



## **Chamber Statement on On-campus Stadium**

Arguably, Colorado State University is the single most significant contributor to the quality of life and economic vitality of Fort Collins. The benefits of having a public research university the caliber of CSU are substantial. Among them are:

- CSU produces a huge payroll with attendant disposable income going into the local economy,
- CSU-generated disposable income sustains a robust service sector with many restaurants, bars, retail shops, coffee shops, insurance agents, realtors and many other companies owing their existence to CSU,
- CSU-generated disposable income produces taxable sales which benefit city government, county government, the school district, and all other tax-dependent entities,
- The university is a magnet for companies looking for expertise and collaborative research,
- The university attracts talent, and future talent, to the community,
- In addition to CSU's own offerings, a well-educated community drives the demand for community cultural events and activities,
- World-changing research is being done in Fort Collins, CO at Colorado State University,
- The CSU-boosted economy produces above average per capita donations to the charitable sector of the community,
- Fort Collins' educated population has high standards and expectations that permeate other aspects of community life including the quality of government and public schools,
- And as a university town, Fort Collins has a youthful, energetic, and aspirational community personality.

While Fort Collins is more than just Colorado State University, we would be much less without it. Much of what we enjoy about Fort Collins exists because of the presence of Colorado State University. We all have a rooting interest in its ongoing success.

In fact, the entire state benefits from having a first-rate public research university. Yet, over the past decade Colorado has largely disinvested from its public universities and colleges. The \$100 million of additional funding for higher education approved by the Legislature during the 2014 session is a notable and welcome exception. On the whole, Colorado's higher education leaders are being forced by necessity to find other means to fund their institutions.

Compounding the funding challenge, higher education in America is undergoing changes due to demographic shifts and disruptive educational technologies.

In the face of much uncertainty, Colorado State University leaders have a duty to position the university for long-term success. A key question they must answer is "Where will the funding come from to allow the university to fulfill its land grant mission of providing applied knowledge to help society meet its needs and challenges?"

That brings us to the proposal to construct a new stadium on the main CSU campus in Fort Collins.

Athletics is a branding vehicle for universities to capture the attention of prospective students and their parents and garner, renew and sustain alumni support. A recent example is Colorado State's victory over Washington State in the 2013 New Mexico Bowl. The university could not afford to pay for the positive visibility it received for days after the come-from-behind last minute victory. Like it or not, athletics does more to attract attention to a university than anything else it does.

The driving argument in favor of building a new stadium is that a successful athletics program, especially football, will attract students and financial support to the university. And with the current stadium in need of substantial investment, it is logical to consider other options, including a new on-campus stadium.

As the Chamber takes a position on this issue, we state up front that we are not experts at branding, athletic facilities design and finances, or the future of higher education in an era of disruptive technological and demographic changes. Nor do we pretend to understand the future of collegiate football in the face of health concerns and attempts to unionize players.

Rather, our 'expertise' comes from 110 years of serving Fort Collins with a commitment to its long-term well-being.

## Chamber Position on Proposed CSU On-Campus Stadium

We have listened to the arguments for and against the stadium and appreciate the passion of both sides. There are many details in a project of this magnitude; and while they matter, it would be easy to get lost in them.

In arriving at our decision, we elected to use a simple filter that is informed by our mission of fostering a strong local economy so that we can afford a community we're proud to live in. The belief that a strong economy and strong quality of life are inextricably bound together is part of the Chamber's fundamental values. While considering this issue, we asked two questions:

- Is the on-campus stadium good for the local economy? Or, asked in the negative, will the proposed stadium harm the economy?
- Is the on-campus stadium good for the overall quality of life and well-being of the community? Or, asked in the negative, will the stadium harm the community's quality of life?

Our conclusions relative to economic impact: The local economy will see benefits during the construction phase and from the ongoing operation of the stadium. Other likely positive economic impacts: the university's branding strategy will attract students and alumni support boosting CSU's overall financial viability and the new stadium will ignite redevelopment in Midtown, along Prospect Avenue, along Shields and west of the campus.

Our conclusions relative to overall community quality of life: The overall community quality of life of Fort Collins will benefit from having a major readily accessible multi-purpose facility near the core of the city.

These, in our opinion, are the key questions. If the project does not harm the economy or overall livability of the community while offering potential upside benefits, it is logical to support it.

A third question we considered was:

- Whose decision is this to make and have they been sensitive to the wider impacts from siting a stadium in the core of the community?

The final decision to site the proposed stadium on the main campus rests with Dr. Tony Frank and the CSU Board of Governors. We appreciate the parameters placed around the project and the process by Dr. Frank to protect the interests of state taxpayers. We also have appreciated the engagement of the university with the general public, the campus community, surrounding neighborhoods and the City of Fort Collins. As with all things, opinions

vary, but we believe the process for input and engagement has been open as has access to information about the project. We believe that good faith efforts have been and are being made by the university to hear, understand and mitigate as far as reasonable the impacts of putting a major facility on the south end of the main campus.

#### The Chamber's Position:

The Fort Collins Area Chamber of Commerce supports Colorado State University's proposed on-campus stadium.

It is uncommon for communities of our size to secure an investment of this magnitude. Done correctly this is an exciting opportunity for Colorado State University and Fort Collins.

The project will have an overall positive impact on the local economy with no major economic risks for the community and a possibility of induced secondary investments.

Positive quality of life impacts are hard to quantify but in our opinion, the overall livability of the community will not be adversely impacted.

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As an independent public entity, CSU is free to act in its own self-interests. Even so, the university has been sensitive to the impact of this project on the Fort Collins community, neighborhoods and the community taxpayers. We expect the university's interest in being a good neighbor and community partner will continue to guide its actions to minimize friction and disruption during the construction and operation of the facility. Fort Collins taxpayers and ratepayers should not bear a disproportionate burden from stadium-related infrastructure and utilities costs. While over time the community benefits economically from a financially healthy CSU and the operation of the stadium itself, in the name of great town-gown relationships, it is wise for the university to mitigate those costs.

CSU leaders are to be commended for placing conditions on the project relative to use of public dollars for the stadium, expectations for private fund raising, incorporating academic uses in the facility and preserving green spaces and the campus' open feel.

CSU leaders are also to be commended for the openness of the process. While it is unfortunate that the conversation about the on-campus stadium was launched prematurely without sufficient explanation of the need, university leaders have subsequently done a good job of soliciting input and making information available.

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