



To: House Appropriations Committee

From: Councilman Pete Meitzner (District 2) on behalf of the Wichita City Council

Date: Feb. 17, 2017

Subject: Written Testimony in Support of HB 2184: STAR Bonds and Reauthorization

Chairman Waymaster, Vice-Chair Davis, Ranking Member Wolfe-Moore , and other honored members of the House Appropriations Committee:

The City of Wichita has enjoyed great success in partnership with the state in the use of STAR bonds. Our approach has been to use this tool as we believe the state intended, to help finance infrastructure improvements around regional attractions and amenities. This has helped create real results in new tourism, visitor spending, development and civic pride. We strongly support STAR bond reauthorization as a *market-driven* tool that requires *no new tax*, and allows communities to capture the value of an *increase in tourism from outside the region and state*.

Wichita has several exciting projects underway, two of which we would like to focus on today: the K96/Greenwich area of Northeast Wichita, and the West Bank of our Downtown Riverfront. These projects range from a focus on commercial development and youth sports, to a new multisport stadium with affiliated baseball, a museum, and pedestrian bridge, among other key amenities.

K96/Greenwich area of Northeast Wichita

This area had experienced little retail and commercial development along with limited freeway access. With the success of this STAR bond district and partnering with the State, there has been additional retail growth adjacent to, and outside the original STAR bond boundaries. This has resulted in additional sales tax revenue to the State, and expanded property tax revenues to the County and School district.

- In recent years, with assistance from STAR District funding the area was able to construct a new freeway on and off ramp that has generated significant commercial development interest and enabled the construction of the Wichita Sports Forum.
- Wichita Sports Forum is a private, indoor sports facility that has numerous basketball, volleyball, indoor sand volleyball and soccer courts that caters specifically to travelling youth sports teams.
- In just its first year of operation in 2016, the Wichita Sports Forum saw more than one million people come through its doors. Visitors generated tens of thousands of hotel room nights, countless meals in area restaurants and increased sales in neighboring stores.

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- In addition, many of these visitors experience Wichita for the first time and see all of the great amenities, businesses and housing options.

Success often builds upon itself with new opportunities for accelerated growth and development. The success we have enjoyed in the K96/Greenwich area has created even more opportunity centered around retail and youth sports.

- The success of retail inside the STAR bond district spread to significant retail development outside of the district as well.
- Growth of the Wichita Sports Forum has created opportunity to renovate the existing Stryker Youth Sports facility, a City soccer complex, to enable year-round tournament competition for a variety of sports include soccer, football, lacrosse, field hockey and many others.
- This will better enable the Wichita region to attract regional and national sports tournaments.
- The project will renovate grass fields to artificial grass, field lights, locker and restroom improvements, and will construct indoor fields to ensure tournament activity even during the coldest or hottest times of the year.
- The project will partner with the adjacent Wichita Sports Forum facility in marketing and attracting out of region and out of state visitor tourism.
- A third party feasibility study projects more than 100,000 participants a year with more than 40,000 of those participants coming from out of state.
- Visitors are expected to generate an estimated 35,000 hotel room nights.
- In addition, these facilities will expose more visitors to Kansas and the Wichita region as a great location to live and work.

Downtown Riverfront Area

A previous STAR bond project in Wichita's downtown area enabled improvements to the riverbank as well as to Wichita's iconic, "Keeper of Plains" plaza. Similar to K96/Greenwich, the success of one project is helping to spur more development on the horizon.

We have been partnering with the state on the West Bank Riverfront project focused on downtown sports and tourism:

- The project is proposed to connect and continue Riverbank improvements, with a renovated multisport facility at the current site of Lawrence-Dumont Stadium.
- Related talks are underway to attract Major League Affiliated Baseball back to Wichita.
- The historic National Baseball Congress (NBC) Tournament (first played in 1935) enjoyed a resurgence of its own in 2016, selling out with the participation of retired Major League stars, attracting national exposure, and an estimated \$2.6 million in economic impact.

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- The project leverages the NBC with year-round amenities for visitors such as an NBC museum, restaurants, and other amenities.
- A pedestrian bridge is planned to connect the West Bank stadium amenities with performing arts and convention facilities on the East. This is envisioned as both a connector and an iconic downtown gathering place.
- We have learned that one of the key challenges for Wichita, the region and state is the retaining existing and attracting new businesses and residents to Kansas. During our efforts to retain Cargill, the importance of providing key quality of life amenities was impressed on us as a key factor in their determining whether to stay in Kansas and Wichita. We believe that a vibrant downtown, supported by projects funded in part by STAR bonds will enable the Wichita region and State of Kansas to compete in retaining and attracting new businesses.

Conclusion

We very much appreciate the opportunity to provide testimony today in favor of HB 2184. We believe STAR bonds have proven to be successful, *market-driven* economic development tools to *generate tourism* through regional attractions, *with net new sales tax revenue*. We greatly value our partnerships with the State of Kansas in this regard, and expect to continue working these important projects to a successful conclusion together. We will continue to work closely with the Department of Commerce to ensure that we are adhering to the standards and requirements of the STAR bond rules. We intend to continue to comply with all requirements in the process, and are open to discussing opportunities to clarify and protect STAR bonds' value and utility. We ask for your consideration and support of reauthorization, as we partner to create a more vibrant economy and better quality of life for our citizens.

Thank you very much.

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