

Thoughts on a Stadium in Ramsey County *by Commissioner Victoria Reinhardt*

Many people have asked me what I think about the possibility of a new Vikings stadium in Ramsey County. I would like to take this opportunity to share my thoughts. Last February I supported a motion to move ahead with creating a stadium proposal in Arden Hills to get answers about transportation infrastructure, environmental cleanup, tax capacity expansion, job creation, and financing. I asked for the information in terms of the development being with or without a stadium. That way, the data could be used by any interested developer. At this point, it is clear to me that the benefits of a stadium in Arden Hills are not worth the cost of a half cent sales tax in Ramsey County.

The former Army Ammunitions Plant is the largest superfund site in the state and redevelopment of that location will come at great effort for local leaders. Already, we have secured vital parkland for wildlife habitat and public recreation. The location proposed for the stadium and surrounding development will work well with our previous work and plans for the area set aside for parks and trails. Construction of a large public facility would provide much needed construction jobs, help mitigate pollution and provide a catalyst for future economic growth in the surrounding area. But those benefits do not warrant the cost of raising a regressive tax within the smallest geographic county in Minnesota. Boutique taxes or fees are not the answer. There needs to be a better financing solution.

The precedent was set many years ago that stadiums have some public funding involved. The Mayor of Saint Paul suggested using a tax on beer at the wholesale level that would amount to two cents per beer sold in Minnesota. What I like most about that idea is that it is a statewide solution. I have heard from a lot of people who want to keep the Vikings in Minnesota, but the financing is where there are a wide variety of opinions. Most often, I hear, "It is not the Ramsey County Vikings, it is the Minnesota Vikings, so let people across Minnesota chip in."

If the Vikings are to stay in Minnesota, the Legislature and the Governor will need to shape the final plan. The owners of the team want a new stadium in Arden Hills. They promise to build hotels, restaurants and retail outlets on the site, which would generate property tax revenue that would benefit Ramsey County taxpayers. I have stated previously that on all issues before me, I do as my parents taught me – I do my homework and make informed decisions. In that process, it is clear to me that the primary benefit of a Minnesota Vikings stadium is to the Team, the State and the Region; the financing should reflect that. The current proposal brought forward by other commissioners, which, I should note, has NOT been voted on by the County Board, relies on a Ramsey County only sales tax. Therefore, it doesn't work from my perspective. If the Legislature and Governor pass legislation so that the County Board could vote on the half cent sales tax without a referendum, I will vote against it.

The Governor and Legislative leaders have said there may be a special session as soon as the end of October, if they can agree on a proposal. As I said before, the Legislature will define the terms of the deal and the financing mechanism. Legislators will decide if the plan requires a Ramsey County only sales tax, and if that tax should be exempt from a vote of Ramsey County citizens. Make sure to call your legislators and tell them your opinion.