

Considerations on the Pittsfield Stadium Issue

STUDENT PAPER

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INTRODUCTION

HISTORY OF THE CITY

The City of Pittsfield has a long and distinguished history, which dates back to 1800 when Arthur Schofield came over from England, bringing with him the English secrets of the machines used to maintain a monopoly over the cloth industry. In 1890, a rapidly growing electrical industry was introduced to Pittsfield when the Stanley Electric Manufacturing Company was created. In 1890, only 16 men were employed; by 1900, with business booming, the company was worth two million dollars and employed over 1200 people. General Electric bought the Stanley Electric Manufacturing Company in 1903, when the population of the city was about 25,000 people.

General Electric would keep Pittsfield on the map as a major industrial center while the textile and paper industries faded. The boom in the electrical industry sent ripples throughout the city. Banks experienced rapid growth, there was an immense increase in new home construction, and many of the cultural events Berkshire County is now famous for were originally organized with the help of money donated by GE. By 1930, the population of Pittsfield had already doubled to 50,000 (Sumner).

PITTSFIELD'S BASEBALL HISTORY

In 1919, the city of Pittsfield decided to build a baseball stadium that would serve as a home to their new minor league baseball team, the Pittsfield Hillies. The stadium was constructed of wood and built in the 100-year floodplain of the Hoosatic River (figure 1). This area had been considered unbuildable until a geologic study found a substrate of ledge within the

clay/hard pan layer not far below the surface of the property. This meant that foundations could be driven to support a grandstand area, such as the one that exists today (Valenti).

At the time of the stadium's first construction, baseball was a game played in the warm, sunny, mid-summer afternoon. Keeping this in mind, stadiums were designed with the idea that the sun should be high overhead, but still over the shoulders of the outfielders, who would have to play the ball. This required a field positioned so that the left field line ran due west from home plate (Witteman 77).

The city of Pittsfield has used Wahconah Park to host various minor league teams since the departure of the Hillies. Other teams to play at Wahconah Park include the Electrics, Indians, Red Sox, Senators, Rangers, Brewers, Cubs, and now the Mets (Pittsfield Mets Information Packet). Over the course of its history, the park has also played host to countless high school football, baseball, and soccer games, concerts, fairs, festivals, and expositions.

The park was expanded in 1950 to seat the approximately 4,000 people it does today, in 1977 a major overhaul was undertaken in an effort to correct some of the park's flaws and bring the stadium into modern times. Lights were added to the stadium to facilitate evening play. Evening play meant that sunset would occur in center field, thus shining directly into the batter's eyes. Trees were planted beyond the center field wall to help combat the glare. Also at this time, the dimensions of the outfield were altered to better accommodate football. Previously, the football field had partially overlapped the baseball infield; now it would exist entirely in the outfield. Lastly, 1977 also saw the raising of the entire playing surface in an attempt to correct drainage problems. This problem would be further addressed in the winter of 1996-97, when a drainage system was installed beneath the Wahconah playing surface (Southard).

THE METS TODAY

In the summer months, the City of Pittsfield turns over Wahconah Park to the Pittsfield Mets, a single A minor league affiliate of the New York Mets, playing in the New York/Penn League. As part of the New York/Penn League, there are three primary entities involved with the running of the baseball team.

First and foremost is the team owner. National Pastime, Inc. The ownership group consists of five men with William Gladstone as the president and majority owner of the franchise. For obvious reasons, they must consider the team a business, with costs and revenues, and expect it not to lose money.

The second entity involved is the parent club, the New York Mets, with whom the Pittsfield Mets sign what is known as a "Player Development Contract". In entering into this contract, the parent club agrees to supply players and grant certain other allowances (i.e. the use of its name and logo) in exchange for what it feels to be a satisfactory development program. The program should be structured in such a way as to facilitate the movement of players through the farm system, with especially talented players ending up in the major league. The current

Player Development Contract between the Pittsfield Mets and their parent club is up for renewal in two years (Murphy).

The last party involved is the National Association of Professional Baseball Leagues (NAPBL). This is the governing organization for minor league baseball around the United States, including the New York/Penn League and its members. Designed to ensure fairness, unify the minor leagues, and maintain the welfare of the players, the organization establishes and publishes a criteria of certain standards for teams, their stadiums, and their facilities, which are expected to be met (NAPBL Handbook).

The Mets have been in Pittsfield for 9 years now, having moved from Little Falls, New York in 1988 because the town was too small. The New York/Penn League is designated a short season single A class. As a result, the playing season is only about three months long, beginning in mid-June and running through early September. This past year they averaged 2,370 fans per game, totaling over 87,000 fans for the year, en route to a New York/Penn League Championship!

THE PRESENT SITUATION

The issue, which has become the subject of an on-going debate, is that Wahconah Park is a 78-year old stadium which both the Pittsfield Mets management and HOK Sports Facility Group (the consulting firm which performed the audit of Wahconah Park and its facilities) deem to be not up to the standards for minor league baseball as set forth by the NAPBL. The New York parent club is also unhappy with the situation - the sub-par facilities at Wahconah Park are hindering the training program being given to their young players. The Pittsfield Mets feel that the best way to correct the problems is through the construction of a new baseball stadium which would accommodate approximately 4,500 people, and include a number of luxury suites which the team could sell (figure 2). The team has also indicated that if a new stadium is not built to correct the problems and bring the facilities up to the industry standard, they may leave town.

The City Council allocated 30,000 dollars for the hiring of a consultant team to investigate the potential locations for a new stadium. The consultant team consisted of four members: Arrowstreet, Inc., HOK Sports Facilities Group, Foresight Land Services, and Landauer Associates. On January 2, 1997, a contract was signed which specified dates by which the city would make decisions regarding the construction of the new stadium (Agreement).

The consultant team came up with an initial list of 14 potential sites for a new baseball stadium, including the option of performing a major renovation to Wahconah Park (figure 3). Five of the sites on the list were immediately eliminated for having major problems. The remaining nine sites were placed into a matrix to show their strengths and weaknesses (figure 4). Four sites were determined to be relatively problem free; they were termed to have "good potential". The remaining five sites were considered to be problematic, but not unworkable. The

four sites with good potential were then ranked from one to four. In the end, the consultant team recommended that the Berkshire Medical Center/Kent Avenue location be the site of the new stadium (Arrowstreet me. et al.).

Upon the release of the consultant's report, the recommendation went before the City Site

Selection Committee. This committee accepted and approved the recommended site. With the recommendation formalized, the issue has been turned over to the Mayor and City Council of Pittsfield to determine whether or not to pursue plans to build the new stadium. In the meantime, the consultant team is constructing a more site specific report. The city was supposed to have made a decision by October 15 as to the new stadium (Agreement 15), but when this appeared impossible, a deadline extension was negotiated with the Mets. There is currently some speculation that the city may need to negotiate a second extension.

OUR TURN AT BAT

Entering into this project, there were five fundamental facts which had to be considered:

- Wahconah Park, as it stands right now, is not up to the required standards of a minor league baseball stadium.
- The City of Pittsfield and the Pittsfield Mets have a contract in which it is stipulated that the city will provide the team with an industry-standard minor league baseball stadium. If this stipulation is not achieved, the Pittsfield Mets may leave town.
- A new stadium has been proposed and a new site has been chosen at the Berkshire Medical Center-Kent Avenue site. However, the project itself has not yet been approved. (Note: Early in the project, the BMC-Kent site recommendation was approved by the City Site Selection Committee.)
- Wahconah Park is of historical value to the City of Pittsfield and there are many who would like to see its continued use.
- The BMC-Kent site has both advantages and disadvantages. The final decision regarding the construction of a new stadium has yet to be made.

While the consultant's report was thorough, it was limited in that it only covered the physical aspects of building a new stadium. To conduct a complete evaluation, however, there are other factors which must be taken into account. These include:

- The public opinion and overall social atmosphere regarding the issue.
- The city's socio-economic issues, including the idea of urban renewal and how this would occur.
- The current political atmosphere surrounding the project on both a local and state level. This would include the issue of funding the project, as well as the philosophical idea of new stadiums themselves.

- The historical value of the current stadium as held by the residents of the City of Pittsfield.
- Hidden costs which may not have been included in the consultant's report. The numbers given in the consultant's report were not explicit in what they accounted for.

To some extent, to address these issues will require stepping back, rather than assuming there will be a new stadium. Instead, it is important to tackle the larger question of whether a new stadium is even necessary. Taking into consideration the facts of the project and other necessary considerations, it was appropriate to narrow the investigation to three primary foci:

- 1) Whether the City of Pittsfield wants to keep the Mets. The answer to this question is fundamental to whether or not a stadium should be built.
- 2) Potential prospects for the Berkshire Medical Center-Kent Ave. site. This site is the one perceived by the public to be "the site" because it has received approval from the Site Selection Committee.
- 3) Potential prospects for the current Wahconah Park. The concept of renovation is one which should be considered, but has yet to be studied in depth.

After research and careful consideration, three possible solutions presented themselves:

- 1) Do nothing.
- 2) Build a new multi-use stadium at the BMC-Kent Avenue site.
- 3) Perform extensive renovation on Wahconah Park.

STATUS QUO OPTION: WHAT IF NOTHING IS DONE?

Any proposal involving the use of public funds and having a large effect on residents of a city should consider the status quo option. This can establish a baseline with which changes in the current situation can be evaluated. Regarding the stadium issue, this "do nothing" option entails spending no more money and effort on renovations to Wahconah Park or any new stadium

plan. There is one important repercussion of this option that affects some important criteria indirectly.

If the city does not do anything concerning improvements to the current stadium situation, the Mets have shown their intentions to move elsewhere. Despite the fact that the management feels some attachment to Pittsfield, it does not make good business sense for the team to stay in an inadequate location (Murphy). The Pittsfield Mets' ownership group has already shown interest in a move to Long Island, where Suffolk County, NY, has offered to build a new stadium using state funds (Herman).

If no resolution is reached between the Mets and the City of Pittsfield, a move appears to be imminent. Though there is the possibility that the Mets will not be able to find a home immediately, without some resolution the Mets will leave when they see the opportunity. With the surging popularity of minor league baseball, it is not difficult to relocate such a franchise. As a result, if no change occurs, it must be assumed that the Mets will move from Pittsfield.

Analyzing the possibility of the loss of the Mets is useful for two purposes in this report. It can provide background on the importance of a minor league baseball team to a city. Before

any judgements can be made, the various impacts of a minor league team on a community - economic, social, and psychological - must be understood. Without an understanding of the unique benefits of a minor league team, we cannot fully appreciate the loss if the team leaves. The background knowledge can be gleaned from research on the minor leagues as a whole and from case studies of changes in communities after the loss of a team. It is vital to understanding the second purpose of the "do nothing" option - why Pittsfield would be making a mistake in losing the Pittsfield Mets. To determine the effect on Pittsfield, we have to look at and analyze the repercussions of losing minor league baseball, and then look at Pittsfield's unique circumstances.

MINOR LEAGUE BASEBALL - A GROWTH INDUSTRY

Minor league baseball franchises have become a highly sought after commodity for many smaller cities around America. They have the ability to generate public support for their perceived economic and social benefits, and there are many examples of large amounts of public money being used to court a team. Minor league attendance has risen 47 from 1990 to 1995, in comparison with a 5 increase for the major leagues (Gilliland 3). The minors now consist of 150 teams in 5 classes (A, AA, AAA, short season A, rookie), with 20 more expansion franchises in the near future (Johnson, xii).

The popularity of minor league baseball is soaring. After a period of decline in interest in the minor leagues, beginning in the 1950s and continuing until the early 1980s, the attendance and number of franchises began to climb. Attendance is now reaching levels not seen since before major league games were televised. Along with the rise in attendance has come a steep rise in the value of minor league franchises. Single A franchises, selling for as little as \$5,000 in the late 1970s, were selling for as much as \$2 million in 1990. AAA teams are selling for as much as \$15 million (Zimbalist 112).

The renewed popularity of minor league baseball can be explained by a combination of factors which have served to differentiate the minors from the majors, while preserving the quality and excitement of the sport. Without detracting from the purpose of the minor leagues - to prepare players for the majors - the NAPBL has created a unique kind of entertainment. It is almost unanimous that the cheap tickets, high quality of baseball, and close proximity to town contribute to the popularity. The ticket price of four to six dollars is about half that of a major league game. When food, beverages, and souvenirs are included, it becomes even cheaper.

In a book entitled *Baseball and Billions*, written by a known baseball historian and economist, Andrew Zimbalist, the author suggests several reasons for the popularity of the minor leagues today.

It seems the heightened commercialization of [major league] baseball engendered by the advent of free agency was a boon as well to the minor leagues. Whether this was a product of a greater interest in following the development of a future multi-million dollar superstar or a [negative] reaction against commercialization and a return to baseball's simple roots emulated by

the immediacy and lack of pretense of minor league parks is difficult to ascertain. Interest in minor league ball certainly got a boost from commercialism as new Hollywood films such as *The Natural*, *Bull Durham*, and *Field of Dreams* glorified the simplicity and spirit of the game itself

(Zimbalist 112).

This quote summarizes several theories about the resurgence of minor league baseball in two sentences. Zimbalist suggests people attend games for the opportunity to watch future big-league stars. The true reason, however, may be the belief, inspired by a series of recent movies about baseball, that the corruption induced by big money in the majors does not exist in the minors. The spirit of the game's simple roots is still present in minor league cities.

Perhaps more important than anything concerning baseball is the sheer entertainment value involved in minor league play. The minors have carved a niche in the opportunities for recreation in host cities as consumer oriented, family entertainment. In *Minor League Baseball and Economic Development*, Johnson suggests, "Team representatives (managers and owners)... described their business as entertainment, not baseball. (Johnson 13) " This can be seen in the special events designed to draw people to the stadium. Minor league baseball has become famous for these performances. The Mets are no exception. They have had fireworks nights, performers, and giveaways ranging from hats to haircuts. Minor league baseball is meant for people out to have a good time, not dominated by money and big-league pressure.

MINOR LEAGUE TEAMS - THEIR IMPACT TO THE COMMUNITY

One would assume that with the rampant popularity, expanding range, and steep increase in the value of minor league franchises, minor league baseball would be a big money maker for a community. Often the economic repercussions generated do not justify the amount of public funds invested in a team. Minor league baseball can be a moneymaker, but not necessarily a big one.

"A minor league facility might generate gross revenues of 4 to 5 million dollars annually; a large grocery store can do as well" (Gilliland 4). Thus, in order to justify the presence of a team in a community, measures other than strict dollar figures must enter into the equation. In an analysis of the impact of minor league baseball, the most important factors in the equations cannot be quantified. This makes for a difficult analysis. Rosentraub argues that the economic impacts of a team can be seen in three areas: 1) maintaining an identity for a city's economic development, 2) competing with larger cities at a lower cost, and 3) stimulating economic development on their own (25).

Johnson has effectively divided the impacts into five tiers of a pyramid, seen in this figure (37). This can be used as a guide in examining the confusing and interrelated effects of minor league baseball.

Psychological/Identity Gains
Tax Revenue Increases
New Jobs
Capital Infrastructure
New Spending by Fans, Teams

Figure 5. *The tiers of economic impact of minor league baseball. (Taken from Johnson, 1993)*

Johnson's foundation of the pyramid is comprised of "new" spending by fans and teams. This category includes all of the things normally associated with revenue from a minor league baseball team. Examples included in this category are: season tickets, "luxury" boxes, fence signs, broadcasting, parking ticket sales, and concessions. This also includes money spent in the city by visiting teams and tourists; this is a very desirable source of income because it results in spending in areas unrelated to baseball. Each team and community generates a different proportion of their revenue from each of these sources. These are the easily quantifiable impacts, the hardest to overlook.

The next three layers of the pyramid are slightly easier to miss; however, under careful study, they can be evaluated. Capital primarily involves the stadium and infrastructure associated with the team. New jobs and tax revenue increases are self-explanatory and often beneficial results of the team's presence. These are generally smaller than new spending impacts, especially in shorter season leagues as the amount of time the team plays becomes smaller and highly seasonal.

At the top of the pyramid are "psychological/identity gains." These are the larger social benefits of the team and are often more important than any amount of profit or loss. Unfortunately, they are also the hardest to quantify. Researchers have argued that investments in teams should be described solely in terms of psychological and social gains and losses, rather than relying on economic terms, which may be insufficient to describe the impact (Johnson 47).

Psychological gains often are a matter of civic pride. Many people have argued that this is by far the most important issue in the loss of minor league baseball. The community loses a part of itself when a team leaves. Often the psychological gains revolve around the larger image of the town. Teams contribute to larger community goals like downtown redevelopment and the promotion of underutilized areas, as in the "Downtown After Five" movement. Johnson writes a disclaimer to figure 5, stating, "The economic impact of sports may pale in comparison with the psychological impact of sports in American society." He thereby implies the bottom layers of the pyramid of impacts may be unnecessary. Revising the figure to reflect this knowledge, the social impacts would be the foundation of the pyramid — the largest factor in an analysis of the impacts of minor league baseball.

Tax Revenue Increases

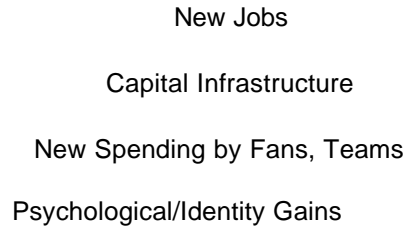


Figure 6. *The tiers of economic impact of minor league baseball — Revised. (Modified from Johnson, 1993)*

ECONOMIC AND SOCIAL IMPACT

A revised version of the pyramid is especially applicable to the situation in Pittsfield, because, though the team has been shown to bring money into the community in the form of tourism and local spending, the psychological roots and social importance of the team and stadium outweigh all monetary benefits. Both the city and the team acknowledge that the team is a source of revenue, and a 1991 study by the NAPBL showed that the Mets draw 3.2 million dollars to Berkshire county. The dollar figure may be more valuable in Pittsfield's circumstance compared with other minor league locales (Pittsfield Mets Information Packet). As discussed previously, the principal source of revenue for a minor league team is "new" spending by fans and teams. "New" is included because often a source of recreation will simply draw funds away from other recreational opportunities. For instance, if there was a professional soccer team playing in Pittsfield in summer, people might be likely to go to one event or the other, rather than both. The funds generated by one would simply be a transfer from the other, similar opportunity. In Pittsfield, the situation is different. Berkshire County offers much in the way of "cultural" recreation — art museums, theatre festivals, music — while offering little in the way of professional sports. These opportunities for recreation and tourism do not draw from the same type of spending, as does baseball. The 3.2 million dollars may be additional spending, as opposed to a transfer of funds from other recreational opportunities.

In addition, the Mets attract a group of people who would otherwise not come to the county. 60 of the Mets' audience comes from outside Berkshire County (Murphy). When multiplied by the 87,000 people who watched a Mets' game last year, the tourism generated by the team's presence is highly valuable to the area (Pittsfield Mets Information Packet). But because the team is a short season single A team, the impacts are seen on a highly seasonal basis, and do not necessarily outweigh the impacts of another use of the land. They are not wholly sufficient to make keeping the team a valid conclusion on a solely economic basis. But in Pittsfield, the psychological importance of having the Mets extends throughout the city, creating a larger, more widespread impact than a source of revenue.

History has been shown to play a large role in civic pride. Cities around the country invest large sums of money in public projects designed to renovate old buildings, movie theatres,

and ballparks for the purpose of creating a connection with the past. It often restores a sense of perseverance and pride to the community. Pittsfield has had a long history of minor league

baseball in a historically rich stadium. Teams have been playing in Wahconah Park since 1919, giving time to build a sense of identity for both the spirit of minor league baseball and the stadium itself. To remove that facet of the town would sever another connection with the past.

The Mets themselves are entering their tenth season, which may not seem like a long time, but in minor league baseball, where it is not common to see a team with a connection to a town, it is a serious commitment to remain for that long. Between 1987 and 1992, 35 minor league teams relocated. One-third of all single A franchises relocated in that period (Johnson 28). With that kind of turnover, it is unlikely to generate a strong connection between town and team. The Mets have built this connection and have the opportunity to continue to build upon this history if some compromise can be reached.

The deeper the sense of identification with a community, the more likely that community is to grow and continue to support community opportunities. Developing the sense of town identity is crucial to the psychological well being of a community. This can be easily accomplished by publicity and recognition. The Mets have brought that sense of publicity and recognition to Pittsfield. The mere aspect of being a tourist attraction brings attention, while the fact that the team plays in a scenic location in a historic ballpark with unique traits has brought very favorable publicity to Pittsfield.

The Pittsfield Mets have been featured in Sports Illustrated, ESPN2, The New York Times, Boston Globe, and many other publications. One article in particular captured the team and city at its best. The article, in Time, was written about the rising phenomenon of minor league baseball as a whole, and used the Mets as its main example. Its title, "The Only Game in Town: If it's baseball pure and simple, you can find it in Pittsfield, Peoria, or Rancho Cucamonga," reflects the content of the article, in which Pittsfield is used as the main example of how the minor league has succeeded in its mission to entertain. Pittsfield is mentioned repeatedly and fondly. When the city receives publicity like this, civic pride is raised.

We can see the pride in the team and the desire not to lose the source reflected in the opinions of the community. Regardless of the stance on the stadium, public opinion in Pittsfield is ardently pro-Mets. Feelings of the community have been apparent, shown in town meetings, political sentiment, and in local papers. In a letter to the Berkshire Eagle, the chairman of the Pittsfield Tourism Commission wrote, "We have, within our midst, something that few cities in this country possess, professional baseball.... Out of thousands of cities in America, only those

155 [with professional baseball] enjoy the unique opportunity to host the nation's pastime as we do in Pittsfield" (McCann). This sentiment is also seen in letters from residents of the city with little knowledge of the economic impact of the team. In another letter, a resident summed up the

feelings of many: "Berkshire County as well as Pittsfield all have something to lose if the Mets move out of this area" (New).

Pittsfield has suffered many losses after an industrial downturn. There are many signs of economic progress in Pittsfield, ranging from renovation projects to new business and tourism. Some people have expanded the issue to stand for something larger than just the baseball team; rather, they use the team as a rallying point for the community. This expansion of the issue is represented by one quote in particular from an editorial in *The Berkshire Eagle*: "Over the decades, Pittsfield has earned a reputation as a city that tears things down, not one that builds things up" (Editorial). Losing the Mets will be one more vacancy in Pittsfield, one hard to replace. In order to build things up, Pittsfield must keep the vital parts of the city intact - this includes the baseball team.

CASE STUDY OF WATERLOO

Waterloo, a small city in Iowa, suffered the loss of a single A baseball team, the *Diamonds*, in 1989. The economic situation in Waterloo was remarkably similar to that in Pittsfield with many blows dealt by the loss of industry and a shrinking population. The loss of the baseball team, influenced by the inability to generate public funds to build a new stadium, further exacerbated the downward spiral of economic and social depression in the town. The local paper, the *Waterloo Courier*, wrote a eulogy for the loss of the *Diamonds*,

Alone the loss of professional baseball wouldn't be so hard to stomach...but look around, it's another real, or perceived, blow to the image of Waterloo, to say nothing of the lost entertainment and financial value. This, from a city that makes seemingly negative news everyday (Panek 366).

The economic prosperity and psychological well being of towns is intricately connected with professional baseball. In Waterloo, or Pittsfield, the loss symbolizes more than simply a vacant stadium; it symbolizes a loss of an integral part of the town. The loss of the team dropped the "livability rankings," a measure used to quantify the value of a city by comparing it to cities of comparable size, over 10 as a result of a drop in the recreation category from 74 to 124

(Panek 203 and Noll 492). Livability may not be an arbitrary economic measure of the loss, but what would Pittsfield be like if it were 10 less livable? Hopefully this will not happen to Pittsfield.

KEEPING THE METS IN PITTSFIELD

If one looks at the issue on a purely economic basis, Pittsfield should keep the Mets in town. But if one takes into account the social and psychological factors that are intimately linked to a minor league team, losing the team becomes a tragedy.

Making the decision to keep the Mets in town is then the first step towards a resolution of the stadium issue. Something has to be done; keeping the status quo results in a loss to the

community. Resolutions which attempt to involve both the city and the team and keep the Mets in Pittsfield can now be considered.

A NEW STADIUM AT BMC-KENT AVENUE OPTION

THE SITE

The first choice for the location of a new stadium is the BMC-Kent site, an approximately six-acre site, two tenths of a mile south of the existing Wahconah Park stadium. The proposed site is bounded by Wahconah Street, North Street, Kent Avenue, and Seymour Street, and occupies all the land within this boundary. Park Street, Booth Place, and Pitt Street are located inside the site area (Figure 7).

The buildings within the site include two-story and three-story residential houses, apartment buildings, and businesses. Berkshire Medical Center (BMC) is located across Wahconah Street from the BMC-Kent site: the hospital is the largest single landowner on the site. The hospital uses its property on the site for parking; approximately 420 spaces are located on the site (Arrowstreet, Inc. et al. 42). A BMC parking lot occupies much of the north end of the site.

In the past year, the neighborhood within and surrounding the site has received a reputation for violence and drug dealing. A shooting on Kent Avenue this past summer injured two people and left one three-story apartment building on the block vacant (Sukiennik October 28, 1997). Though the neighborhood has been fairly quiet since the beginning of the fall, the violence that has occurred has been very visible and noticed by the rest of the city (Boyer).

The BMC-Kent site is at the northern-most edge of the city's Central Business District (CBD), an informal designation given to the area bounded by Second Street and Pomery Avenue on the east. Reed Street on the south, Center Street and Francis Avenue on the west, and Wahconah Street on the north. North Street runs through the center of the area and is the district's main commercial route (Urban Land Institute 11) (Figure 7). Historically, the CBD has been the commercial, governmental, and professional center of the city, but with an increase in suburban shopping centers and a decline in the urban population, the city has experienced a decline in activity in the CBD. Many Pittsfield citizens, elected officials, and city planners encourage the revitalization of the CBD in order to preserve the vitality of the downtown area. At the beginning of November, the State authorized a \$2.5 million bond for the City's renovation of the historic Colonial Theater on the corner of East Housatonic Street and South Street (Sukiennik November 7, 1997) (figure 7). The renovated theater is being seen as an anchor for

the southern section of the CBD; advocates of stadium construction at the BMC-Kent site look to the stadium as an anchor for the northern part of the CBD, a compliment to the theater

renovation.

THE PROPOSAL

The consulting firm's plan proposes the realignment of Wahconah Street with Tyier Street (Route 9) and the realignment of Seymour Street with Charles Street. These realignments are proposed to improve the currently convoluted traffic patterns in "one of the City's worst intersections" (Sukiennik March 4, 1997). The proposal also calls for the closure of North Street between Tyier Street and First Street, creating a more consolidated and well-defined BMC campus (Arrowstreet Inc. et al. 42).

The proposed 4,500-seat stadium would be built with the first base line parallel to Kent Avenue and the third base line parallel to Seymour Street. This would give the field an ideal north-east-facing orientation. Bleachers would run along the first and third base lines of the field (Figure 8). This orientation would make the stadium visually and physically accessible from North and Wahconah Streets, the two main arteries into the City from the north.

Two parking lots on the site would provide parking for 310 vehicles; additional parking would be available in the lot at the existing Wahconah Park. It is assumed that the parking facilities would be shared with BMC (Arrowstreet Inc. et al. 42).

The cost of the proposed project is \$16.8 million. It is estimated that the stadium facility would cost \$11.3 million; land acquisition would cost approximately \$3.6 million, and preparation of the site is estimated at \$1.9 million (Arrowstreet Inc. et al. 59). The proposed construction would take approximately 32 months to complete (Arrowstreet Inc. et al. 54).

THE ATMOSPHERE SURROUNDING THE PROPOSAL

THE PUBLIC

Public opinion within the City is divided over the issue of building a new stadium. Proponents of a new stadium cite its potential to revitalize the BMC-Kent neighborhood, the age and deficiency of the existing Wahconah Park, and the social and economic costs that would accompany the loss of the Mets, as reasons to build a new stadium.

Opponents of a new stadium point to the cost of the project to the City's already-strapped budget, and Wahconah Park's importance as an historical landmark both for Pittsfield and for baseball.

A sampling of public opinion on the issue was taken on Election Day when a referendum question on the ballot asked, "Do you approve of the construction of a multi-purpose 4500 seat stadium in Pittsfield with any city funds?" 64 voted "No" on the question, and the referendum was defeated (Berkshire Eagle. November 3 and November 5, 1997). Stadium advocates, however, are quick to point out that the question was worded by Councilman Arlos, a longtime

opponent of the construction of a new stadium, and probably influenced voters.

LOCAL GOVERNMENT

Politicians have been actively discussing the construction of a new stadium for over a year. The city's mayor, Edward M. Reilly, has promoted the idea of a new stadium during his administration and personally appointed the committees to explore stadium funding and stadium sites (Stein). Reilly was one of the first advocates of stadium construction at the BMC-Kent site. He has emphasized the project's potential for urban renewal, roadway realignment, and additional downtown parking; by emphasizing these project goals, he has hoped to increase the project's possibilities for funding from the state (In Brief). Reilly has also emphasized the need for the stadium to be a community facility, not just a stadium for the Mets. He's advocated increased stadium use for high school sports, concerts, and exhibitions (Stein).

The stadium issue played a prominent role in this year's mayoral election, with both candidates taking opposing stands on the issue. Gerald S. Doyle, the newly elected mayor and former City Council President, supports the construction of a new stadium. Like Reilly, Doyle has emphasized the stadium's potential for community use, particularly its potential as an outdoor concert facility (Stein).

Members of the City Council have also taken positions on the stadium issue. Peter Arlos, a long-time councilman who was unseated in the recent election, opposes stadium construction because of its cost to the City and the lack of local support he perceives for the Mets (Berkshire Eagle November 3, 1997). Joseph Guzzo, a councilman who will continue his position on the council, opposes stadium construction because of its cost and the proximity of the existing

Wahconah Park (The Berkshire Eagle November 3, 1997). The newly elected City Council's overall opinion on the stadium issue is not yet clear.

THE METS

As discussed earlier, the Mets have expressed dissatisfaction with the condition of the existing Wahconah Park. The team has cited many standards that the stadium does not live up to. Team owners have stated that unless a new stadium is built, the team will leave its home in Pittsfield (see page 29).

At the beginning of this year, the team and the city signed a contract regarding the maintenance and use of Wahconah Park for the 1997 baseball season. In addition to a timeline for the consideration and construction of a new stadium, this contract also states that if a new stadium is built for the 1999 season, the Mets will automatically enter into a 10-year lease with the city for the new facility (Agreement 15). In addition, the Mets have agreed to pay rent for the use of the new park, something they do not do at the existing Wahconah Park (Sukiennik 4 March 1997).

ENVIRONMENTAL ASPECTS

Unlike the existing Wahconah Park, the BMC-Kent site is not subject to the Rivers or Wetlands Protection Acts. However, several gas stations were situated on the property, and it is believed that abandoned gasoline and oil drums are buried on the site (Mellace). Because the Consultant's report did not describe what would need to be done to prepare the site, it is unclear what has and what has not been factored into the Consultant's \$1.9 million estimate for site preparation.

SOCIAL ASPECTS

Urban Renewal

As mention earlier, advocates of stadium construction at the BMC-Kent site have emphasized the project's potential for the redevelopment and revitalization of the neighborhood. The construction of minor league baseball stadiums has been successful in assisting the revitalization of deteriorating urban neighborhoods in both Harrisburg, Pennsylvania and South Bend, Indiana. In Harrisburg in the late 1980s, the city's aggressive mayor organized the acquisition of a baseball team and the construction of a stadium in an area of the city that had become a crime-ridden eye sore and a symbol of the city's post-industrial deterioration (Johnson 180). The city was able to finance the stadium through private investment and state grants for recreational projects and projects benefiting low-income citizens. The stadium's presence increased business for downtown bars and restaurants, and the baseball team's summer presence created 70 part-time jobs. Local charities also benefited from the team as the team's management helped to organize and promote fundraisers that raised \$25,000 for charity in the team's second year. In addition, the revitalization of the area held a tremendous symbolic significance for the city's residents (Johnson 183-185).

Also during the late 1980s, South Bend was experiencing a very similar post-industrial decline. When a White Socks minor league came to the city, a stadium was built in a redevelopment area as an anchor to stabilize the eastern part of the city's central business district (Johnson 189). The baseball team gives a portion of its annual revenue to the city, and part of these funds have been used as grants for neighborhood improvement projects (Johnson 198). The stadium has been commended for giving local residents a reason to go downtown. In addition, city officials assert that the stadium has become a source of pride for local citizens (Johnson 199).

Redevelopment projects are not unprecedented in the city of Pittsfield. In the past thirty years, the city has undertaken two major projects. The first, in the late 1960s, cleared buildings and created vacant property along the eastern portion of Columbus Avenue. This commercially valuable land was allowed to redevelop slowly, without much government influence (Russo; Hathaway). In addition to other facilities, a parking garage and a bank now sit on the site. In the

late 1980s, a more site-specific urban redevelopment project began with the \$5.5 million conversion of North Street's Capital Movie Theater to the Ralph J. Froio Senior Center. The project was completed in 1993 and included the development of a parking lot behind the facility and some other improvements along North Street (City of Pittsfield, Massachusetts 6). The project received a state urban revitalization development grant that reimbursed the city for much of the project spending (Russo).

If a stadium is constructed at the BMC-Kent location, it is most likely that the site will be officially declared an area for urban renewal. In this case, the conduct of the city and its Department of Community Development will be subject to Sections 45 through 52 of

Massachusetts General Law Chapter 121B throughout the financing and land acquisition stages of the project. Section 45 states that property in cities and towns that "constitutes a serious and growing menace, injurious and inimical to the safety, health, morals and welfare of the residents of the commonwealth" is subject to urban renewal. Sections 45 and 47 establish the power of an urban renewal agency like the Department of Community Development to use public money and the power of eminent domain to acquire private property. Section 45 also states that "parks, recreational areas and other open spaces are public uses and benefits for which private property may be acquired by eminent domain.. .and for which public funds may be expended for the good and welfare of this commonwealth."

Before proceeding with any urban renewal project. Sections 47 and 48 require the urban renewal agency to submit a proposal to the city, including plans for financing the project and for relocating any owners or residents displaced by the renewal. The law also requires a public hearing and allows any "aggrieved" person to file a petition against the agency and the project. In addition to compensating a landowner for the purchase or taking of their property, the city is required by federal law to financially assist in the relocation of any displaced owners or tenants. This relocation assistance applies to expenses like moving costs and utility re-connections in new residences (Russo). For the development of the BMC-Kent site, property acquisition and owner/tenant relocation costs have been estimated at \$3.5 million.

In addition to its potential to improve a crime-ridden neighborhood in the city, a new stadium at the BMC-Kent site is being looked to as a potential anchor for the northern part of the City's downtown. As mentioned above, the proposed stadium's location and orientation would make the facility a physically and visually prominent and accessible feature of North and Wahconah Streets, the main routes into the downtown area (Arrowstreet, Inc. et al. 42).

ECONOMIC ASPECTS

Funding

One of the main reasons critics oppose the construction of a new stadium is the \$ 16.8 million price tag this project carries. Both the consultant and the City have investigated potential sources of funding for the project. Construction at the BMC-Kent site would be eligible for state

Urban Renewal Funding which could pay up to 50 of the land acquisition, development, and infrastructure costs of the project (Arrowstreet, Inc. et al. 84). These funds for urban renewal are

available through the Urban Redevelopment, Economic Development, and Community Development Action Grant programs of the Massachusetts Department of Housing and Community Development (MDHCD) (Arrowstreet, Inc. et al. 87). Funding for the relocation of displaced businesses and residents is available through the MDHCD's Economic Development Relocation Program (Arrowstreet, Inc. et al. 87). In addition, the City could obtain State funding by working with an appropriate State agency to place a special appropriation in the State Budget (Arrowstreet, Inc. et al. 84). The City could apply for State funding through the Department of Highways (Arrowstreet, Inc. et al. 91), the Office of Labor, Education and Economic Development's Division of Housing and Community Development (Arrowstreet, me. et al. 92), and the Department of Economic Development (Arrowstreet, Inc. et al. 93).

While State urban renewal funding is seen as a potential source for major financial support of this project, one city official described funding for urban renewal projects as "very limited," citing the difficulty in obtaining State grants (Mellace). The construction of a new stadium has already received one vote of disconfidence from the State government. The convention center bond bill that was passed at the beginning of November gave no funding for the project (Sukiennik 7 November 1997). In addition, the State has said it will not fund minor league baseball stadiums (Sukiennik 4 March 1997), and recently denied any assistance to the City of Springfield in its appeal for funds for a new baseball stadium (Arrowstreet, Inc. et al. 84).

Flexibility

Building a new stadium at the BMC-Kent site is an inflexible option. The construction of a new stadium would require a lot of money and a large initial investment. In addition, if a new stadium is built, the City will have two stadiums, less than a quarter of a mile apart, to maintain.

Many proponents of a new stadium see the existence of two stadiums as a benefit for the City. They argue that the existing Wahconah Park could become a space reserved for concerts and other community events. It could also become a permanent home for local high school sports teams that do not have the land or the facilities for many on-campus athletic fields. Proponents of these ideas further argue that these events could take place in the existing Wahconah Park without damaging the manicured surface of the baseball field at the new stadium.

Opponents of a new stadium point out that if these types of activities are reserved for the existing Wahconah Park, only the Mets will use the new stadium, and it will cease to be a multi-use facility for the community. In addition, one City official questioned what the City would do

with two stadiums when the maintenance of one has been so physically and financially difficult (Mellace).

RENOVATING WAHCONAH PARK OPTION

THE CLIENTS

THE PUBLIC

Public opinion has been divided in support of both the new stadium as well as the renovation of the old stadium. Those who have supported the latter have mainly voiced their concern that, as a historical landmark, Wahconah Park should not be torn down. "We paid the rent for lights, police, maintenance and we had the fog, the sun and wetlands for more than 47 years. ... Don't destroy Wahconah Park" (Borletto), wrote one impassioned reader of the Berkshire Eagle. Other issues raised have, on the other hand, been mostly concerns raised against the construction of a new stadium rather than in support of renovating Wahconah Park. These concerns include the fear of high costs, with little benefit to the community, and the propriety of building a new stadium when Berkshire County is known as a cultural destination. As another person wrote to the Berkshire Eagle, baseball in the Berkshires is only the "bush leagues" and "an all-season performing arts center would be a bigger attraction [for tourists] than a two-month Class A baseball venue" (Nix). The same person also then suggests that the construction of a new baseball stadium would be nothing but a "new playpen for National Pastime Corporation."

The businesses and residents of the area that are to be taken and relocated by the construction of the new stadium are also voices that have not been given a real vote in the issue.

In choosing the option of renovating Wahconah Park, the city can soothe opponents of the new stadium by building on an existing landmark with less disturbance to the residents and businesses at the BMC/Kent Avenue site. By renovating Wahconah Park, the city would have beautified and revitalized an old, historically valuable site without razing an already used site.

LOCAL GOVERNMENT

The political atmosphere is currently against the renovation of Wahconah Park. The new mayor, Gerald S. Doyle, is for the construction of a new stadium (Berkshire Eagle November 5, 1997). The local government is using downtown redevelopment and renewal, civic pride, and attraction of new businesses to the area as the main reasons for the construction of a new stadium. However, a closer look at the renovation of the old stadium reveals that it has the potential to fulfill all the above-mentioned reasons.

- Renovating Wahconah Park can still contribute to civic pride by building on something that already has a great nostalgic and historical value to the community. Pittsfield's reputation in the past few years for tearing things down instead of actively building and creating

community spaces will not be improved by tearing the old stadium down.

- Wahconah Park could be renovated into a multi-use stadium as well given adequate resources. As it stands, the old stadium already hosts football and soccer tournaments and could be upgraded to host other conventions, thus potentially attracting new businesses.
- The main issue seems to be the fact that Pittsfield needs to have a better, upgraded stadium that is up to par with stadiums in counterpart cities in order to compete for new businesses and to keep such businesses as the Mets in town. In this case, the option of renovating Wahconah Park seems to be just as good as building a new stadium elsewhere.

THE METS

The main obstacle to the renovation of Wahconah Park stands with the Mets who have stated that they need a new stadium. Their current contract with the City of Pittsfield stipulates the construction of a new stadium in order to guarantee a ten-year extension of their stay. However, this preference stems from the fact that the old stadium has not been up to par and the problems the Mets have encountered with Wahconah Park. Three main issues stand at the heart of the inadequacy of the old stadium:

- 1) Wahconah Park, as of July 1996, was deemed to be not in compliance with Professional Baseball Association (PBA) standards;
- 2) The contract between the Mets and the City of Pittsfield requires the city to provide the team with a premise in compliance with the PBA agreement;
- 3) The parent Mets are unhappy with the lack of emphasis on other required standards, which prevent the Pittsfield Mets from fulfilling its role as a training and rehabilitation facility for the New York Mets.

By renovating Wahconah Park, the city could potentially bring the old stadium up to these standards by making it "like new" or as good as new. The Mets have said that they do not favor any specific site for the construction of a new stadium, but that they support any site for which the most public support can be generated and which is the most likely to happen (Murphy). It seems that should the renovation of the old stadium be chosen and the city commits to upgrading the stadium to an agreed upon standard, the Mets may not be averse to this option. This option is not their preference and does, however, call upon the cooperation of all parties involved.

THE PROPOSAL

PHYSICAL ASPECTS

The most urgent part of renovating Wahconah Park is remedying the areas in which it has been deemed insufficient. The areas that are not in compliance with PBA standards include

(Arrowstreet Inc. et al.):

- Field dimensions - the orientation of the field is incorrect, creating the famous "sun delays" in the evening, and the pitcher's mound is not of regulation size;
- Playing surface - the construction of the park in a flood plain often results in standing water which violates the requirement for a "field surface without major defects which could affect the normal play of the game" (NAPBL). The lack of padding on the fence and railings are also considered hazards;
- Bullpens - the benches lack the required ten person capacity;
- Dugout - the dugout helmet racks lack the required fifteen helmet capacity;
- Foul poles - the poles lack the required bright finish color necessary for the interpretation of play during games;
- Field lighting - the illumination of the field was deemed inappropriate at the time of the study though it seems the stadium lights underwent a "relamping" before the 1997 season (Southard). This relamping appears to have met the minimum standards of 60 footcandle average (fc avg.) in the infield and 40 fc avg. in the outfield, but does not meet the recommended standards of 70 and 50 fc respectively. There was also inadequate lighting in the visitor's bullpen, but it is unclear as to the extent to which this was fixed during the relamping;
- Home clubhouse - the requirement is for a minimum of five lockers more than the active player limit of the club. There are currently fewer lockers than active players on the roster;
- Umpire facilities - the lockers provided in the umpire clubhouse are not of the required 3' by 6' size;
- Facility maintenance - there is no developed, written maintenance plan for the facilities, either short term or long term. Without such a plan, it is impossible for the park to "follow its maintenance program ... to maintain the professional atmosphere of the facility" (NAPBL).

There are also a number of areas in which Wahconah Park barely meets the minimum requirements for PBA standards. These areas that should be considered in a thorough renovation of the current stadium include:

- Concession areas - the current concession stands do not meet the recommended 5' of counter space per 350 seats in total capacity;
- Public comfort facilities - the minimum restroom standards for sinks, toilets, and urinals, though currently met, are inadequate;
- Announcer's booths - the spatial recommendations are barely met and the booths are awkwardly located, requiring precarious climbs and preventing handicap access;
- Parking areas - though requirements are currently met, the parking area is awkward and often very wet with no drainage;

- Irrigation system - a system currently exists, but it is unreliable and without any easy back up solution;
- Handicap access, visitors clubhouse, "batter's eye" structure - are all currently correct, but only the bare minimum standards are met for these facilities.

Other than the above-listed physical requirements that need to be considered in renovating Wahconah Park, it is recommended that the driveway and entrance to the stadium be improved for better visual access and improved safety. A blind corner currently exists at the

entrance to the parking lot of the stadium and no good signage or visual marker indicates the existence of the stadium at its entrance.

As a visual marker itself, Wahconah Park is close enough to the BMC/Kent Avenue site that it can anchor the end of the downtown area even if it is not zoned within the business district (see figure 9). In looking at downtown renewal, the city should consider the renovation of Wahconah Stadium in conjunction with its current projects with Colonial Theater, potentially creating a strip of economically and aesthetically revitalized businesses between these two landmarks.

The aesthetic appeal of the stadium could also be improved with the addition of new stands and new picnic grounds. New railings around the park would also make the stadium more appealing by eliminating the current chain-link fences topped with barbed wires that are reminiscent of prison compounds. In the end, the old stadium lends itself well to renovation depending on the amount of resources available. The extent of renovation could go as far as taking the whole stadium and completely relocating the structure further up the grounds of the same site. However, this would probably be the least efficient and least environmentally viable option. It is not unimaginable for the city to undertake several stages of renovation while finding funds and allowing the Mets to play their summer season in between these stages of renovation.

ENVIRONMENTAL ASPECTS

Flood Plain

Wahconah Park is situated in the one hundred-year flood plain of the Hoosatic River and thus falls under the regulation of the Massachusetts Wetlands Protection Act, the Massachusetts Stormwater Act, and the Massachusetts Rivers Protection Act. If major renovation and a reorientation of the stadium is considered, these acts have to be taken into consideration. Change is possible however. Just before the last 1997 season, the Parks and Recreation Department was able to submit a plan to install a new drainage system and the local Conservation Commission approved it under "Orders of Conditions." This new drainage system seems to have been effective in the 1997 season, although the past season was relatively dry.

Sun Delays

If reorientation of the field were looked at to correct the sun delays, the plan submitted would have to show that there really is no other option before a variance would be granted by the

Conservation Commission (Mellace). However, the problem of sun delays is not as bad as it may seem. There were only two sun delays during the 1993 season, each lasting only about 10-15 minutes; Issues remain with safety and the importance of continuity of game play; however, this time delay can be seen as a benefit as well. It can be marketable time during which businesses can run promotions and sell concessions, for example. Indeed, the Mets themselves have written about the sun delay as a privilege to experience in their programs' in a creative marketing ploy. Concession sales have also been known to go up 15 during games when a sun delay occurred (Murphy).

SOCIAL ASPECTS

Urban Renewal

One of the biggest advantages of renovating the current stadium compared to the option of building a new stadium is the elimination of the need to relocate and raze the neighborhood surrounding the BMC/Kent Avenue site. Although the city has cited this relocation as an opportunity for downtown urban renewal and the elimination of a drug-dealing neighborhood, it is unclear whether the drug-dealing problem will simply be displaced or eliminated. By keeping the neighborhood around BMC and Kent Avenue alive, the city would avoid displacement of its residents, and also maintain the integrity of an organic and old neighborhood that has grown with the city. The potential of renovating Wahconah Park could also hold implications for the revitalization of this area as a more active downtown strip is created between Colonial Theater and Wahconah Park. With a neighborhood in this area, the local businesses will have a ready pool of clientele and the city will have a more intimate and friendly downtown area. The argument here is for improving the area by improving the surrounding facilities.²

Civic Pride

Most importantly, by renovating the current stadium, the city would be taking a proactive step in improving its downtown character, thereby potentially increasing civic pride. Although it has been argued that the construction of a new stadium would act as a rallying point for a city

'Pittsfield Mets 1993 Souvenir Program states: "If you should have the rare privilege of experiencing a sun delay, relax, sit back and enjoy the evening, because the players will return and the game will resume in the blink of an eye" (P.14).

² See articles on these "intimate" and mixed-use downtown areas. Recommended:

- Kunstler, James Howard. "Home from Nowhere." The Atlantic Monthly. September, 1996.

that has lost its economic clout in recent years, the renovation of a historical landmark that is part of the vibrant and active local history could serve as a symbol of economic revitalization and a

rallying point for civic pride just as effectively. The added benefit and potential of creating an economically revitalized corridor between Colonial Theater and Wahconah Park should not be lost to the city either.

ECONOMIC ASPECTS

Funding for the renovation option is available and many options exist that the current stadium would be eligible for. What follows is only a partial list of potential funding sources for the project:

- Office of Labor, Education and Economic Development, Division of Housing and Community Development (7004-9101, 7004-9102, 7004-9108): for community and neighborhood redevelopment of the neighborhood at BMC/Kent Avenue site through the improvement of Wahconah Park and the establishment of a revitalized economic corridor between the stadium and Colonial Theater.
- Executive Office of Environmental Affairs (2100-2030): "for the recreational and resource conservation operations of the department," which includes the Parks and Recreation Department of Pittsfield, which currently oversees the maintenance of Wahconah Park.
- Transportation, Department of Highways (6010-0001): for potentially improving the physical and visual access to Wahconah Park and improving traffic safety and circulation in the area.
- Department of Economic Development (7007-0300): "for the operation and administration of the Massachusetts office of business development and the regionalization and job creation program administered by said office, and for marketing and promoting Massachusetts, nationally and internationally, in an effort to attract and retain targeted businesses and industries." This is applicable to both the importance of keeping minor league baseball in Pittsfield, which also helps promote and market the name of the city, and to improving the area around Wahconah Park (Arrowstreet Inc. et al.).
- Secretary of State's Office, MA Historic Commission, MA Preservation Projects Fund: for the conservation and preservation of historically valuable sites (Konrad; Alien).

MA Historic Commission Preservation Fund

The just mentioned Preservation Project Fund source is one of the most likely sources of funding available for the renovation of Wahconah Park. This money is available for non-profit groups or municipalities to renovate structures and to run consultant studies to determine different aspects and costs of renovation. The fund acts as a 50 matching grant, and to be eligible, the stadium has to be listed on the local or national Historic Site Register. Listing starts at the local level, however, and the time period in which the evaluation and listing of site occurs can vary depending on the emergency of the project. Funding then occurs with preference given to those structures that are listed higher in historical or emergency value. There has not been a precedent set for the preservation of such recreational structures as stadiums, but a group in Worcester, MA, is currently applying for Preservation Project Fund money for a stadium located in their city. Should their application be approved in May 1998, a great precedent will have been

set for the approval of Wahconah Park. The last deadline for the current round of funds is May 1998; however, there will be more rounds should Pittsfield decide to apply later. Should Wahconah Park be listed on the Historic Site Register, the amount of renovation that could occur depends on the contract the city and the state's Historic Commission draw up when the fund money is signed over. The degree of renovation has to be stipulated and outlined in the contract and there is ample room for negotiation as the Historic Commission usually prefers that the structure remain in use as long as the integrity of the site is maintained (Konrad; Alien). In addition to preserving Wahconah Park, historic preservation might also warrant the development of a minor league baseball museum at the park.

There is money available should the option of renovating Wahconah Park be chosen; however, the time frame needs to be kept in mind as the Mets may leave town if the city remains noncommittal.

Other Externalities

Economically speaking, the renovation option also presents other costs and benefits that are not easily classified. The irreversibility costs of this option is much less than the option of constructing a new stadium. Flexibility is available here: several different stages of renovation could save costs later should other plans come up. There are also no hidden costs of neighborhood relocation and land acquisition or site clean up.

The most prominent externality stands as the historical and nostalgic value of Wahconah Park. As one article in Time magazine stated, "At Pittsfield's Wahconah Park, ... a \$5 bill buys not only a hot dog but also a seat less than 40 ft. from home plate" (Witteman). The article invokes the hometown atmosphere at the current stadium and celebrates its quaint atmosphere including the famous/infamous "sun delays." As it says, "This is baseball the way the game is meant to be played: on intimate terms."

By choosing the renovation option, the City of Pittsfield would be keeping the stadium that Sports Illustrated has celebrated as "a little bit of heaven."

CONCLUSION

A QUANTITATIVE ANALYSIS

In order to determine the best course of action, the decision was made to evaluate the three proposed solutions with regard to the issues that go beyond the physical aspects contained in the consultant's report. In an effort to perform some kind of quantitative analysis, a matrix was built which ranked each proposed solution, relative to the others, with regard to each issue involved (figure 10). A "1" means that the proposed solution is the first best choice if that particular issue is the only deciding issue. Conversely, a "3" means that the proposed solution is the worst with regard to that particular issue. A mathematical average was then taken in an effort

to compare the merits of each proposed solution on the basis of all the issues put together.

This method is slightly unrealistic in that it automatically assigns equal weight to each issue; however, it is impossible to assign one issue more importance than another as the relative weights of the issues will change on an individual basis. Equal weighting aside, the matrix shows that a major renovation to Wahconah Park, in lieu of a new stadium, is an attractive option which must be considered.

FINAL RECOMMENDATIONS

The worst course of action for the City of Pittsfield is to do nothing (see summary below).

If this occurs, the Mets are virtually guaranteed to leave town, costing the city revenue and hurting civic pride. Wahconah Park would continue to deteriorate and it is unlikely that the city would be able to find another professional level tenant.

STATUS QUO OPTION

Pros:

- City does not spend money

Cons:

- City already spent a lot of money
- City will lose the Mets and the revenue they generate
- Civic pride is hurt
- Wahconah Park continues to deteriorate with no primary user

Should this course of action be followed, the next step for the city will be to figure out how to replace the revenue — or cut the equivalent amount of costs — generated by the Mets.

The close second course of action for Pittsfield is to build the new stadium at the Berkshire Medical Center-Kent Avenue site (see summary below). This would keep the Mets in town for a guaranteed 10 years. A high class facility, meeting or exceeding all standards as put forth by both the NAPBL and the parent New York Mets, would make it significantly easier for the Pittsfield Mets to conduct business. Revenue would also be generated from people attending games simply to look at the new stadium. Lastly, the new stadium could be used to draw outside revenue generating events, such as statewide high school baseball tournaments.

CONSTRUCTION OF NEW STADIUM OPTION

Pros:

- Mets stay in town
- Stadium meets all regulations
- Revenue increased further
- Civic pride enhanced

Cons:

- Expensive

- Possibility of hidden costs
- Possibility of hidden regulatory problems
- Displacement and relocation of people
- Where does crime go?

The downside is that a new stadium will likely be expensive and funding has yet to come easily. There may be hidden costs that have not been accounted for in the consultant's report. Also, the questions still remain as to what will happen to the people currently residing in the area of the proposed new site, and what will happen to the crime currently in the area. Will it be displaced out of the city? Or simply elsewhere within the city?

Should this course of action be followed, the next step would be to commission a consultant's report to examine these site-specific issues in greater depth.

Note: At the time of writing this paper, a new, more site specific consultant's report was being put together, however, it had not yet been released.

Our recommendation for a solution to the stadium issue is that Pittsfield and the Mets negotiate what would be required to be done to Wahconah Park to keep the Mets in Pittsfield (see summary below). Then, after these negotiations, the city would follow through in good faith to renovate Wahconah Park to those standards, both aesthetically and functionally. This plan would allow the city to take advantage of the work and money already put into the stadium.

RENOVATION OF WAHCONAH PARK OPTION

Pros:

- Likely to be less expensive
- New funding sources available
- Historic value preserved
- Takes advantage of previous work
- Avoids displacement and relocation issue
- Public support high

Cons:

- Mets may still be unhappy
- Still have sun delays *
- Site is outside the Commercial Business District *

(Note: "*" denotes negative factors that could may not be as much of a problem.)

This plan is, of course, contingent on the Mets' willingness to compromise for a solution that does not provide them with a new stadium but still brings them up to standards. If they are unwilling to reach such a compromise, the idea becomes impossible. Also, the Mets must be able to take the city's word that the city will act in good faith and make all efforts to hold up their end of the bargain.

This option would likely be less expensive than a new stadium and sources of funding not available to a new stadium, such as historical preservation money, would likely become available. The issue of what to do with displaced people from the BMC-Kent Avenue site is also avoided.

Wahconah Park is outside the Commercial Business District by only two-tenths of a mile. If the visibility of the stadium entrance is increased and the nearby traffic pattern is simplified, it would still be possible to proceed with the plans which call for a main business corridor through

Pittsfield, with the Wahconah Stadium as the north anchor and Colonial Theater as the south anchor.

Though the sun delays may still exist, they are rare and becoming more infrequent as the center field trees continue to grow. When they do occur, they are brief. Not only do they provide valuable marketing time to the Mets, but they add charm to the current Wahconah Park and are responsible for helping make the park famous.

It is understood that none of the proposed solutions are ideal, but it is not clear that there is an ideal solution to be had. Rather, for all parties to achieve their goals, both negotiation and compromise will be required. If this negotiation and compromise can take place, in good faith, it is likely that renovating Wahconah Park will provide the solution which is closest to that of an ideal one.

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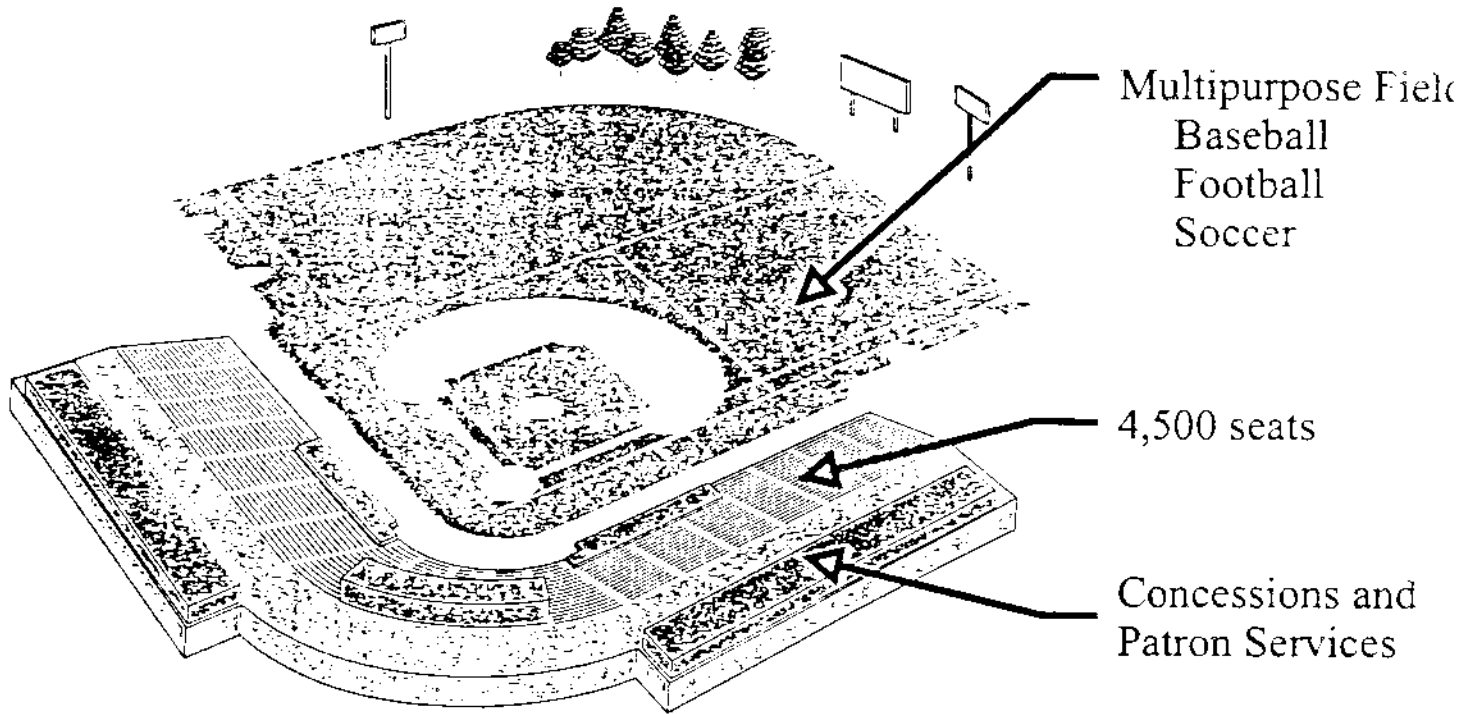
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Prototype Diagram and Facility Program

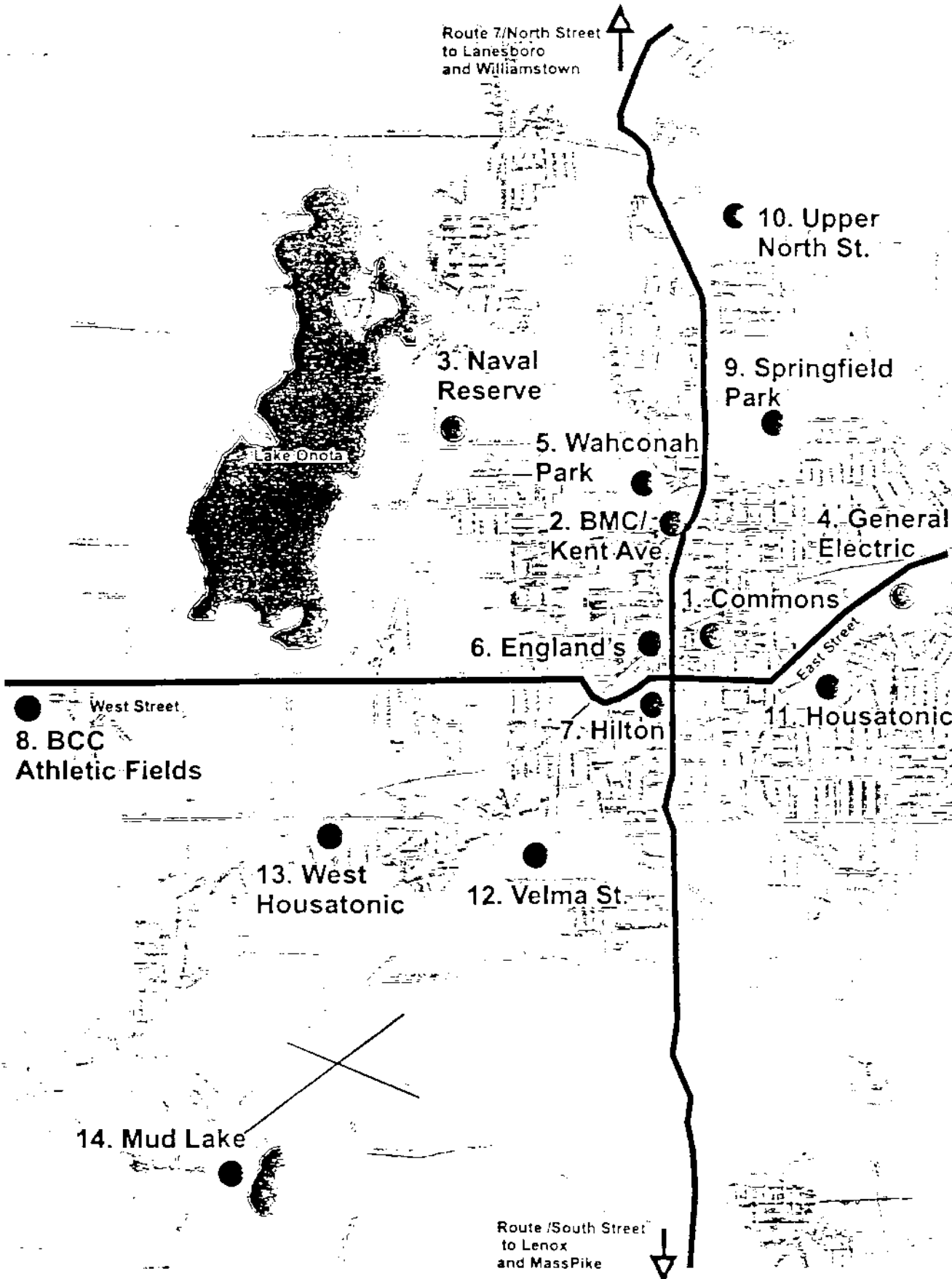
Prototype Facility Layout



Program Highlights

- Modern 4,500 spectator seat stadium
- Option for skyboxes and premium seating
- Natural turf field configurable for public events, concerts, school events, fairs, and sports
- Lighting for night events
- Concession stands
- Souvenir store
- Press Box
- Three team clubhouses: high school, Pittsfield Mets, and visitors
- Stands, field, and clubhouses comply with baseball industry standards
- 700 car parking for large crowds with 700 overflow spaces for capacity crowds

Site Options Studied

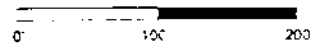


Site Evaluation Matrix

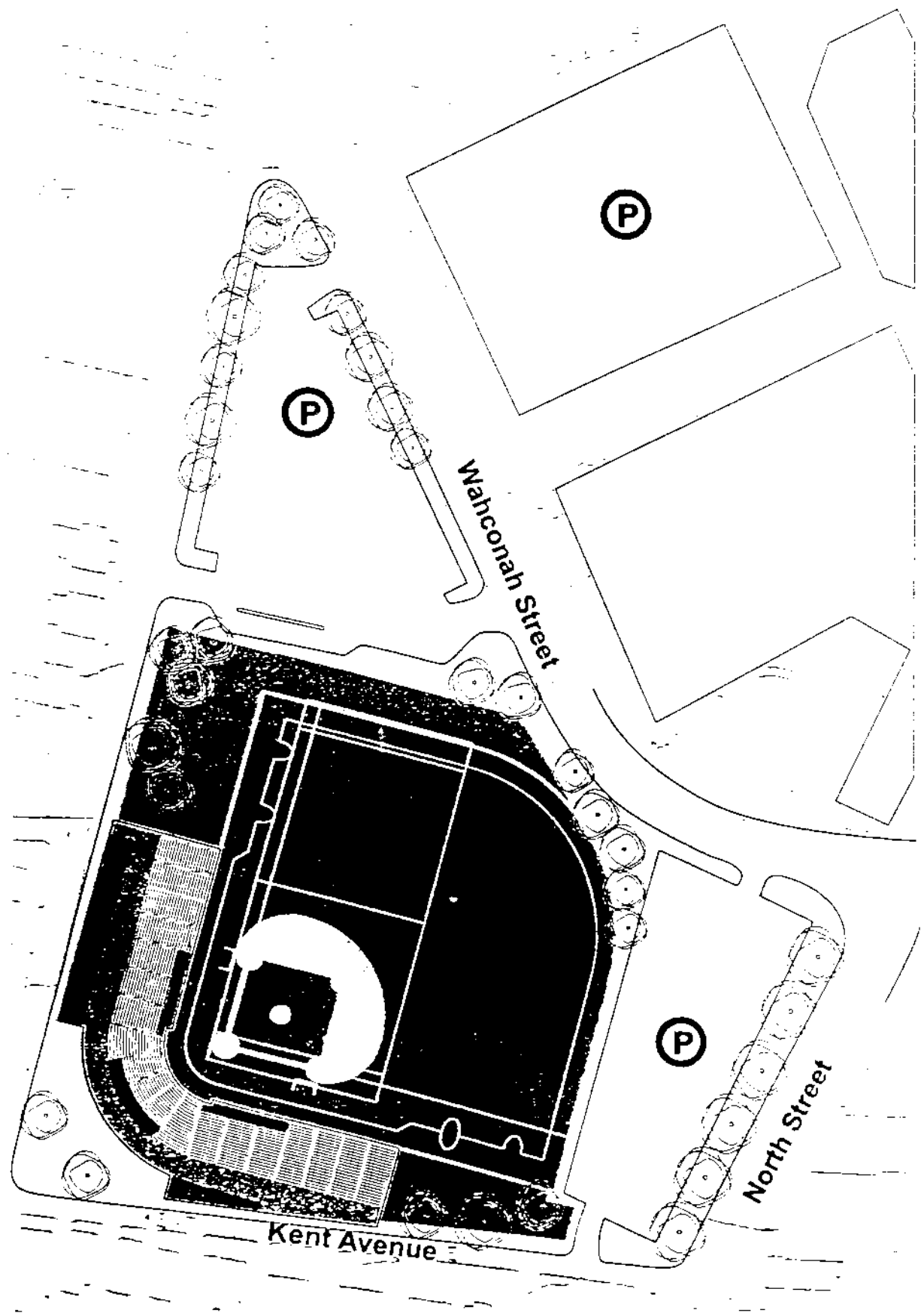
strongly positive
 positive
 mixed
 negative
 strongly negative

	<i>Problematic</i>					<i>Good Potential</i>			
	<i>Springside</i>	<i>BCC</i>	<i>Hilton</i>	<i>England's</i>	<i>Whitconah</i>	<i>GE</i>	<i>Naval Res.</i>	<i>BMC/Kent Ave.</i>	<i>Commons</i>
Technical Issues									
Site Area			tight	tight		large			
Access	traffic	road				main road	multiple	main road	main road
Parking		parking		parking	access			existing	existing
Utilities									
Demolition									
Construction	grading	contours	awkward	awkward			contours		
Environmental		wetlands			flood, river	haz. mats.			
Orientation			awkward	awkward	awkward				
Civic Issues									
Location	North Street	peripheral	downtown	downtown	known	nearby	peripheral	downtown	downtown
Compatibility	conflicts	mixed	opportunities	opportunities		aid level	opportunities	opportunities	opportunities
Visibility									
Implementation Aspects									
Ownership	public	public	lakings		public		donated		
Costs									





Kent Avenue/BMC Site Diagram



Taken from: Pittsfield Comprehensive Development Plan
as written by the Pittsfield Planning Board
April 1993 Appendix D, p. 3-7



note:

Wahconah Park = CWS = commercial warehousing and storage
does not allow a "park" but the stadium has a special permit

BMC-Kent site = B-G = general business
allows "parks" but not "stadiums"

LIMITED MONEY - REAL WORLD

<u>CATEGORY</u>	<u>NOTHING</u>	<u>RENOVATION</u>	<u>NEW STADIUM</u>
Environ. Regulations	1	3	2
Minor League Economics	3	2	1
Public Opinion	3	1	2
Legislation	3	1	2
Funding	3	1	2
Social - Civic Pride	3	2	1
Urban Renewal	3	2	1
Mets	3	2	1
Reversibility	3	1	2
Crime	3	2	1
Historic	1	2	3
Average:	2.64	1.72	1.63