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Is Miami destined to become a world-class metropolis with a showpiece museum/park combination nestled on its scenic waterfront only minutes from downtown? Or is it destined to become yet another American city seduced into handing over its precious public land for the development of an ill-conceived, privately owned sports facility?

This is the question that will face City of Miami commissioners on March 15, 2001, when they vote on the future of Bicentennial Park. With this election quickly approaching, I feel compelled to voice the arguments of those of us who are committed to seeing this dynamic parcel of land developed in a manner that is responsible, logical, and aesthetically pleasing.

Every great city should have a great museum. The ideal situation is to have that museum anchored to a spacious, appealing park. One need only look to New York, Washington, DC, San Francisco, San Diego, Mexico City, Paris, and Madrid for examples of museum/park combinations that add culture and depth to their respective municipalities.

Miami is the only major metropolitan area in the United State without a world-class art museum, science center or park. The Museum Park Miami proposal for Bicentennial Park, advocated by supporters of both the Miami Art Museum and the Miami Museum of Science, would bridge this cultural gap in one dramatic fell swoop. Both of these institutions continue to make outstanding achievements in their respective fields despite having outgrown their facilities some time ago, and both institutions have supporters committed to providing the seed capital to make this vision a reality. (I know this because I am one of them.)

With its close proximity to the future site of the Performing Arts Center, the new Bicentennial Park would become a thriving cultural axis and play a tremendous role in revitalizing downtown Miami and the surrounding neighborhoods.

Choosing sports over arts is a losing proposition for cities. While the perception is that stadiums and arenas are “silver bullets” for cities in need of economic development, the facts simply do not bear this out. After concluding its study on the economic impact of sports facilities in major US cities, The Brookings Institute in Washington, DC concluded that “a new sports facility has an extremely small (or perhaps even negative) effect on overall economic activity and employment.” Most urban planners agree with this assessment. The October 2000 issue of *Urban Land* contains a full-length article on the impact of arts districts in major municipalities such as Denver and reports these findings: “Arts-related organizations in the United States currently draw more visitors than professional sports events, and Denver is no exception. SCFD (the city’s Science and Cultural Facilities District) drew 7.9 million people in 1997, exceeding by 41 percent the 1996-1997 season home-game attendance of the Broncos, Nuggets, Rockies, and Avalanche combined.” The article goes on to say, “As economic engines, art districts are exceptional. Many of their core facilities and related commercial

enterprises are open daily, unlike those of sports facilities, which operate infrequently and typically exist beyond walking distance at the edges of downtowns.”

This argument is further clarified when one considers the current economic state of Major League Baseball, which is uncertain at best. Recent news reporting and commentary predicts a work stoppage (the eighth since 1972) as early as this season. (As an aside, I do not believe I have ever heard of a painter, sculptor or scientist going on strike.) Can you imagine driving or walking down Biscayne Boulevard on a beautiful summer afternoon, passing the gigantic Marlins baseball stadium with its retractable roof, only to find it lying dormant because of labor issues? Is this the image the City of Miami wants for its most desirable and visible waterfront property?

Public land should be for public use. The citizens of Miami have responded to the above question with a resounding “no!” At a recent design workshop held by the City to discuss plans for Bicentennial Park, the overwhelming majority of those in attendance agreed that the park should be developed in a way that engages nearby residents. With an art museum and science center open 365 days a year, including daytime activities, after-school and community programming, as well as evening and weekend events, the Museum Park plan clearly meets these needs. Conversely, the baseball stadium proposed by the Marlins would have a singular, static purpose, dramatically alter traffic patterns, block any reasonable street-level view of the Miami skyline and Biscayne Bay, and reduce the amount of available green space to almost zero.

I believe the citizens of Miami are tired of having their hard-earned tax dollars support sports franchises which may one day pick up and leave. They have seen the Miami Dolphins and Florida Panthers depart for “greener pastures,” and have been stuck with a depleted Orange Bowl Stadium and a near-useless Miami Arena. Enough is enough. If Mr. Henry wants a modern, revenue-generating baseball stadium in Miami, he should do what Joe Robbie did for the Dolphins: build it himself.

In closing, I wish to commend the mayor and commissioners for their prudent deliberation on this issue. I hope that they continue to demonstrate their leadership by voting “no” to the Florida Marlins in Bicentennial Park, and thereafter saying “yes” to our Museum Park Miami proposal.