Hello Spokane School Board Directors,

Thank you for your service to our community. I appreciate how this Board has taken the time to really evaluate what is best for students and families, while also considering the most prudent financial decision. I believe you are all working to put students and their families first. Thank you for considering the new information and new opportunities a downtown stadium presents. I wanted to make sure you all heard directly from me and my position. While it has not been submitted yet and there might be some slight changes, I think the best way for me to share my position is to send along the joint guest opinion Spokane County Treasurer Michael Baumgartner and I have been drafting and will be submitting soon to the Spokesman-Review. Please call or email me with any questions.

Best regards,

State Representative Marcus Riccelli

Build the Stadium Downtown

Joint Guest Opinion by State Representative Marcus Riccelli and Spokane County Treasurer Michael Baumgartner

Spokane has a history of coming together to do big things. It’s a principle that makes our community great and rather unique. Most recently, we helped lead a bipartisan group of elected officials and community leaders who came together to create a new medical school. While we may disagree on a lot at times, when it comes to doing what’s best for Spokane, we align to support big ideas. Now we have another chance to do something transformational for our community, benefiting students, families and taxpayers while generating economic growth in our community.

Above all, the Spokane Public School Board should put students and their families first. We applaud the School Board for considering the new information and new opportunities a downtown stadium presents. We appreciate how this Board has taken the time to really evaluate what is best for students and families, while also considering the most prudent financial decision.

Before we exhaust the benefits of building the stadium downtown, let’s clear the air. There has been a lot of confusion on the advisory vote that was offered by the City of Spokane – not Spokane Public Schools – and the results have been used by some as a reason the School Board should shut down discussion. Let’s start with the facts. The City and Spokane Public Schools have different boundaries. This advisory ballot measure drew votes from 4,067 residents outside of the district, at the same time it denied input from 10,172 actual Spokane Public School residents who live south and east of the city limits. Bottom line, the advisory ballot measure gave voice to thousands outside the district while disenfranchising many within their boundaries.

The reasons to support locating the new stadium downtown are abundant. A downtown stadium will enhance participation and the overall experience of student’s extra-curricular activities – whether as athletes, band members, drill team members or fans with school spirit. Additionally, building it in a central location that is more accessible aligns with smart growth principles of a strong urban core, and is more inclusive and equitable.

It would open the opportunity to build new playfields where Joe Albi currently exists. They are desperately needed and would significantly augment the fields currently at Dwight Merkel. Additional playfields have enormous community benefit as we encourage a healthier next generation and they would provide more opportunities for kids from all income levels to play recreational and competitive sport. They are so important, we are committed to finding opportunities in the state’s capital budget to help fund building of those fields.

Speaking of opportunities in Olympia, we are also committed to working in a bi-partisan fashion with our local delegation to secure capital funding, and find private funding, to offset any costs of soundproofing the 50-year-old Civic Theater. It is a local treasure. Property acquisition adjacent to the downtown stadium site will result in 500 new parking spaces free to Spokane Public School district patrons and we believe parking mitigation for the Civic Theater could be worked out as well.

Is it also exciting to potentially bring professional soccer to downtown? Yes, undeniably. But more importantly, a stadium will be built. It’s just a question of where. In its last full year of operation the Joe Albi stadium was used 20 days out of 365. So being able to have additional uses for a taxpayer funded public facility just makes good dollars and sense. Building upon Friday Night Lights and high school football, to LSL Soccer – one could quickly see top ranked WSU Women’s Soccer coming up from Pullman, outdoor concerts and so much more happening in that central location. If built downtown, the stadium would generate an estimated economic impact of $11.4 million, versus an estimated $2.3 million if built at Joe Albi. As leaders, we need to continue to make decisions that lead to a more vibrant downtown core, making downtown Spokane the unequivocal heartbeat of the Inland northwest.

From Expo 74 to the North South Spokane Freeway, from a new medical school to a downtown stadium, working together this community has shown it can dream big and work together to transform our region. We bring momentous ideas to fruition when we believe Spokane can and move beyond Spo-Can’t and missed generational opportunities. Let’s usher in the next big thing and build the stadium downtown.