



**Hearing on Bill 15-270, the “Ballpark Revenue Amendment Act of 2003”  
Committee on Finance and Revenue  
Thursday, June 12, 2003**

**Presented by:  
Chris Weiss, Director, D.C. Environmental Network  
Friends of the Earth**

Thank you Chairman Evans and Councilmembers for holding this hearing.

My name is Chris Weiss. I serve as Director of the D.C. Environmental Network at Friends of the Earth. Friends of the Earth is a national environmental group with over 1800 members in the Metropolitan Washington region. The D.C. Environmental Network, spearheaded by Friends of the Earth, consists of over 150 environmental, health and civic associations who believe the economic and environmental well being of District residents is tied to successful stewardship of our fragile urban environment.

I am here today to express organizational support for the D.C. Sports and Entertainment Commission and Mayor William’s effort to bring baseball to the District. Friends of the Earth is excited at the prospect of baseball coming back to the District. However, we do not believe taxpayers should pay for a new baseball stadium. Privately financing a new stadium is a good deal for taxpayers and a good deal for the environment.

Everyone is saying the District is experiencing tough financial times:

- As you know, in September 2002 testimony given to the City Council, Chief Financial Officer Natwar M. Gandhi stated, “Cumulatively, over the FY2003 through FY2006 period, we now estimate that ...total local source revenues will be approximately \$1.3 billion lower than projected.”
- Just last February the CFO reported that DC faced an additional “\$128 Million in budget pressures” due to decreased revenue estimates and increased demands for mandated programs including snow removal, Medicaid and other court-ordered spending.
- The Washington Post reported June 5<sup>th</sup> that “Mayor Anthony Williams predicted...that the District’s six-year-old economic recovery will falter and the city will soon resume its earlier trend of losing jobs, residents and businesses unless it receives an infusion of millions of dollars in federal aid.”
- The Government Accounting Office released a study that showed “The District continues to defer major infrastructure projects and capitol investment because of its structural imbalance and

its high debt level. These factors make it difficult for the District to raise taxes, cut services, or assume additional debt.”

Friends of the Earth and over 15 District based civic and environmental organizations responded to the District's worsening financial picture with the release of the first ever D.C. Green Scissors report. The report highlights more than \$642 million in budget savings that could be attained by ending wasteful transportation projects and sports boondoggles, reforming the property tax system and requiring the beneficiaries of the District's environmental infrastructure to pay their fair share.

One of our recommendations in the report was that the District of Columbia save as much as \$2-300 Million dollars by avoiding the same pitfalls so many cities have experienced with public financing of baseball stadiums. (I have enclosed that report with my testimony.)

**Friends of the Earth believes that rather than spending important time and effort putting together a financing plan to build a baseball stadium, District officials should be working harder to meet important human “environmental health” needs.** As an environmental organization some of the lost opportunities we risk as we waste precious time putting a financing package together for a new stadium include:

<p>⇒ <b>Cleaning Up Our Air</b></p>	<p>The regions air quality continues to decline. Having experienced far too many Code Red days when the air is particularly unsafe for children and the elderly in 2002. The District is in a state of crisis that demands that resources be committed to deal with this environmental disaster. Only when we begin to do more to clean up our air we breathe will the thousands of children that suffer from asthma, begin to experience some relief. <b>Do we need clean air in a city with thousands of children who suffer from asthma or do we need a publicly financed baseball stadium?</b></p>
<p>⇒ <b>Clean Up Our Waterways</b></p>	<p>The District has not even begun to deal with the worsening condition of the Anacostia River, Potomac River and Rock Creek. We continue to dump millions of gallons of raw sewage and polluted stormwater into our rivers each year. The D.C. Water &amp; Sewer Authority's (WASA's) plan to fix the District's antiquated sewer system still needs over \$1 billion dollars if it is ever going to be realty. Even if we are able to implement WASA's plan we will only have begun to do all that is necessary to follow the requirements of the Clean Water Act. <b>Do we need clean rivers and creeks or do we need a publicly financed baseball stadium?</b></p>
<p>⇒ <b>Creating Healthy Schools</b></p>	<p>The District schools need resources to upgrade facilities in order to make sure that the learning environment is safe. Making sure the indoor air quality, temperature, toxicity and water are safe for children needs constant vigilance. Much work still needs to be done. <b>Do we need safer schools</b></p>

	<b>or do we need a publicly financed baseball stadium?</b>
⇒ <b>Meeting Growing Transportation Needs</b>	The Washington Metropolitan Transit Authority is looking at potential significant decreases in revenue in the near future. Fares and parking fees have been increased and will be increased again in order to sustain basic services. The District and the region are going to have to step up to bat and commit new resources in order to meet the regions transportation needs. <b>Do we need better public transportation or do we need a publicly financed baseball stadium?</b>
⇒ <b>Cleaning Up Our Neighborhoods</b>	Recycling in the District of Columbia is considered “something nice” but is not a priority for District government. Funding for important recycling initiatives is always under attack. As the region continues to experience growth the District is going to need to expand its efforts to control the waste stream. Controlling the waste stream means cleaner neighborhoods and a more sustainable community if we do this right...but we need more resources to make it happen. <b>Do we need more efficient recycling or do we need a publicly financed baseball stadium?</b>
⇒ <b>Enforcing Environmental Laws that Protect Our Health</b>	The Metropolitan Police Departments Environmental Crime Unit is not doing its job. Polluters are continuing to dump illegally in parks and communities throughout the District. The entire police department needs re-training on how to enforce existing code that protects the environment. <b>Do we need a publicly financed baseball stadium or do we need a better trained police force to help clean up our polluted environment?</b>
⇒ <b>Creating Security in These Troubled Times</b>	Terrorism will continue to be a threat to District residents. How we manage the thousands of train cars and trucks that go through our region carrying dangerous toxic chemicals may be the difference between safe streets and neighborhoods and a major environmental catastrophe. Threats to our air and water and even the food we eat, will need to be dealt with and necessitate new funding. <b>Do we need security or do we need a publicly financed baseball stadium?</b>
⇒ <b>Attracting 100,000 New Residents</b>	Ultimately our ability to attract 100,000 new residents in the coming years will depend on how environmentally secure District neighborhoods are. Economic development will not work unless District leaders aggressively attack the

	environmental ills that negatively impact our quality of life.
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The District is struggling to meet basic needs – in education, libraries, environmental protection, health care, and other areas. It should not put in a baseball stadium before other investments that could do a lot more to improve the quality of life for D.C. residents and businesses.

Let's also try and remember what a special place Washington D.C. is. The D.C. area is the largest metro area without a team. Major League Baseball should be begging to come here rather than making outrageous demands for limited resources.

A Washington Post poll conducted in May 2002 found that 80 percent of D.C. residents want baseball to return to D.C. However, half of those who favor bringing baseball here, do not support paying for a stadium with public funds.

Baseball Commissioner Bud Selig recently admitted, **“The positive shelf life of a new stadium has shrunk considerably. The new parks in themselves can't be a long-term or mid-term panacea.”** Ironically, the District should take Commissioner Selig's advice. Avoid the pitfalls of public financing and enjoy the benefits of privately funded projects.

Thank you.