

Analysis of Options Considering a Stadium for Colorado State University Campus Leadership Committee

14 November 2014

Overview

The committee believes that Options 1 and 2 are not viable and that concerns regarding risk and control prevent Option 4 from being considered by the committee as a viable option at this time. We feel that Option 3 is viable and is in the best long term interest of the University. We have concerns that Options 1 and 2 will adversely impact the University General Fund in the short term, and likely encounter expensive future maintenance costs at the Foothills site. There were strong sentiments among the committee members that the stadium be a place for *all* athletes and the community at large, not for just football. The current location and condition of the stadium have not engendered the CSU community as a whole to feel a strong sense of connection to the University on game days, nor does it provide an opportunity for integration and interaction among student athletics and academic endeavors. Option 4 is appealing because it provides the potential benefits of a campus stadium with limited impact on the General Fund, and it will be completely built in one phase. However, lack of control in the design, construction, operation, and maintenance was the over-riding concern.

In Option 3, the vision of an on-campus stadium is profoundly entrepreneurial and in the spirit of the University. Colorado State University has become an important academic institution in part because of the faculty and staff's continued commitment to obtain external funding and their creative ability to *venture* into business enterprises. The opportunity to build an on-campus stadium resolves the issues associated with the condition of the current stadium while providing an accessible means for engaging students in social and academic undertakings. With this option, CSU can create and actualize the vision of the University in the near future while remaining in control of the construction, operation and maintenance of the stadium. A new stadium on campus would create a collegial and community presence with flexibility and adaptability at a later date to meet future needs of the university. On campus stadiums provide a unique ambiance and invites the alumni and community members to experience the CSU central campus.

ANALYSIS

Option 1

Opened in 1968, Hughes stadium has played a large role in many important traditions associated with Colorado State University. The adjacent parking provides a place for tailgating and greeting friends and neighbors, and the panoramic vistas are lovely. Additionally this option has the least over-all expense and requires minimal disruption to central campus. However, we feel that Option 1 is not viable. After full review of this option, the Committee's assessment resulted in several concerns:

- Hughes is primarily a single-use facility with a declining infrastructure in need of significant investment just to bring it to a state of code compliance without providing important amenities supportive of stadium activities. Revitalization can make Hughes safe, but it will never be a campus attraction.
- This option will bring in minimal philanthropic support and will not increase revenues, resulting in a poor funding to cost ratio. It is estimated \$26-37 million will come from the General Fund to support this option, not including unexpected costs associated with revitalizing an older structure.
- Costs for maintaining Hughes will continue to increase over time and will be more expensive than upkeep for a new structure. This option is a temporary solution that will have to be revisited in the future. This option is not a sound investment for Colorado State University.
- As a marketing tool, Hughes directs people attending games away from the campus rather than bringing them to campus. Likewise, it does not bring attendees into the business in downtown Fort Collins.
- The remote site does not take advantage of the full array of transportation services provided by the city of Fort Collins (e.g. MAX transportation system).

The committee members expressed strong sentiments about the stadium being a place for *all* athletes and the CSU community at large, not for just 'football', which we understand to be a

source of positive revenue projections. We would like this structure to be referred to as a stadium or an event center, rather than the more limiting term of “football stadium”. We would like this structure to have an atmosphere that positively addresses gender equity and the diversity of our athletic teams and players.

For both options 1 and 2, the location of the facility has not engendered the CSU community to feel a strong sense of connection to the university campus on game days. There is less of a sense of belonging and “Ram Pride” when away from the heart of CSU at a satellite location. In addition, both options do not allow family, friends, prospective recruits, and visitors to experience the central CSU campus. Placing a stadium on campus invites members from any community to see CSU for what it is – a fantastic university with much to offer.

Option 2

Option 2 provides a revitalized stadium with substantial improvements designed to enhance the attendee’s experience. However, it is unclear how much additional revenue will be generated by the renovation, and how much philanthropic support will be forthcoming as time passes and the facility continues to age. Impact on the General fund could be substantial. Many concerns voiced in Option 1 are also pertinent here; the stadium remains a single use facility, maintenance will prove more expensive since the structure continues to age less gracefully than intended, and location directs attendees away from the campus and city. It is also a concern that the impact (either projected or real) of improving Hughes has no clear potential to positively affect students – academically or socially. The committee supports moving forward with major cultural changes or infrastructure investments that bolster student retention, success, and wellness (as discussed below)(1-3). However, supporting a large investment as a long-term plan for this off-campus stadium, with no academic space, no major connections to campus life, and no intentional influence toward the betterment of students’ lives seems contrary to CSU’s long term strategic objectives and mission. As such, we do not feel that Option 2 is viable.

Option 3

An on-campus stadium is consistent with the profoundly entrepreneurial spirit of the University's Strategic Plan. The opportunity to build an on-campus stadium resolves the issues associated with the condition of the current stadium while providing an accessible means for engaging students in social and academic undertakings. With this option CSU can create and actualize the vision of the University while remaining in control of the planning, construction, operation and maintenance of the stadium. This new stadium would create a campus presence with flexibility and adaptability at a later date to meet emerging and future needs of the university supported by facility revenues. We believe this to be a viable option. Other benefits:

- This option has the least potential impact on the general fund (\$0-\$38 million) and provides adaptability for academic space, classrooms, dining halls, restaurants, and places students to congregate for leisure.
- Phasing would allow the university the flexibility to build and expand as necessary to meet future demand.
- Bringing the stadium closer to the academic core of campus is a gesture with potential to allow athletics to take a more significant position in our university's mission and culture, with the potential to better integrate student athletes with students, faculty and staff.
- The new stadium be positioned to potentially attract higher caliber teams requiring facilities beyond what can be offered at Hughes Stadium, providing high-level competition, stimulating increased revenue potential.
- The new stadium will provide a different fan experience that will hopefully serve as an incentive for alumni to return to CSU, enhancing the fan experience.
- The committee supported the findings of the site selection committees. Factors considered regarding location included 1) Campus philosophy, 2) Flood plain considerations, 3) Property owned by CSU, 4) Proposed academic buildings, 5) Traffic patterns, 6) Available parking, 7) Utility network, and 8) Zoning districts in nearby

neighborhoods. Based on their evaluation of these factors, we support the proposed location.

Research supports engaging students, in their freshmen year, in academic and social activities improves retention(1). Transition to college can be difficult and many freshman find it challenging. It is argued that experiences outside the classroom influence subsequent experiences inside the classroom and, in turn, influence persistence(2;3). The majority of freshmen live on campus, and many do not have personal transportation (personal communication, Dave Bradford). Ease of access to athletic and other activities in a campus located event center could encourage student involvement, improve freshman morale, and decrease attrition.

Students would benefit from having a place to go even when not a game day. This can be achieved by creating places to eat and meet up with friends; a study area with a view of the field or stadium would be great asset and would enhance the academic portion of this stadium. Other amenities for consideration: bowling alley, ping pong and pool tables, places to socialize (café or coffee spot, study room/areas), a restaurant(s) taking advantage of the mountain views (not the case with any restaurant in Fort Collins), a place similar to the Ramskellar, and a some fast food alternatives. Other ideas include occasional concerts to attract well-known artists and bands. Opportunities for additional CSU events may also provide creative opportunities to benefit staff and faculty. In this way, the stadium becomes a multi-use facility capable of partnering in local business ventures, thereby strengthening the economy rather than a sole purpose entity only in use during games.

Option 4

This option provides a stadium on campus with the additional benefits of being completed in one phase, with Public-Private Partnership (P3) having minimal impact on the General Fund. However, lack of control by CSU in the design, construction, operation and maintenance of the building is the over-riding concern. Issues to be considered include:

- To our knowledge, the P3 option has not been used by other universities for a football stadium project. We have little insight into potential problems or an understanding of the full nature of the benefits of such an arrangement, creating significant risk.
- We have concerns over control of the quality of design and construction and the ability to embrace future change.
- Upon completion, what happens if the maintenance is unacceptable or problems develop in the facility that are not repaired to the quality acceptable by CSU? What happens if the structure needs to be adjusted to suit emerging needs?
- Although there may be less financial risk, there would also be less benefit if football attendance consistently rises and the other academic and alternate use spaces become popular. Renting out the space may not be the best long-term business plan.

These may be problems with solutions, but at this time we do not think this is a viable option.

Further comments and recommendations

As in any worthwhile endeavor, there are challenges as well as opportunities. In Option 3, committee members felt the academic and other space opportunities should be addressed as soon as possible. We understand the financial projections were modest, yet our hope is that this completion would be on the horizon with increased interest in attending a game in the new stadium as well as providing new revenue streams.

As part of the planning of the stadium on campus, a realistic, and acceptable parking/traffic plan should be developed not only for Saturday games, but for games played on weeknights to accommodate TV. In our evaluation of other programs, we have found that weeknight games have been a logistic nightmare with ongoing conflict between the game schedule and academic needs. Simply stating 'parking for football will begin at 5PM on a Thursday game night' is unclear and will create enormous traffic and access problems for university students/faculty/staff and football fans.

We recommend that there be plans in place and available to minimize the inconvenience to campus and surrounding communities during construction, including plans for alternative parking. Additionally, there needs to be a plan developed for noise and people control during events.

The Athletic Department needs to be accountable for expenses coming from the General Fund designated for stadium maintenance or these funds should be managed by Facilities as appropriate. The Faculty Council Committee for Intercollegiate Athletics and the Committee on Strategic and Financial Planning are charged with reviewing the Athletic Department budget each year and bear responsibility in monitoring. As other academic departments are accountable for their budgets and deficits, thus should be the Athletic Department as we envision a future focused on the primacy of academic pursuits supported by attractive campus amenities, such as a new stadium.

Reference List

1. Tinto V. Colleges as Communities: Taking Research on Student Persistence Seriously. *The Review of Higher Education* 1998;21.2:167-77.
2. Rendon L. Validating culturally diverse students: Toward a new model of learning and student development. *Innovative Higher Education* 1994;19:33-52.
3. Terenzini P. The transition to college: Diverse students, diverse stories. *Research in Higher Education* 1994;35:57-73.