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A Study of the Proposed Richmond Coliseum

Coleman Bennett Yeatts Jr.

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A STUDY OF THE PROPOSED
RICHMOND COLISEUM

A Thesis
Presented To
the Faculty of the Department of Political Science
University of Richmond

In Partial Fulfillment
of the Requirements for the Degree
Master of Arts

by
Coleman Bennett Yeatts, Jr.
June 1967
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CHAPTER I

INTRODUCTION

Nearly seven years ago, representatives of Richmond's leading cultural groups - such as Ballet Impromptu, The Children's Theater and others - appeared before City Council to ask for assistance in the construction of a theater for the performing arts. This recent campaign to improve cultural facilities has been converted into a move to make Richmond one of the South's leading basketball cities as well as a major meeting place for large conventions. This move is to be the building of one of, if not, the finest Coliseums in the country.¹

The evolution from cultural center to sports coliseum was gradual and subtle. It began when representatives of the cultural groups asked the city to finance a study to determine the desirability and feasibility of a downtown theater for the performing arts. They indicated they would try to finance its construction with contributions from citizens and businesses. Their arguments were so impressive that the City Council appropriated nearly $9,000 for the study. The study showed "that Richmond has an urgent need for, and can support cultural, educational, recreational,

¹News item in the Richmond Times Dispatch, December 20, 1964.
because of the vital part this structure would play in the economy and general welfare of our city."5

On October 19, 1964 Mayor Crowe named a Citizen's Committee to advise the City Council about a sports Coliseum. The committee was made up of the following: John Bagby, Jr., realtor; John S. Lanahan, hotel man; William M. Hill, banker; Ferrucio L. Legnolioli, architect; and Robert J. Habenicht, lawyer member of Council. This Citizen's Committee, under direction of a resolution sponsored by Councilman Henry R. Miller III was to study and recommend to the City Council (1) a desirable location, (2) size, and (3) design. The Committee had nothing to do with a theater.6

The Citizen's Committee's investigation confirmed the fact that Richmond needs a Coliseum to serve its citizens and to compete with other cities as a convention and tourist center. A Coliseum provides entertainment, cultural and educational opportunities, and many other varied activities that belong in a metropolitan center. Throughout the country numerous cities either have a Coliseum or are at present constructing, or planning to construct, such a facility. One of the principal benefits for a city having a Coliseum is that it will bring additional revenue to the city. It will bring conventioneers, and it will bring people to the

5Ibid.

city to view or to participate in events held in the Coliseum. 7

The importance of conventions is demonstrated by figures compiled by the Richmond Chamber of Commerce, which estimates that 90,000 people came to Richmond to attend conventions in 1964. They stayed an average of three days, and they spent over thirty-three dollars per person, per day, which flowed into the general economy of the city. The lack of night time activity in Richmond, however, and the lack of a suitable area for large meetings and extensive trade shows within walking distance of hotels have made it difficult to attract certain conventions to Richmond. There is a large potential that remains untapped. 8

In the great majority of cities that have recently built Coliseums the structures are usually not sports arenas only, but are air-conditioned and designed to facilitate the widest possible variety of uses. In this way the many demands by different groups found in the city cause the structure to be occupied and used to the maximum extent. 9

A partial listing of suggested Coliseum uses in the Richmond area follows:


8Ibid.

9Ibid., p. 5.
Ice Skating  
Ice Shows  
Basketball  
Hockey  
Tennis  
Roller Skating  
Track  
Boxing  
Wrestling  
Table Tennis  
Rifle Range  
Rodeo  
Flower Shows  
Horse Shows  
Jazz Festivals  
Antique Shows  

Dancing  
Circuses  
Religious Meetings  
Pops Concerts  
Home Shows  
Teachers' Meetings  
Convention Meetings  
Automobile Shows  
Boat Shows  
Trade Shows  
Product Introduction  
Mass Meetings  
School Graduation  
School Meetings  
Dog Shows  
Medical College of Virginia Meetings

It is interesting to note that practically every reason for building the Coliseum was back in 1953 a reason for building the Arena. Times have changed, Richmond has grown, but certain needs remain the same.

CHAPTER II

THE LOCATION OF THE COLISEUM

When selecting a site for any Coliseum the most important factor is whether it should be downtown or in an outlying area. This is especially pertinent since the function and possible use varies considerably with this decision. In Richmond any number of locations could have been suggested as having the land area, parking, and roads to merit consideration for a Coliseum. The three locations that have been mentioned most prominently in the past are the Atlantic Rural Exposition grounds, the Parker Field area, and a downtown site.11

The location at the Atlantic Rural Exposition grounds, better known as the State Fair Grounds, was suggested by the owners of the grounds, the Atlantic Rural Exposition, Inc. The civic-minded officials of this organization were most cooperative with the Citizen's Committee, and they should be commended for their endeavors to provide a Coliseum for Richmond. The Parker Field location had been proposed by various Richmond citizens in the past. The downtown site was first suggested in Richmond's First Master Plan in 1946 and later in 1964 by the Planning Commission.12

11Coliseum Committee, op. cit., p. 7.

12Ibid.
The following is a comparison of the advantages and disadvantages of the three locations taken from the Coliseum Committee Report of February, 1965.

ATLANTIC RURAL EXPOSITION GROUNDS

Advantages

1. Ample vacant land is available for development of a Coliseum and parking area.

2. Parking would be adequate and within walking distance of the Coliseum.

3. Opportunity would exist to make use of existing management at the State Fair Grounds, thereby saving on operating costs and possibly increasing efficiency.

4. Existing facilities at the State Fair Grounds would be most suitable for staging and handling animal shows, circuses, etc.

Disadvantages

1. Not served by expressway network present or proposed.

2. Considerable cost to the city is necessary to provide arteries to make the site accessible.

3. Not convenient to hotels, restaurants, shops or other major concentrations of employment, or transient accommodations.

4. Not readily accessible by public transportation.

5. Traffic congestion on nearby local streets would be detrimental if not destroy residential areas.

6. This site requires the expenditure of city tax money in Henrico County rather than within the city.
PARKER FIELD

Advantages

1. Adjacent to an interchange of I-95 and served by several other main traffic arteries.

2. Closer to the center of population of the Richmond metropolitan area.

3. The land is already city-owned.

4. Relatively accessible by public transportation.

Disadvantages

1. Not sufficient land available to provide for concurrent activities at the Arena and Coliseum or at Parker Field and the Coliseum.

2. Costly multi-deck parking necessary due to lack of land. Also would probably require parking use of the existing recreation area.

3. Immediate street improvements necessary to make this site accessible.

4. Not convenient to hotels, restaurants, shops and other major concentration of employment.

5. One-way ramps on and off I-95 and Acca Bridge as well as left turn movements in this vicinity limit traffic flow and would result in congestion.

6. Increased traffic and parking on local residential streets would be detrimental to property values.

DOWNTOWN SITE

Advantages

1. Adjacent to interchange of I-64 and I-95.

2. The downtown area is the focus of not only the expressway network but of all major traffic arteries.
3. Downtown is the hub of the transit system. It is the origin or termination of almost every regular bus line.

4. Regardless of the development of any future mass transit system, the downtown area will always be the hub with regard to origin and terminus, thus never be inaccessible.

5. Convenient to hotels, restaurants, shops, and major employment centers.

6. Most accessible point of entire metropolitan region.

7. Greater opportunity for varied use and multi-functional operation.

8. Maximum attraction to tourist and conventionaire.

9. Would eliminate and redevelop obsolete and worn-out areas adjacent to the retail core by its construction and development of surrounding areas by private enterprise.

10. Would provide to the City of Richmond the maximum return for money spent by the city by varied use and occupancy.

11. Would enhance the vitality of the downtown area and provide in the central core the opportunity for exchange of ideas, and concentration of multi-varied activities. This is the very purpose of the central area and governmental actions such as this should be taken to help it perform its functions.

12. Roughly 20% of this site will be acquired for the widening of Leigh Street and the downtown streets will be adjusted to efficiently handle the I-95 and the I-64E interchange.

Disadvantages

1. High cost of land.

2. Does not have a large parking area directly adjacent, however, some additional land may have to be acquired or private parking provided on scattered nearby sites.
3. Relocation of a few people and businesses may be a problem.

4. This site less suitable for staging and handling animal shows.

5. Site restricted for future expansion by existing street pattern.

6. When not in use there would be the possibility of a relatively large inactive "dead area" in the core of the city.

7. Traffic congestion would occur when a major activity coincided with peak traffic movement such as the night time traffic volume just before Christmas.

Basically the decision on locating a Coliseum had to be resolved between a downtown location and a location outside of the downtown area. The Citizen's Coliseum Committee felt that the great weight of evidence indicated that a downtown location, over any other location, should be selected for a multi-purpose Coliseum. It is for this reason that the Coliseum will be built on the two-block downtown area bounded by Clay, Leigh, Fifth, and Seventh Streets.¹³

There are always conflicting views with any decision that is made and the locating of the Coliseum downtown is no exception. Council member Robert C. Throckmorton criticized city involvement in the Coliseum project, and said it "shouldn't spend tax money for what private enterprise could do." He predicted the Coliseum would be used only forty nights a year and "will be a total flop where it's going to be put."

He said the logical place for an area Arena is in the State Fair complex in Strawberry Hills. 14

Thomas T. Vinson, Jr., executive director of the Home Builders Association of Richmond, expressed concern about accessibility and about parking facilities. In his opinion, Parker Field and the State Fair Grounds are more attractive possible sites. Vinson said he was not consulted by the Coliseum Committee, and he knew of no other promoters of large trade shows who were consulted. A spokesman for the committee said it consulted several experts and relied heavily upon the experience of other cities with Coliseums. Nearly all of them recommended downtown sites. 15

Coach Malcolm Pitt, head of the Athletic Department of the University of Richmond and a man whose opinion is respected all over the country, goes along with the opinion of Throckmorton and Vinson that the place for the Coliseum is not downtown. 16 City Manager Horace H. Edwards, in a recent interview, indicated that he would rather see the Coliseum built at the State Fair Grounds. One of the reasons he cited was that the Fair Grounds was a much better location for the

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15 News item in the Richmond Times Dispatch, February 27, 1965.
16 Interview taken with Coach Malcolm Pitt, Head of the Athletic Department of the University of Richmond, May 15, 1966.
handling of circus animals and horses for horse shows.  

The main reason the Coliseum Committee ruled in favor of a downtown location is that in order for the Coliseum to be most useful in connection with conventions, it must be downtown where hotel and motel facilities are concentrated.  

An authority on the subject of Coliseum locations says:

"Many lose sight of the fact that the most important consideration is the need for convention-type buildings to be in close proximity to hotels and restaurants. Those who ignore this important factor lean towards huge parking facilities, available only in the suburban areas. Close proximity to hotels is vital to conventions, for frequently conventioneers desire clothing changes and comfort facilities not too far from the convention; also, they like to be near restaurants. Conventions conducted in buildings some distance from hotels cause extra transportation fees or the need for driving personally owned cars to and from hotel areas. It has been found that convention site committees favor cities where the convention site is closest to hotels and restaurants."

On the question of whether to build the Coliseum downtown or not this writer, after extended research, will have to rule in favor of the Coliseum Committee's decision to locate the Coliseum downtown. It is felt that due to the multi-purpose of the Coliseum and due to the revenue the city will gain from conventioneers, who will visit the city, it is a wise decision. This writer admits that there are disadvantages, such as the parking problem, but it is felt that the advantages far outweigh the disadvantages.

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17 Interview taken with Horace H. Edwards, City Manager of the City of Richmond, April 11, 1967.

18 News item in the Richmond Times Dispatch, March 1, 1965.

19 Coliseum Committee, op. cit., pp. 4-5.
CHAPTER III

THE COLISEUM STRUCTURE

On September 9, 1965, a four-man Coliseum Advisory Committee was named. Councilman Robert J. Habenicht, sponsor of the resolution which created the committee, was named as Council representative on the body. Other members of the Committee are John Lanahan, President of Richmond Hotels, Inc., William M. Hill, Vice President of The Bank of Virginia, and Henry B. Hucles, a Negro, who is a professor in the Physical Education Department of Virginia Union University and a former Athletic Director of the college. Lananan and Hill had figured in speculation for appointment since the committee was announced. Hucles, however, had not been mentioned as a potential member until two weeks before the committee was named, when Habenicht offered an amendment changing the body from three to four. According to sources close to Council it was indicated that Hucles was named in order to lend a bi-racial composition to the group. Committee considerations of resettlement and land acquisition problems might be aided by the bi-racial makeup, said these sources. William Hill on September 20, 1965, was elected president of the City Council's four-man Coliseum Advisory Committee. Their first emphasis was on land

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acquisition efforts and retention of architects. 21

A nationally prominent architectural firm, Vincent G. Kling and Associates of Philadelphia was chosen, January 18, 1966, to design the Richmond Coliseum. Ben R. Johns, Jr., a local architect, was named the prime architect who will work with Kling. City Manager Edwards with the backing of the four-man City Council Coliseum Advisory Committee made the announcement. Edwards said the two architectural firms will jointly develop the project, with Kling handling the schematics and design development and Johns handling most of the local detail. Kling in his first Richmond interview demonstrated to newsmen the reasons for his reputation: 22

"I don't know if we will bury the first floors and put an umbrella on top or build it on stilts. No two Coliseums are alike, problems of sitting, relationship to the rest of the city, public transportation and how we handle automobiles will be considered in our approach." 23

Kling's conversation was liberally laced with futuristic concepts such as shows suspended from the dome and his vision of a Coliseum which is a "three-dimensional cube from which you can see something completely." William M. Hill, the Chairman of the Coliseum Advisory Committee, hailed City Manager Edwards' decision. "In the Kling firm Richmond has

23 Ibid.
obtained what we consider one of the nation's best."

Kling has achieved national repute for his designs which have combined function and aesthetics. His work on the Civic Center in Norfolk won him acclaim. A Boston Coliseum and arena and a municipal building in Philadelphia have been highly praised also.

At present the seating capacity for the Richmond Coliseum is to be somewhere around 12,000. It is planned for the Coliseum to have approximately 10,000 permanent seats and around 2,000 temporary seats for spectator sporting events. For conventions another 1,000 persons could be accommodated on the arena floor for a total seating capacity of 13,000. There is some talk that this is too many seats for the Richmond Coliseum; however, there is pressure on the committee by local sports organizations to have this large seating capacity so the city will be able to bid on major regional basketball tournaments. Also, Civic groups and persons interested in attracting major conventions and reported to have told the committee that the larger seating capacity would add relatively little to the cost and would give Richmond, when attempting to book major conventions, an added attraction.

24 Ibid.
William M. Hill, Chairman of City Council's Coliseum Advisory Committee said two primary considerations led to the decision to go for at least 12,000 seats.

"First, we wanted to be competitive, and let's not forget that there are several arenas in adjoining states which will seat 12,000 persons for sporting events. Second, we want to be sure that we are building enough capacity for the future. Projections on the number of events which would fill a 12,000 seat - or even larger - Coliseum must take into consideration the tremendous population growth of the area and the state as a whole."27

The City Council's Coliseum Advisory Committee and the architects took a flying trip in the latter part of March, 1966. On the trip they visited Coliseums at Charlotte and Greensboro, North Carolina, Memphis, Tennessee, and St. Petersburg, Florida. As a result of the tour costly design mistakes on the Coliseum can be avoided. 28

On April 14, 1966 at a day-long planning design session David C. Margolf, project co-ordinator for Vincent Kling, architect, showed preliminary designs which emphasize the multi-purpose feature of the city's proposed Coliseum. Kling unveiled a concourse level design concept which produced an estimated 30,000 to 40,000 square feet of exhibition space.29 His concept envisions the use of a modified flying buttress type of roof support with enclosure of the buttresses.

29News item in the Richmond News Leader, April 14, 1966.
to create broad expanses of exhibit area in the pedestrian walkways at ground level. "It makes it a civic building, rather than a sports arena out in the middle of the country somewhere," said Kling. Another 20,000 square feet of exhibit space for large items such as boats or trucks would be supplied in a corridor at the level of the arena floor, which is approximately thirty feet below grade. Ingress and egress for large equipment using this corridor would be from Clay Street. This area would also serve to house circus animals and other items connected with traveling shows. To gain this ground-level space, however, it is a near necessity to depress Clay Street.\(^{30}\) In fact, Kling plans to depress both Clay and Leigh Streets. The depression of Leigh Street will likely be postponed several years in order to cut costs.\(^ {31} \) Depressing the streets will permit "safety for 10,000 to 12,000 pedestrians," letting them walk directly to parking areas or proposed motels without crossing streets. "There is as much invested below the street as there is above," Kling said.\(^ {32} \) Kling also proposes to bend Fifth and Seventh Streets outward to create a broad pedestrian plaza and vehicle unloading area around the Coliseum. Sixth Street from Broad

\(^{30}\text{Ibid.}\)

\(^{31}\text{News item in the Richmond News Leader, June 18, 1966.}\)

\(^{32}\text{News item in the Richmond Times Dispatch, July 19, 1966.}\)
to the Coliseum would become a pedestrian mall. 33

Since the Coliseum is designed as both a sports and convention facility, the added exhibition space should give Richmond a much better drawing card for large conventions. Another convention-related feature of the preliminary Kling design is a small complex of meeting rooms, offices, and food handling facilities. 34

City Councilman Robert J. Habenicht and a member of the Coliseum Committee, reacted favorably to the Kling proposal.

"Today's presentation gives us the emphasis on the dual purpose of our Coliseum in contrast of the previous emphasis on spectator sports. It is the hope of City Council and the Coliseum Committee that we will have a banner attraction for conventions as well as the best sports arena in the East." 35

Operators of other Coliseums have said that, if built as planned, Richmond's Coliseum "will be one of the finest in the country." Richmond may be late in building a Coliseum, but it has the advantage of profiting from mistakes made by others. 36

Some of the points that have been agreed upon are as follows: (1) The Coliseum will be gas heated and gas airm-
conditioned, (2) There will be no escalators. Pedestrians will not have to walk up and down many steps because entrances will be at the half-way level. (3) The Coliseum will extend about thirty-five feet below street level. (4) The quality of seats will be good, but how good depends on the cost. (5) The Coliseum will be quickly convertible for uses "from a horse show, to a circus, to a track meet." (6) The design of the Coliseum will include room for one tennis court and it could be used for swimming events with the installation of a portable tank. 

To provide Richmond with the country's finest Coliseum-convention center is going to cost around $20,000,000. The City Council put $16,100,000 into the 1966-67 capital budget for the project. Before the Council would vote on the project, however, it was necessary for a feasibility study to be performed. A breakdown of how the $16,100,000 Council put into the 1966-67 capital budget for the project would be used is as follows:

<table>
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<tr>
<th>Description</th>
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<tr>
<td>Coliseum building and equipment</td>
<td>$9,858,000</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Additional land</td>
<td>$3,100,000</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Depressing Clay Street</td>
<td>$2,750,000</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Relocating Fifth and Seventh Streets</td>
<td>$265,000</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Street improvements (Fourth and Clay, Eighth and Clay)</td>
<td>$66,000</td>
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<td>Demolition of buildings, test borings, etc.</td>
<td>$61,000</td>
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**TOTAL** $16,100,000

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37 Ibid.


For the 1967-68 budget year, Council has included an additional $3,102,000 to be used for depressing Leigh Street in the vicinity of the Coliseum. This feature, coupled with a plan to control development in a wide area around the Coliseum, has raised the price to over $20,000,000.

In a Richmond Times Dispatch article dated January 2, 1967, the total Coliseum cost is listed at $20,200,000. Interest added for twenty years raises that figure to $28,516,000. After twenty years, however, the facility and land are estimated to have a depreciated value of $16,280,000.

In order to determine the true cost of the Coliseum, it is necessary to subtract the depreciated value of this investment from the original cost of $28,516,000. A homeowner goes through this same type of process when he pays for his home in twenty years and continues to enjoy the benefits relatively free for another thirty years. "The present value of the $16,280,000 (discounted at 4.0 per cent interest, which the city could earn if it chose to invest the funds elsewhere) is $9,181,920. The real cost of the investment is, therefore, $19,334,080." Total tax revenue and operating income will be $23,500,000 ($470,000 multiplied by 50 years), a figure greater than the real cost of the investment.

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40Ibid.
41News item in the Richmond News Leader, December 6, 1966.
In response to a question concerning the roof of the Coliseum the Architect, Vincent G. Kling, said the exterior roof will be copper-toned, but that it will be made of aluminum. "Copper is too expensive and the fact of the matter is that aluminum will do the job better." 43

With reference to the seats, Kling said that the furthest seats from Richmond's Coliseum floor will be ten percent closer to the floor than in any other Coliseum of similar size in the country. Inside the coliseum, the arena floor will be two stories below ground level, thereby placing the principal spectator entrances at the mid-point in the grandstands and cutting in half the average distance a spectator will have to walk to reach his seat. 44

The exterior of the Coliseum is highlighted by thirty-two vertical piers, eight stories high, arranged in radial arcs extending from the center point of the arena. These piers will be clad with native Virginia brick, said Kling, "to give a strong sense of continuity with the traditional architectural flavor of downtown Richmond." 45

Almost a year ago, on May 13, 1966 Kling presented a series of schematic drawings of the floor plan of the Coliseum and layouts of seating arrangements, site improvements, and a pedestrian mall on Sixth Street leading into

44 Ibid.
45 Ibid.
the main entrances of the structure. 46

"We have designed for you the absolute best Coliseum in America," Kling said. "The sight lines in this building and the Architectural features and acoustics would be better than those of any Coliseum we have seen." 47

City Councilman Henry R. Miller III said that he had "seen many of the country's top arenas and Coliseums and there is nothing like this anywhere." There were other Council comments:

Scott Anderson - "I'm surprised (at the price) just like everybody else is. I'm surprised that it would be that much and very much concerned as to whether we can put up that much money for it."

Robert C. Throckmorton - "The only thing I have to say is that it looks like we've gotten into an agreement with Cape Kennedy - there's no telling how high it will go."

Mrs. Eleanor P. Sheppard - "This is an opportunity that the city should grasp. It's the first project I've seen presented in my twelve years of considering public buildings that's had no negative aspects other than the price tag." 48

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47 Ibid.
CHAPTER IV

THE PARKING PROBLEM

How quickly will you be able to get into and out of Richmond's new Coliseum? Where will you park your car? Where will charter buses be stored during Coliseum events? On Friday, March 4, 1966, these were some of the matters considered by Richmond's Coliseum Committee in talks with representatives of bus lines and taxicab companies.\(^{49}\)

An important goal according to John T. Hanna, City Traffic Engineer, is the need to separate automobile traffic from buses and cabs. Hanna feels that there should be a discharge point for automobiles and taxicabs right at the box office, a point for discharging passengers near the box office and a place where charter buses could park within a reasonable walking distance from the Coliseum.\(^{50}\)

Representing the transportation services at the meeting were Kermit Blanks of the Virginia Transit Co., Sidney J. Hunt of Eastern Greyhound Lines, and John Harvey of Trailways. These men with the aid of the committee members attempted and are still attempting to foresee the possible parking problems and to do something to avoid them.\(^{51}\)

\(^{49}\)News item in the *Richmond Times Dispatch*, March 5, 1966.

\(^{50}\)Ibid.

\(^{51}\)Ibid.
It has been found that "a parking space is needed for every three persons arriving at a Coliseum by automobile."
The use of good public transportation can reduce this need.
"Some well-attended Coliseums report that ten-twenty per cent of their patrons arrive by bus." Richmond with its transit systems can transport a substantial number of Coliseum patrons.\(^5^2\)

For capacity crowds there should, ideally, be approximately 4,000 parking spaces readily available and easily accessible. It is, however, simply not feasible to design parking for peak crowds because they will occur only ten-twenty times per year.\(^5^3\)

In a survey of other Coliseums throughout the country walking distances from parking areas varied from one to six blocks. "Apparently, persons attending special attractions at Coliseums are willing to walk up to six blocks." Attendance falls off sharply beyond this distance. At the Richmond location (the two-block site bounded by Clay, Leigh, Fifth, and Seventh Sts.) there are over 5,000 off-street spaces within \(\frac{4}{3}\) blocks of the proposed facility.\(^5^4\)

In Richmond at the time that most events take place there will be more than enough spaces available. However,

\(^{5^2}\)Rountrey and Associates, op. cit., p. 35.
\(^{5^3}\)Ibid.
\(^{5^4}\)Ibid., p. 36.
when the downtown stores are open at night, the number of available spaces will be reduced since many of them will be taken up by shoppers and retail employees. There should be enough spaces within four or five blocks though if the monthly and private spaces could be made available during these busy evenings. 55

As the recent Rountrey Economic Feasibility Study points out "the real parking problem exists only when the 'spectaculars' are in town and even then only when the downtown shoppers and employees are in competition with the Coliseum goers for the spaces."

In summary, even though in the vicinity of the Coliseum parking conditions are not ideal, they appear to be at least satisfactory for most of the events that will take place. The Rountrey Study feels "that Richmond can operate successfully in the downtown location without additional parking facilities." Perhaps in time, Richmond can follow Baltimore's example and lend money "to private operators for the development of parking lots" with an interest charge. 56

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55 Ibid., pp. 36-37.
56 Ibid., p. 37.
CHAPTER V

THE ECONOMIC FEASIBILITY

Since the Coliseum is going to cost much more than was anticipated several of the councilmen have been somewhat apprehensive about voting for it. Back in June of 1966 Councilman James C. Wheat, Jr., insisted upon looking into the feasibility of the program before going further.

"This," he said, "may be the wisest investment we could possibly make - and it might be the worst. What I propose is to make the authorization available, and at the same time keep strings on its expenditure until we can consider further its feasibility at this figure." 57

At a Council meeting, Phil J. Bagley, Jr., along with Henry R. Miller III, B. Addison Cephas, and Robert J. Habenicht, indicated they would concur in the Wheat proposal. Councilman A. Scott Anderson indicated he would be against it. Mayor Crowe did not indicate what he would do, nor did Councilman Robert C. Throckmorton. Councilman Eleanor P. Sheppard was not present. 58

The new Council, which took office July 1, 1966, had the final say on the expenditure of the Coliseum authorization. There were three new members on the City Council - Winfred Mundle, Henry L. Marsh, III., and Howard H. Carwile. These Anderson who did not run for re-election, and Miller and Throckmorton, who lost their seats. 59

58 Ibid.
59 Ibid.
As has been pointed out the City Council voted approval of the needed funds in its 1966-67 Capital Improvement Budget ($16.1 million for the first year), but added to its action the stipulation that City Manager Horace H. Edwards could spend none of the money until the Economic Feasibility Study was completed. In addition, City Council separated the Coliseum Bonds from other capital improvements bonds because there were reports that citizens might petition for a referendum on the Coliseum project.\(^60\) (Which they did not do)

On August 22, 1966, a resolution for a $6,000 Economic Feasibility Study on the Coliseum-convention center was introduced at the City Council meeting. The resolution authorized City Manager Horace H. Edwards to spend that sum on a study to see if the city is justified in spending such a large sum of money on the project.\(^61\)

By October of 1966 a contract had been made with Rountrey and Associates, a Richmond real estate consultant firm, to make the study. Horace H. Edwards said that the contract with Rountrey and Associates should give a definite appraisal of prospects for economic return, both short and long range, on the convention complex. Said Edwards:

"We hope to have figures on the operations experiences of nearly all other similar operations around the country. There is no expectation that we will

\(^{60}\) News item in the Richmond News Leader, July 18, 1966.

\(^{61}\) News item in the Richmond News Leader, August 22, 1966.
find the operation of the Coliseum itself profitable, since the funds from admissions and rentals are simply not great enough to pay off the bonded indebtedness of such projects. We will be looking at other areas of economic impact to determine the economic feasibility."62 Rountrey and Associates is headed by J. Edward Rountrey. Dr. Robert C. Burton, University of Richmond Economist, collaborated on the Coliseum project with the firm.63

According to the Rountrey Report all of the managers of arenas, Coliseums, and auditoriums contacted "submitted that economic feasibility was or should be of secondary consideration; that the fundamental or basic function of the Coliseum-auditorium-arena is to serve the community."64 City support of a Coliseum would be similar to support of an airport or a park. The rate of return on investment of Byrd Field or the deepwater terminal in Richmond has not been such that private enterprise would be interested in these facilities as investment opportunities. No one can argue that Richmond should close Byrd Field simply because the return on investment is less than four per cent. The entire community is served by the airport including private citizens, state public officials, as well as the vast business and manufacturing community. In a like manner the Coliseum will serve the Richmond community.

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63 News item in the Richmond News Leader, December 27, 1966.
64 Rountrey and Associates, op. cit., p. 8.
Building the Coliseum downtown will stimulate building activity which will increase basic land values in the vicinity of the Coliseum. 65 The records of the Richmond City Assessor's Office indicate that the value of land is increasing in the Coliseum vicinity.

"Sales of land within three or four blocks of the facility show a considerable increase in value of land per square foot. An average of sales for 1961-62 show the average value of land per square foot to be $2.50. An average of sales for 1965-66 show the average value of land per square foot to have moved up to $4.85." 66

There are other reasons, besides the Coliseum, that have made the land values go up. The westward movement of the Medical College of Virginia, the City's Civic Center, private building activity in the area, the Federal Building, and the Interstate routes, have all contributed in making this land more valuable. 67

The proposed city acquisition will include portions of property that might not be needed for the project. The argument is that it would be cheaper to acquire all of such properties than to purchase the needed parts and pay damages to the residue. 68

In dealing with the land-value it appears that the enhancement figures are somewhat nebulous and there is no

65 Ibid., p. 9.
66 Ibid., p. 10.
67 Ibid.
choice but to accept the opinions of experts. "There is, however, a much more tangible area of value enhancement. "This area is in the new building activity the Coliseum has stimulated, such as hotels, motels, restaurants, and parking. In dealing with these it is fair and accurate to conclude that the Coliseum has been responsible for this new activity. 69

Back in June of 1966, Vincent G. Kling, the Architect, said that his office had been contacted by "persons of substance" from New York, Philadelphia, and Richmond concerning projects around the Coliseum.

"There is a very definite interest in hotel, motel, and parking deck construction around the Coliseum. It is just a question of how soon after we get going that the others start. Their construction time would not be as long as ours, since they won't be building the size structure which we envision," Kling said. 70

Councilman Robert J. Habenicht predicted on January 10, 1967 that "At least one, but probably two new hotels" will be opened in downtown Richmond by the time the new Coliseum is finished. 71

A top Hilton Hotel official says that decisions need to be made promptly on visitor accommodations for persons attending conventions at the city's new Coliseum-convention center. "You're not going to book the big conventions here

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70 News item in the Richmond News Leader, June 7, 1966.

71 News item in the Richmond News Leader, January 10, 1967.
if you don't have a place for people to sleep," said Robert J. Caverly, executive vice president of the Hilton firm. The Hilton executive was in Richmond March 29, 1967, to discuss the possibilities of a new Hilton Hotel in Richmond. He met with City Manager Horace H. Edwards and his assistant, John T. Hanna. Caverly said Hilton has not yet settled on a site and that several are being considered. He emphasized that his firm wants to come to Richmond. "It's a progressive city. You're moving ahead and we want to move with you," he said. Caverly and William L. Siskind, a Baltimore lawyer who is a principal in the Hilton franchise operation here, agreed that Richmond, to augment the 12,000-seat Coliseum, needs a new 400 room convention hotel. Siskind said the structure planned by Hilton would cost from $6.5 million to $8 million, including land. He went on to say that the worthwhile conventions are booked two, three, even four years in advance. "That's why we've got to get plans under way right now to meet the opening of the Coliseum in 1969 or 1970."72

An estimated 600,000 persons per year will attend Coliseum functions in the first few years, but the figure will climb to 700,000-800,000 per year. These figures do not include convention business. It has been estimated that thirty to fifty per cent of the total attendants will be from outside the city. The amount of money each visitor

will spend outside the Coliseum, and primarily in the downtown area, has been estimated to be anywhere between four and eighteen dollars. Some of these visitors will shop. Most of them will buy at least one meal and many will pay for parking. On an average it has been estimated that each visitor to the city will spend about eight dollars. Most of those attending the Coliseum functions will be Richmonders, but those from outside Richmond will spend enough on food and incidentals to bring the city $27,872 in retail sales and merchants' gross receipts tax.

With references to conventions, the Rountrey Study reported that twenty-nine regional and national associations answered that their organizations were interested in Richmond.

"Total attending delegates of these associations were in excess of 35,000, average length of stay was three days, and approximately 33,000 stayed at least one night. Most of the respondents indicated that they would visit Richmond occasionally, but with no guarantee of regularity."

It must be concluded, after comparing this very limited sampling with the experience of other cities, "that Richmond will enjoy an upsurge of convention business once the facility is in operation."

If it is assumed that the Coliseum will be operating

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74 News item in the Richmond News Leader, December 27, 1966.
75 Rountrey and Associates, op. cit., p. 18.
to full capacity by the time the third season gets under way (possible only with proper management and promotion) then it is possible to estimate the income for the Coliseum. The Rountrey Feasibility Study used income from other facilities in areas similar in size and income to the Richmond Market Area to arrive at a reasonable income expectation for the Richmond operation. The income has been computed on the basis of estimated attendance which, as was mentioned earlier, is 600,000 per year for the first years and later 700,000-800,000 per year.

The estimated Rental Income for the Coliseum including exhibit space is $150,000. An average minimum rental charge of $500 or ten per cent of the gate (receipts) is the basis for this figure. Most facilities charge ten per cent of the gate and Richmond must be competitive. This charge could be more or less depending on the function. 76

The estimated Concessions Income for the Coliseum is $145,000. This figure is a gross figure. This means that if Richmond's Coliseum concessions were contracted out, it would become a net figure and be lower. "Of twelve cities reporting concession income of more than $100,000, six contracted the concession business out and six operated their own." 77

76 Ibid.
77 Ibid.
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76 Ibid.
77 Ibid.
There has been a great deal of speculation about "whiskey by the drink" in Richmond. Judging from information gathered from other cities the Rountrey Report feels that "this is not a vital factor." The Report says that "In the 'dry' cities satisfactory arrangements apparently are made with such things as the establishment of private clubs. For conventions, arrangements can be made by the various hotels." 78

The estimated Promotional and Skating Income for the Coliseum is $70,000 and the Miscellaneous Income is estimated to be $20,000. Miscellaneous Income includes such things as box office operation and vending machines. 79 The total income for the proposed Richmond Coliseum is estimated to be $385,000.

Assuming that the Coliseum will pay its own utilities and operate its own concession business it is possible to make a reasonable estimate of operating expenses. According to the Rountrey Report the greatest expense will be salaries and wages which may total $200,000 per annum. Other substantial expense items are as follows: Utilities and telephone expense $45,000; Concession expenses $40,000; Maintenance of building and equipment $20,000; Insurance $20,000. It is estimated that other expenses will total approximately $40,000 including items such as promotion and advertising, tickets, ushers, office supplies, and special public and guard assistance.

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78 Ibid.
79 Ibid.
at major events. By the third year of operation the total expenses should approximate $365,000.  

The Rountrey Report estimated the income generation to the Metropolitan Area and the City of Richmond totals $15,080,000 and $8,377,000, respectively. They summarized revenue generation to the City's budget from all sources at $835,000 annually from land value enhancement, along with real estate taxes from the expected new Hotels.  

There are many intangible benefits that the Coliseum will bring to the City of Richmond. It is impossible to measure the service such a facility will provide the people of the area. Many events which have not been able to come to Richmond because of lack of adequate facilities will be presented to the Richmond area public in the new facilities. The Coliseum will greatly enhance the entertainment and sports environment of the city. The construction of the Coliseum will be a powerful influence in the overall revitalization of the downtown, that city policy has been aiming at. The Coliseum will answer the old complaint of Richmonders, that there is little to do in Richmond at night. 

The building activity, discussed earlier, will in all probability generate still further building construction. It is not possible to relate this construction directly to the

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81 News item in the Richmond News Leader, December 27, 1966.
Coliseum. It must be related to the activity stimulated by the Coliseum. "This later construction may amount to many millions of dollars which may never have taken place had the Coliseum not been built." To measure this impact on the City of Richmond is impossible because it is intertwined with many developments, but this impact is real and tangible.  

After receiving the Rountrey Economic Feasibility Study City Council voted eight to one on January 9, 1967 to proceed with the proposed twenty-one million dollar coliseum project. Councilman Howard J. Carwile cast the only dissenting vote. Councilman James C. Wheat, Jr., spelled out what Council did by voting to proceed with the project. It committed itself to spend up to $200,000 for working plans and to receive bids for construction of the facility. Wheat said that if the bids received are higher than expected he might reconsider his position. "My vote is the approval of procedural steps, I'll feel perfectly free to reconsider when we get the bids in."  

Councilman Henry L. Marsh, III, said that voting on the Coliseum proposal was "An extremely difficult decision, but then its expected to last for fifty years. I hope we will exhibit the same degree of courage and enthusiasm for other needs." Councilman B. Addison Cephas, Jr., said the

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82 Rountrey and Associates, op. cit., p. 31.
83 News item in the Richmond Times Dispatch, January 10, 1967.
Coliseum "will give employment to people in all walks of life; I'm 100 per cent for it; it will have advantages for all citizens regardless of what economic status they may be in." 84

Howard H. Carwile, who cast the only dissenting vote, said the Coliseum "will be the number one white elephant of the world" and that downtown "is the most expensive, impractical" location. "It will serve the downtown vested interests but will not serve grassroots Richmond." 85

The president of the Crusade for Voters, Milton L. Randolph, said "we are in favor of a downtown location for the construction of a Coliseum. We feel that a location within the central district would more fully meet the cultural, recreational, and convention needs of our city." 86

Meredith A. House, a lawyer and former candidate for City Council, spoke in opposition to the Coliseum proposal as a representative of the Richmond Taxpayers Association. House said the Taxpayers Association "is greatly concerned about the soaring cost of government in Richmond. The Taxpayers Association supports wholeheartedly education in the City of Richmond, and we are extremely concerned that a large outlay for a luxury project might undermine the ability of the city to provide quality education." 87

84 Ibid.
85 Ibid.
86 Ibid.
87 Ibid.
A number of citizens made it known that they were in favor of the Coliseum. Vice Mayor Winfred Mundle said, "I've received a large number of letters and phone calls asking for approval." Among those urging Council to approve the project were William M. Hill, Chairman of Council's Coliseum Committee; John S. Lanahan, Vice President of the Central Richmond Association; Edmond H. Brill, Jr., representing the Richmond Chamber of Commerce, and Edward E. Willey, Jr., President of the Richmond Jaycees. 88

For several years there has been talk of a possibility of Federal Aid for the Coliseum project by considering it a form of urban renewal. On September 1, 1966, however, a House Committee, the House Banking and Currency Committee, killed specific authorization for more than fifty cities in the country, including a Coliseum in Richmond and projects in Newport News, Hampton, Portsmouth, and Roanoke. The specific authorization would have allowed Richmond to count its outlay for a Coliseum as part of the total cost of an urban renewal project. This would have meant that the federal government's two-thirds contribution to the urban renewal project would reduce the cost of the Coliseum to Richmond by a sizeable amount. The Committee rejected that approach and adopted instead a general provision that cities could count only twenty-five per cent of the cost of Coliseums and other

88 Ibid.
buildings as part of their urban renewal projects.

According to the Committee, a city would qualify for twenty-five per cent credit on specific facilities like coliseums only if the facility was within a quarter-mile of an actual urban renewal project and the Secretary of Housing and Urban Development approved the facility. "Richmond has no urban redevelopment project in the works at this time, and federal aid for a coliseum, therefore, is an academic question."}

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89 News item in the Richmond Times Dispatch, September 2, 1966.

90 Ibid.
Richmond is the Capital City of Virginia and centrally located within the area of the greatest density of population. It is, therefore, only natural that a modern year-round meeting place for state, regional, religious, and industrial groups be located here.

Richmond needs a Coliseum to serve its citizens and to compete with other cities as a convention and tourist center. The Coliseum will provide entertainment, cultural and educational opportunities, and many other varied activities that belong in a metropolitan center. It is felt by this writer that due to the multi-purpose of the Coliseum and due to the revenue the city will gain from conventioneers, who will visit Richmond, it is a wise decision to locate the Coliseum downtown.

In the Vincent G. Kling firm Richmond has obtained one of the nation's best architects. Officials and auditorium managers all over the country are unanimous in their agreement that the features planned are either necessary or highly desirable. Many of the site and building features represent what the planners and operators of other cities would have if they could start building all over again. If the Coliseum is built according to Kling's plans it will be one of the finest in the country.
Even though in the vicinity of the Coliseum parking conditions are not ideal, they appear to be at least satisfactory for most of the events that will take place. It was pointed out that the real parking problem exists only when the "spectaculars" are in town and even then only when the stores are open and the downtown shoppers and employees are in competition with the Coliseum goers for the parking spaces.

The economic effects of the proposed Coliseum are as follows: There would be an appreciation of land value in the vicinity of the Coliseum. Additional building construction would take place and would enhance the city's tax base. Visitors to Coliseum events as well as convention delegates would bring new income to the city and the metropolitan area. Hotel and motel, restaurants, and other retail trade will benefit from persons drawn by the Coliseum. "The Coliseum will result generally in making the Richmond area more desirable as a more complete cultural, entertainment, and indoor sports center." The Rountrey study, from which these economic effects are derived, reaches the conclusion that the economic feasibility justifies the investment of public funds.

There was an interesting and amusing editorial in the Richmond Times Dispatch dated July 25, 1966, concerning naming the Coliseum. According to the editorial some of the names that have been suggested would honor City Manager Edwards and
some City Council members, particularly Mayor Crowe, Councilmen Habenicht, Bagley, and Wheat. The proposed names include "Horace's Hacienda," "The Crowe's Nest," "Habenicht's Haven," "Bagley's Ballroom" and "The Wheat Wigwam." But one perceptive citizen who has watched the estimated cost of the Coliseum spurt from Six million dollars to twenty-one million dollars has suggested an even more appropriate name. Call it, he advises, "Ft. Knox Junior."
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On my honor as a gentleman
I have not received aid on this paper.

Coleman Bennett Yeatts, Jr.