even pass in a county vote. However, the interests of the team and local business ownership groups are tied to the financial and moral support of the local community. Because of this dependency, private organizations apparently have to make concessions to the public in order to maintain support.

### Evaluation of process:

I would consider my primary method of photography as an effective means to convey the results of these changes over the past five to seven years, however I would have liked to get more concrete interviews to strengthen the argument and/or dispute my claims. With the tangible evidence of change around the area and the accompanying information provided by public sources, I figured photographs would be evidence enough to document the district. Adding newspaper commentary was helpful, but a greater diversity of ideas would be necessary to fully gain any better insight than my original methods.

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- Personal communication/informal interviews with managers of:  
*Shalimar Oriental Rugs*  
*King St. Kafe*  
*Artists Gallery of Seattle*

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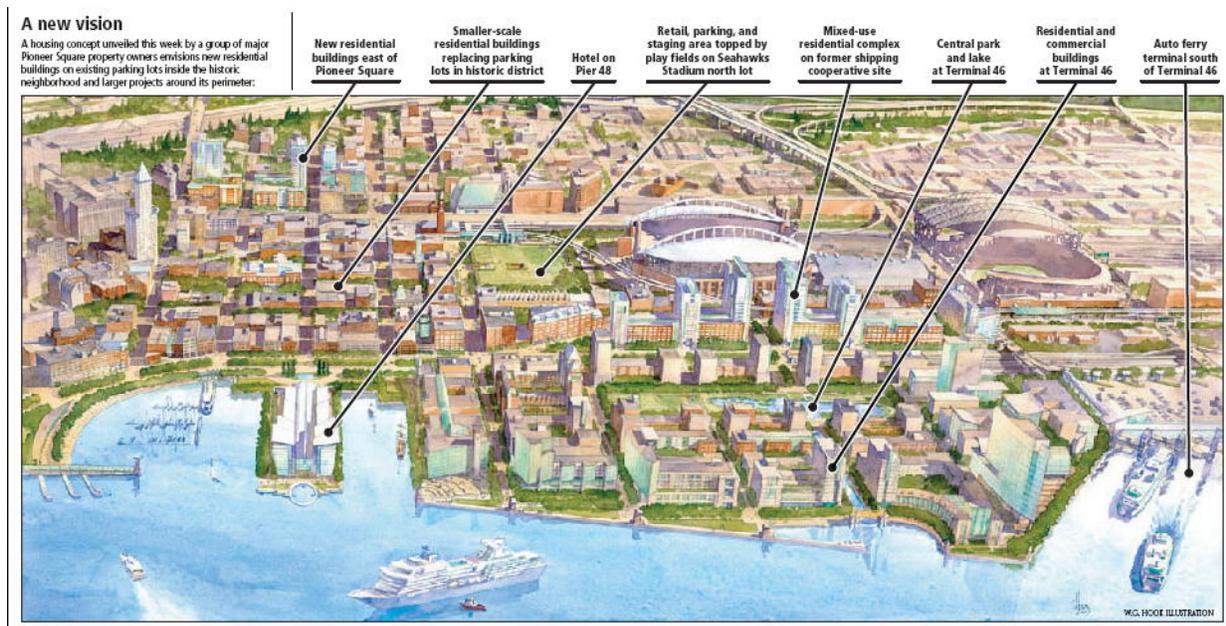


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