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May 5, 2026

The Honorable Ken Hagan
Chairman
Hillsborough County Board of County Commissioners
601 E Kennedy Blvd
Tampa, FL 33602

The Honorable Alan Clendenin
Chairman
Tampa City Council
315 E Kennedy Blvd
Tampa, FL 33602

RE: Tampa Bay Rays Ballpark and Redevelopment Proposal

Dear Commissioner Hagan and Councilman Clendenin,

The Tampa Bay Rays ballpark and redevelopment proposal would be one of the most transformative projects in the history of Hillsborough County and the City of Tampa. This scale of development warrants public investment to maximize the private sector role. The Westshore Alliance supports the project for the positive economic and quality of life impacts the Tampa Bay Rays proposal is projected to create.

Economic impact on Drew Park, Westshore, and local governments

The project site is approximately 120 acres of land in the Drew Park neighborhood, which is part of the Westshore Planning District and the Westshore Special Services District. Our organization was founded in 1983 to guide the commercial development of the Westshore District and was one of the voices advocating for the creation of the Drew Park Community Redevelopment Area (CRA).

Westshore and Drew Park have experienced growth in recent years. However, both have had less taxable property value growth compared to Hillsborough County and the City of Tampa. (see table)

Location	FY26 taxable value growth
City of Tampa ⁱ	7.4%
Hillsborough County ⁱⁱ	6.9%
Hillsborough Commercial + Industrial ⁱⁱⁱ	5.8%
Drew Park (non-residential, non-public) ^{iv}	5.3%
Westshore (non-residential, non-public) ^v	3.1%

The County and City benefit directly from increasing property valuations in Westshore since the revenue generated in Westshore is not captured by a CRA, unlike Downtown Tampa and Ybor City. The revenue is used to fund operations and projects in every neighborhood. The best-case scenario for a return on public investment is a proposal the Rays have presented: a mixed-use development and ballpark on under-utilized or untaxed land. Part of the property tax revenue generated would be set aside for the Drew Park CRA, pending additional discussions between the Rays and local governments.

The Westshore Alliance will continue the Westshore District's transformation into a premier mixed-use district and cultivate a thriving community for residents and businesses.

The scale of the Rays' proposal is reasonable based on recent Westshore projects.^{vi} The policies are in place to make it successful. The updated Tampa Comprehensive Plan maximizes the mixed-use development potential of Westshore, including the Rays' site.^{vii} These land use policies have been proven to generate private development, and local government goals of economic growth and infrastructure development.

The Rays proposal envisions this location as an entertainment district, which is in demand. The Westshore Alliance 2025 Westshore District survey showed that "a new event and music venue" was the most desired amenity in Westshore for workers and residents.^{viii} An event venue continues to be a top-three request of the residents and workers over the history of the survey. The combination of Raymond James Stadium, the Rays' site, and large parcels on Dale Mabry Hwy, provides an opportunity to completely transform a major corridor.

Transportation impacts

The Westshore Alliance advocates for an "all of the above" approach for transportation: better roads, more transit, and safer pedestrian corridors.^{ix} The Rays have expressed support for these projects, but more can be done.

Most people will drive to the site for business, college classes, and games. The ongoing improvements to the Westshore Interchange will provide a significant benefit for drivers using I-275 and other state highways. The Rays and the Florida Department of Transportation (FDOT) are coordinating additional improvements, including addressing the decades-old bottleneck where Dale Mabry narrows to four lanes over Hillsborough Ave.

The greatest infrastructure opportunities are the possible pedestrian and transit projects that will support the site and facilitate connections for neighborhoods and the region. As a community, we should use the Rays' site as a catalyst for building out the Tampa International Airport SkyConnect people mover as a regional transit system. The people mover would first connect to the FDOT owned site on Cypress Street. The system then would connect across the region via 275 and Dale Mabry, including a connection at the Rays' ballpark.

Public agencies should work closer with the Rays to address the broader neighborhood network, including sidewalks and trails, not just pedestrian bridges. That will support communities and create safer streets beyond the site footprint.

Investing in businesses and civic assets

The crux of the argument for and against the Tampa Bay Rays ballpark and redevelopment concept is this: "Should public dollars be invested in private development?" The history of Tampa shows that the answer is a resounding yes, including at this site.

We became a global city when Drew Army Airfield was turned over for Tampa International Airport and redevelopment after World War II. Federal land on Dale Mabry was purchased by the City of Tampa in 1949 for a future community sports complex, including what became Tampa Stadium and Raymond James Stadium.^x Defense contractor CAE moved to Drew Park in 2019 thanks to local incentives, land from Tampa International

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Airport, and a \$70 million loan from Space Florida.^{xi} From buying the old Plant Hotel to building water pipes to New Tampa, this community has always invested public dollars to facilitate private development.^{xii} The investment of public dollars in these assets, and more, has been proven beneficial over the course of our community's history.

Unlike baseball, economic development is a contact sport. What is the message we want to send to the rest of Florida? To the nation, or to the world? We are not going to have another chance to make an investment like this opportunity. It is unlikely that any large project, from a stadium to transit, will be entirely funded by one source of funds. We must invest in ourselves to grow. The cost of doing nothing is far greater than the cost of this project.

Public-private partnerships are the best way to leverage investments from both sources, as well as divide the investment risk. Hillsborough County and the City of Tampa have the tools to minimize the public risk. The Rays have been upfront about such tools. That is why they offered the initial 35-year lease and non-relocation agreement.^{xiii} Other communities have used legislation to solidify these agreements.

The Rays should be asked to do more, including community planning studies. Drew Park is due for a new CRA and master plan update, and the Westshore Alliance has scheduled an update of the Westshore Master Plan in 2027. The Rays can be a partner with the Hillsborough Planning Commission to help design the future of Westshore, West Tampa, and the surrounding neighborhoods. The Rays' planned investments for Hillsborough College programs are admirable. However, there are existing workforce programs that will need funding to train the hundreds, if not thousands, of skilled trades workers the project will need.

There are only 30 Major League Baseball teams in the world. They are civic assets. The County and City have the funding and policies available to make sure we do not lose one. It is a reflection on our business climate if we do not make investments in civic assets, public or private. It is worth it to make this investment. The Westshore Alliance supports the Tampa Bay Rays proposal because it will transform our economy and improve the quality of life in our community.

We look forward to working with you and the Tampa Bay Rays to make this project successful.

Sincerely,



Ed Ellsasser
President, Westshore Alliance
Managing Director, Prime Group Insurance Hilb Group



Michael Maurino
Executive Director, Westshore Alliance

CC: Hillsborough County Board of County Commissioners
Tampa City Council

ⁱ City of Tampa General Government Major Revenues, FY2026 Operating and Capital Budget Summary:

[https://stories.opengov.com/tampa/f9ac8a22-1024-454b-bb87-](https://stories.opengov.com/tampa/f9ac8a22-1024-454b-bb87-f5f980e98715/published/4rwPtXRZO?currentPageId=67efdb576a7ef5cbb8213186)

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ⁱⁱ Hillsborough County FY26 Adopted Budget Book, <https://hcfi.gov/government/budget/budget-information/fy26-budget>

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^{iv} Hillsborough County Property Appraiser, 2025 Non-ad valorem tax roll, Westshore Special Services District, Tampa City Council regular meeting, 8/28/2025, agenda No. 59, File No. E2025-8 CH 24

^v Hillsborough County Property Appraiser, 2025 Non-ad valorem tax roll, Westshore Special Services District, Tampa City Council regular meeting, 8/28/2025, agenda No. 59, File No. E2025-8 CH 24

^{vi} The Rays proposal is 6 to 8 million square feet on 120 acres. That ratio is similar to WestShore Plaza (54 acres, 3.6 million square feet approved as of 2024) and Midtown Tampa (23 acres, 1.8+ million square feet).

^{vii} Tampa Future Land Use Section Draft, 2/17/2026, Plan Hillsborough, <https://planhillsborough.org/city-of-tampa-future-land-use-assessment/>

^{viii} 2025 Westshore Alliance Resident & Worker Survey, HCP Associates, "Desire for New Amenities in Westshore," May 2026

^{ix} Westshore Alliance letter to Hillsborough Transportation Planning Organization, 6/12/24

^x Tampa Pix, "Tampa Ballpark," <https://www.tampapix.com/tampaballpark.htm>

^{xi} Tampa Bay Business Journal, "CAE USA receives \$70 million loan for construction of new training center at TPA," 11/5/2021, <https://www.bizjournals.com/tampabay/news/2021/11/05/cae-usa-receives-70-million.html>

^{xii} Henry B. Plant Museum, "Henry B. Plant," <https://www.plantmuseum.com/about/henry-b-plant-bio>

^{xiii} MLB.com, "Rays reveal timeline, funding plan for proposed ballpark," <https://www.mlb.com/news/rays-propose-timeline-funding-plan-for-ballpark-at-hillsborough-college-site> 4/9/26.