

## Stadium/Historic Gas Plant Redevelopment

Call to Action: We need you to contact the County Commissioners before they vote on July 30, 2024.

The St. Petersburg Area League (LWVSPA) has studied the stadium/historic gas plant deal for the past 18 months. We have authored articles, read documents, met with community leaders, interviewed experts, conducted a survey of voters, testified at hearings, and posted important documents on our webpage.

The St. Petersburg City Council voted 5-3 to approve the current deal. The agreements must now be approved by the County Commissioners because the County must vote to commit \$100 million in property taxes in addition to almost \$600 million in “bed taxes” over the next 30 years.

Why should you as a League member oppose the current deal? We love the Rays and want them to stay. But the current deal violates our social justice and environmental standards. Let us be clear, voting no on the current deal does not reject the Rays, it sends the deal back to the City administration to do a better job for voters, and importantly, avoids an embarrassing and costly Federal violation of a potential Civil Rights Act lawsuit.

The only attorney on the City Council, Lisset Hanewicz, has written a concise op-ed on the many legal flaws in the agreement. You can read her article on the website, [lwvspa.org/social-justice](http://lwvspa.org/social-justice).

We are asking our members to read the updated position paper on the LWVSPA’s website (under social justice) and then write or call their County Commissioner.

**In writing:** Complete the [BCC Agenda Comment Form](#) by 5 p.m. the day before the meeting (July 29, 2024). Please check all the Commissioners’ names.

**By voicemail:** Leave a voicemail message before 5 p.m. the day before the meeting (July 29, 2024) by calling 727-464-4400. Recorded instructions are provided. Persons who are deaf or hard of hearing may provide public input on any agenda item through use of the [State of Florida’s relay service](#) at 7-1-1.

**In person:** Preregister at <https://comment.pinellas.gov> or come to the meeting (July 30, 2024 at 2:00 pm) and fill out a comment card before the meeting and you will be called

to speak to the Board when it is your turn. Speakers will have three minutes or less to present, based upon the number of people signed up who wish to speak. The Chair may designate a set length of time for the public comment period for any particular item of discussion or the citizen comment period.

Also please read the Southern Poverty Law Center's masterful description of the potential violation of Federal Civil Rights Law ([lwwspa.org/social-justice](http://lwwspa.org/social-justice)). We have worked too hard to create a community of inclusivity and equity to have our reputation sullied now.

Last fall and again this winter and spring, our League asked the City to provide a spokesperson to answer questions about the deal in a free and public forum. The City refused. *We believe that the City has an obligation to answer questions from voters. This is a concerning violation of good government.*

We conducted a survey of 32,000 registered voters in St. Petersburg and had almost 800 responses. More recently, the Mason-Dixon company conducted a poll with the same results: *Voters want to vote on the project*; Voters want the Rays to share revenues with the City like they do now; Voters want public funds to be used for public needs including stormwater, water, parks, schools and safety and Voters want the Rays/Hines to pay market rate for the land when it is acquired not spread out over 30 years with no interest.

The pledge of 20% of the bed tax funds every year for the next 30 years is not responsible. Bed tax funds should be prioritized for beach replenishment and maintenance. Other popular destinations including Clearwater Aquarium, Dali Museum, Mahaffey Theater, and other popular attractions do not receive this level of funding, yet they are more popular destinations. The County's data shows that while beaches are the most popular activity, only 3% of visitors attend games at Tropicana Field.

The Rays are not leaving St. Petersburg, there is no other City willing to invest the amount of money they want. This is a negotiation, pure and simple. By insisting that they get the 60 acres of prime real estate as part of the deal, they have run head onto social justice and environmental issues. But we will work those out. We need to send a message that voters want a better deal and elected officials who respect them.