

URBAN PLAY: An Architecture Studio as Agent in Public Discussion for Minor League Sports in a Medium-sized City

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The political agendas of sports scale to different communities. Sports are much more than a “game” and no where is that more apparent than studying access to sports, as a participant or spectator, along the spectrum of youth leagues to professional sports. Local government, in fact, negotiates a difficult terrain in addressing the needs of both sports fans and players. The local level must prioritize infrastructure demands for facilities, arenas, playing fields, parks, parking, and transportation access.

The premise of this design studio is that, when strategically sited with a city, minor league sports could enhance a sense of community, could provide communal assets well beyond game days, could be a catalyst for other development, and could improve the economic well being of the city.

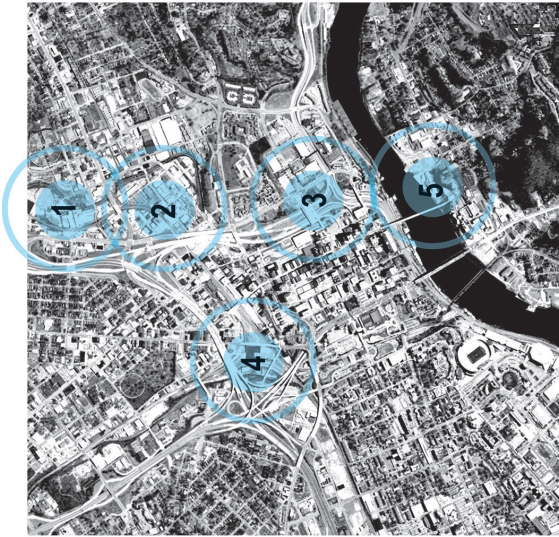
Youth leagues, regional schools, sports clubs, minor league teams, a flagship state university in the SEC, and a nearby county with a robust tourist economy, all compete for limited resources, limited infrastructure and a limited fan base. Decision-making is further influenced by the agendas of a county major, a city mayor, the university, a vibrant “creative class” committed to the revitalized downtown, a nearby African American community that seeks investment but is suspicious of gentrification, “the chamber” of business

interests, the nearby tourist region with its lobbying efforts, property owners, not to mention the sports leagues, the teams and team owners themselves. Within the context of a low-tax state, the university, county, and city budgets strain to meet needs, desires, and priorities. A minor league hockey team plays in non-regulation and outdated facility owned by the city and struggles to find a fan base. Since 1909, the local minor league baseball team has had a series of locations, names, and owners, including the family of the former city mayor and now governor. The current owner is the state commissioner of economic development.

Within these numerous conflicting political dimensions, an architectural design studio exploration provides a neutral ground for discussion and debate.

In the context of suspicion and cynicism about hidden agendas in local development, the work of an architecture studio can advance, if not direct, the public debate. As a premise, this studio determined it would investigate potential sites for two different minor league teams (baseball and hockey) within a ten-minute walk of the city’s downtown. The teams are perceived as a community asset, located in the heart of the city, not in an island of parking in a preferred suburb. As a challenge, the proposed use of the facilities extended well

beyond the limited number of game days, leveraging the investment in facilities as a way to promote community use. The studio work was part of two different exhibits, reaching a broad cross section of interested parties, including the team owners. Outreach grant funding supported part of the studio work.



URBAN PLAY:

PROPOSING A 365/24/7 URBAN HOME FOR EITHER A MINOR LEAGUE BASEBALL TEAM OR HOCKEY TEAM, NEAR THE DOWNTOWN OF A SMALL CITY.

The premise of this studio exploration maintains that, when strategically sited within a city, minor league sports could enhance a sense of community, could provide communal assets well beyond game days, could be a catalyst for other development, and could improve the economic well being of the city. The studio work had an after-life, with three different exhibits and invited presentations to city officials, team owners, and developers.



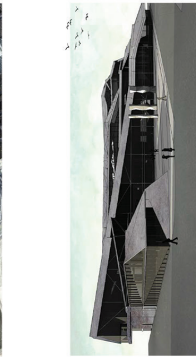
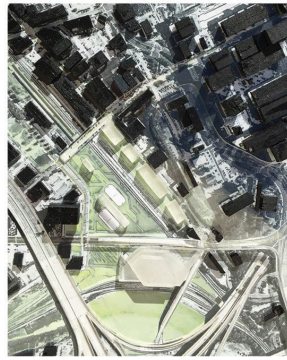
1 BILL MEYER PARK
Smokies Park: A Neighborhood Game



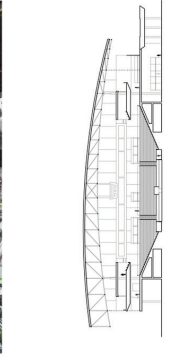
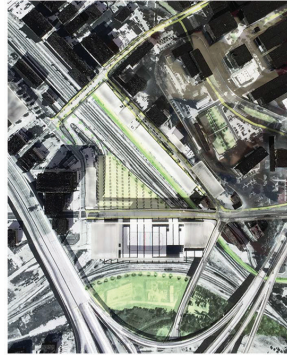
2 EAST JACKSON AVENUE
An Urban Ball Park, mixed use, residences



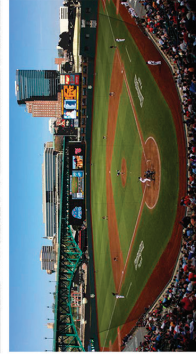
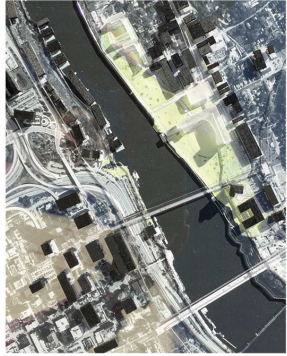
3 EAST KNOX
ONE KNOX: Connecting People



4 WEST JACKSON AVENUE
Space in Motion: Ice Park



4 WEST JACKSON AVENUE
Ice Adjacencies



5 SO KNOX
Waterfront Stadium with a view of Downtown

