

# Ballpark Neighborhood Gathering

## *A Report From Neighbors to Our Community*

On March 13, 2023 more than 125 people gathered to discuss the future of the Ballpark neighborhood. The meeting was organized by residents, for residents through the Ballpark Community Council.

**This report focuses on the input participants gave during the meeting.**

### Thank you

Thank you to the neighbors who volunteered their time to plan and facilitate this meeting, especially Erika Carlsen for developing the agenda and facilitating the meeting and Missy Greis and Publik Coffee for hosting us free of charge. Thanks also to Jordan Menzel for serving as MC, to Jaine Dial for designing our invitation and poster, and to Amy Hawkins, who agreed to have this meeting be held in conjunction with the Ballpark Community Council. This report was drafted by Fraser Nelson, and it will be shared with the City and the public. We deeply appreciate the participation of our guests Mayor Erin Mendenhall, Council Member Darin Mano, Shaleane Gee with Zions Bank and Don Stirling from the Miller Family Foundation. Thanks also to our ASL interpreters Jackie Aaron and Toby O'Hara, and to Luis Bravo and Camila Gutierrez for providing Spanish language translation, ensuring our meeting was accessible to as many of our residents as possible. Thanks also to the City staff who helped with community outreach and helped residents complete Ballpark Next applications on site.

**Thanks especially to the more than 125 neighbors and friends of the Ballpark neighborhood who came to share their ideas with each other and the City.**

### Background

On January 17, 2023 it was announced that after 20 months of negotiation with City officials, the Salt Lake Bees were leaving the Smith's Ballpark. This announcement about the Bees departure is disruptive in many ways. It means the loss of a beloved team, our identity and a marker of seasons that give a rhythm and shared experience to all of us who call the Ballpark home. Change is already coming to our neighborhood, but this feels different.

*And it is different.* Thirteen acres of prime real estate in the nation's 5th fastest growing city is now up for development. A city-sponsored competition will bring forth ideas that could profoundly and permanently change our environment. Elected officials and government staff in multiple departments will debate options, enforce processes and weigh proposals.

On January 24, 2023 in response to the departure of the Bees, the Larry H. & Gail Miller Family Foundation announced their intention to lead a \$100 million public-private partnership to invest in 'human-centered programs and opportunities.' For context, Salt Lake City's 2022–23 general fund was \$425.5 million. This \$100 million dollar public-private partnership has the potential to drastically change the future of our neighborhood and Salt Lake City as a whole.

**We believe that the future of our neighborhood should be in our hands.** After many conversations with neighbors, a small group decided to organize a community meeting. Our goal was to provide a forum to share our sadness, get some questions answered, hold our elected officials to public account, and share our ideas about what could be – and what we are concerned might happen. We hope this report summarizes the outcomes and memorializes this point in time.

This is just the first step. The City is committed to engaging with our neighborhood throughout the process, and the Ballpark Community Council is geared up to represent our voice through its monthly meetings and a sub committee focused just on this issue. Zions Bank has given a grant of \$10,000 to support this kind of community engagement.

We hope that you will continue to engage in this process. As one resident shared:

*“This really is up to us.”*

## Community Input

### *Our fears*

We collected 89 cards where residents described their biggest concern or fear over the loss of the Bees and changes to the Ballpark neighborhood.

**The overwhelming single fear is that the area will be used for apartment buildings.** Generally, residents voiced concern that the use of the 13.5 acres will be driven by developers, and result in a canyon of unattractive, luxury high rise apartments that do not serve the residents of our community. A total of 42, or just under 50%, of responses focused in this area.

*“I'm fearful that property developers will make more bland, unaffordable housing and profit off the loss of our community”*

*“That it is replaced with a soul-less impersonal commercial development or apartment complex that does not encourage or facilitate community development or meaningful experiences”*

Additional common specific concerns focused on how a ‘canyon’ of high rises condos with no retail and no community spaces will bring the worst of gentrification and destroy the character of our part of town. The sameness of so many of the buildings along 400 South is, for example, exactly what people *do not* want. More people will bring more traffic, and increase the strain on our very limited green space. In sum, the fear is the Ballpark will be overrun by ugly, expensive and car-centric apartment buildings that provide absolutely no community value to the people already living here.

A second significant concern is that the **loss of the primary active anchor property will have a negative impact on the quality of life** in our neighborhood, including an increase in crime and unsheltered residents. A total of 24 people, or about 25% of responses focused in this area.

*“This is the loss of an advocate for the neighborhood interested in keeping it safe and clean”*

The issue of homelessness has been raised by our neighbors consistently, not surprising given the number of shelters and service providers already in Ballpark. As the Bees move to the suburbs, some are concerned that the suburbs and other parts of the entire state will continue to rely on our neighborhood to welcome and serve homeless individuals. Specific fears include that a new shelter will be built on the site, that property values in the area will decrease as a result, and that we will see an increase in crime. It should also be noted that some residents suggested the stadium be replaced by service for the unsheltered in another set of questions.

For others, losing the Bees equates to a **loss of the identity and history** that makes the neighborhood special and more safe, and for others it is the **loss of a community gathering space** that brought us together. 15 people, about 17% of respondents, shared this concern.

*“Our community will be forgotten”*

Residents are worried that whatever replaces the stadium will not have the same function, impacting safety. Families and community members will no longer have a place to come together for an affordable, fun experience. One person worried the name of our neighborhood will change. There is a risk that whatever replaces the Bees and or Stadium will fail to capture the public’s imagination or foot traffic – “another Gateway”.

The legacy of SugarHole made an impression on our neighborhood. 15 people are worried that the site **will sit dilapidated and vacant**, leading to urban blight.

Not everyone trusts the process laid out by the City. 8 people, about 9% of respondents, raised concerns about **the role of the City**.

*“The decision has been made and community engagement is all lip service.”*

These concerns ranged from a worry that the city will not think big enough or not embrace the transformational opportunity that has been given, to a worry that the Ballpark Station Area Plan will be abandoned. Some worry that there will be a loss of attention from the City and law enforcement, while one resident fears another corporate welfare recipient will occupy the space and another that the full economic impact on the neighborhood will not be disclosed.

Finally, 4 people are **not worried about the Bees leaving – in fact they embrace it** and see it as an opportunity for a better future for our neighborhood and its residents.

*None - I am quite excited!*

## *What do you love about what the Ballpark provides to the community?*

When people gathered they were asked to respond to two questions on a post it note. Some 302 responses were collected - some with more legible handwriting than others! We've compiled these into major themes.

The actual game of baseball was only mentioned a few times. Far more common was the excuse that the sport gave an opportunity to gather together in a beautiful setting and enjoy hot dogs, family and the diversity of our community. The Ballpark means unity, community, and tradition.

The Ballpark also brings people to our neighborhood. The close proximity to TRAX, plus the affordability of a ticket, makes the Ballpark a gathering space not just for us, but for the whole Valley. Some people love the fireworks, and some hate them, but everyone appreciates that the park has been a landmark and that baseball has been an important part of our history for 100 years. Losing that just stinks.

## *What do you hope will happen with the Ballpark site?*

We gathered more than 150 ideas for how this change can best serve the neighborhood. There are four leading desires:

- 1. A community recreation center**
- 2. More local businesses, including options for dining**

### **3. Green space and parks**

### **4. A performance and art venue**

Regardless of how the 13 acres are used, people want to see something beautiful, a place and activities that will both bring people here and serve those that live here. Spaces that promote local businesses, not franchises, that support walkability over cars, and trees over asphalt. An affordable place to gather as families, as a community. A place for people of all ages and backgrounds. A place that reflects who we are as a neighborhood - diverse, unique, and proud.

*“Think big, SLC deserves it.”*

## **More local businesses**

30 people shared ideas for new uses centered around local businesses and restaurants. Several cited food halls and markets in other cities (Eastern Market in DC, Grand Central Market in LA), while others said something along the lines of ‘more bars and more places to eat’. Small scale commercial spaces for local independent businesses, including art galleries, popups and a small business incubator were noted, as well as a number of missing businesses – a grocery store, a dry cleaner, for example. Pop ups, food trucks and other businesses that can generate excitement and a community feel are exciting options.

## **Community Rec Center**

28 people had this on their wish list. Specific ideas include a Pacific Island Heritage Center / Cultural Center, a pool, programs for kids, a skate park, soccer fields, a pump track and a skating rink.

## **Public performance / art space**

Arts and performance also generated 28 responses, with the most popular being using the stadium as an outdoor concert venue (15). Other ideas include an amphitheater, a Public art space / Sculpture garden, and a general event space for public performances.

## **Green space / Open space / Parks**

The lack of green space and parks in our neighborhood was well documented in the Ballpark Station Area Plan, and this is a clear opportunity to rectify that need. Among the 28 people who shared their ideas of a park, most also cited the hope that trees play a central role in the design of a park. Others would like to see a children’s splash pad, a community garden, amenities for kids, and a roller coaster!

## Other ideas

Reflecting the fears expressed earlier, a smaller number of people hope that housing and social services will come to the neighborhood, though these suggestions focused on meeting the needs of the unsheltered. If housing is built, it should offer ownership options, and street level activation. A sports facility was also noted by just 8 people, 2 of whom suggested a women's facility. Several note this might be a great place for the proposed library. If the stadium is demolished, one resident suggested a part of it be incorporated into the final design. Finally, one person noted that this might be the opportunity to change 1300 south from a state road, and another the chance to tear down the 1-15 on an off ramp at 900 south.

## How to stay involved & next steps

Erika Carlsen closed the meeting with these thoughts:

“There might be a perception among those outside our neighborhood that the Ballpark isn't a great place to be. And sure, like any community, we have our share of challenges. But unlike other communities, what sets us apart is we've got tremendous heart, community-driven care, and real investment in our neighborhood. If a ragtag group of neighbors can bring together all these people for an evening gathering, imagine what more we can do together.

Our action item is to say that now more than ever for our friends, family, neighbors, city and state to understand the magic & possibility of our neighborhood. That as neighbors you spread more of the magic of what this place is, and what this can be. The Bees' departure signals to us that they missed something – they didn't see what we see about our neighborhood. We need the most creative urban planners, resources, to see what we see – to see and feel that magic that has led us to put down roots here, raise families, and open businesses.

**We need to make visible the magic that brought us to this neighborhood and reframe the way we talk about the neighborhood to focus on possibility and progress. We look forward to both walking alongside our elected officials and holding them to account on how together we can make real the magic of this neighborhood.”**

Here are some concrete step you can take :

- Join the monthly meetings of the Ballpark Community Council, held on the first Thursday of the month. If you shared your email you'll get an announcement.
- We are planning to create a subcommittee of the Ballpark Community Council focused solely on these topics. To volunteer, contact [ballparkcc@gmail.com](mailto:ballparkcc@gmail.com).

- We will be hosting a neighborhood get together at RoHa Brewing to keep the momentum going and continue building relationships as neighbors who care about our community. Look for an announcement on the Community Council's [facebook page](#) (link). We are working to get a website and e-newsletter started too specifically on the future of the Ballpark site!
- The City will be setting up a series of public meetings, which we will share. You can also keep on top of the Ballpark Next competition [here](#).

## Additional information

### Questions with the Mayor Erin Mendenhall and Council member Darin Mano

**Watch the meeting here: <https://www.facebook.com/watch/?v=755825865899434>**

*“I don't blame you for feeling surprised and hurt and angry, or worried. This is trauma... We don't know what will happen yet. But I can tell you what my number one priority is – It needs to be activated more than 71 days a year. It needs to be positively activated every single day.”*

*Mayor Mendenhall*

*“I know there will be some really great ideas for this community.”*

*Councilmember Mano*

The organizing committee spoke with many residents to develop a short list of common questions to pose to our elected officials on behalf of the community. Rather than dive deeply into this part of the meeting in this report, which is focused on input gathered at the meeting, we provide the questions and encourage you to view the entire meeting online [here](#).

*We understand you have been involved in this process for over a year. Help us understand the actions and process that led us to this point, especially since many of us are wondering if we could have played a constructive role preventing the Bee's leaving the Ballpark.*

*How do you plan for the community to remain actively involved as invested stakeholders in Ballpark Next? What can we expect moving forward?*

*What is the intended timeline for Ballpark Next once the application process closes on March 17th? How will residents be explicitly invited to weigh in on the process and selected proposals at each stage of the process?*

*We understand that the outcomes of the Ballpark NEXT contest may have little or no bearing on what the city decides to do with the ballpark site/structure. Since these are separate processes, can you describe the city's timeline/plan for engagement on the city's decision-making process for what will happen to the ballpark property and stadium?*

*We acknowledge the generous and historic investment of \$100M into the future of the Ballpark area led by the Larry H Miller Group. How, if at all, will the community be involved in determining the*



*allocation of this investment? If possible, we'd love to hear from representatives from LHM, Zions Bank, and others as appropriate along with City Officials.*

## Meeting outcomes

1. Neighbors, Business Owners, and City Officials enrich and deepen connections as invested stakeholders in the future of the Ballpark and the neighborhoods surrounding it
2. Neighbors, Business Owners, and City Officials have an opportunity to acknowledge and mourn the collective loss of a Salt Lake institution
3. City Officials provide greater clarity and transparency regarding the process and intended outcomes of Ballpark Next
4. Neighbors and Business owners are clear regarding how community engagement and input will be involved in future decisions related to the Ballpark site, including the historic \$100M public-private partnership