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THE ISSUES OF THE COMMUNITY/OPINION

How stadium would damage a key neighbor

- The basilica is a landmark, a resource and magnet for community activities.

By JOHN BAUER

In debating a site for a new Vikings stadium, leaders need to look beyond the numbers and consider the negative human impact that will occur if they choose to locate so close to the Basilica of St. Mary. From property line to property line, the Linden Avenue site is just more than 100 yards from the basilica — ironically, the length of a football field.

Not only will this location affect the 6,500 households that call the parish their spiritual home, but it will also jeopardize our efforts to bring stability and provide a lifeline to those who are most in need.

In addition to being a landmark on the skyline, the basilica is also a magnet for people from all over the metro area. Individuals from more than 270 zip codes belong to this parish. They provide critical funds and volunteer hours to help thousands of people. Our efforts make a difference.

In the past year, the Basilica of St. Mary has offered a multitude of services for people in desperate situations, including:

- Providing 25,240 meals through shelters and Meals on Wheels.
- Distributing 25,300 sandwiches to hungry people who knock on our door.
- Offering more than 7,700 vouchers for a much-needed pair of shoes for work or school.
- Helping over 320 families with assistance to keep their housing and prevent homelessness.
- Supporting more than 2,800 people with bus cards to help them get to new jobs.
- Providing over 1,300 people with gas vouchers to help them get to appointments.

Beyond meeting the needs of those in our community to just survive (food, shelter, clothing), we also provide life skills programs and sessions as well as mentoring. While stadium proponents advocate for the creation of jobs, the basilica's employment ministry currently serves 470 people who are unemployed or underemployed; providing job search guidance, one-on-one counseling and résumé-building workshops.

Consider the impact on the people who need the basilica most.

The basilica's Saint Vincent de Paul outreach ministry continues to experience a rise in demand for assistance, which will go unmet if the stadium is located on the Linden Avenue site. We want the Basilica of Saint Mary to continue to be a beacon of hope for all who come through our doors.

In addition to our social ministry, the basilica also plays an important role in the downtown community. The vision that guides us comes from the prophet Jeremiah: "Seek the well-being of the city to which I have sent you. Pray for it to the Lord. For in seeking its well-being you will find your own" (Jeremiah 29:7). For more than 100 years the basilica has been a landmark on the Minneapolis skyline. During these years, it has been a center for civic and cultural activities, including ecumenical prayer services, concerts, art shows and speakers. We want to ensure that this continues in the future.

We are concerned with the level of activity this proposed stadium would generate. Currently, there are 300 event days at the Metrodome, including eight to 10 NFL game days that bring 65,000 fans through the neighborhood on a Sunday morning (when nearly 2,000 people also gather for mass at the basilica.) Thousands attend the stadium's other events, including major concerts, high school athletic contests and more. Increased traffic flow would affect access and parking for those trying to come to the basilica for liturgies, concerts, community events and outreach.

Thousands of activities fill the calendar each year at the basilica, involving parishioners and the community we serve. From liturgies to our employment ministry, from concerts to outreach programs, from the Basilica Block Party to art exhibits, the life of a thriving community is at stake.

I encourage people to look beyond the figures and consider the impact that the stadium will have on the lives of people who need the basilica the most. It has been more than a church for more than a century. We oppose a Vikings stadium on the Linden Avenue site not just because of the potential damage it could do to our historic church, but also because the basilica is a center for civic and cultural events, a haven for those in need and a landmark on the Minneapolis skyline. We want the basilica to continue to be all these things for the next 100 years.

The Rev. John Bauer is rector of the Basilica of St. Mary.