

Lowertown Ballpark: A Practical Use for a Complex Brownfield



About the Diamond Products/Gillette site

The 11-acre Diamond Products/Gillette site is a very complex, industrial brownfield that has proven hard to redevelop. In addition to having different grade levels, the site has significant environmental issues, is adjacent to a historic district, and is in the direct flight path of the Saint Paul Downtown Airport.

After the building was vacated in 2005, the Saint Paul Port Authority invested \$200,000 in an international marketing campaign to solicit interest for redevelopment opportunities. The site was on the market for eight years without any interest in industrial, retail or residential redevelopment. Based on the market response, Saint Paul was forced to look at other options for the site.

The goal

The Diamond Products/Gillette site's location in Lowertown makes it an important part of the City's plan to continue to grow the downtown area. The City's goal is to identify the best possible plan to redevelop a complicated, vacant property in a way that benefits Lowertown, the city, and the entire region.

The ballpark plan

Several other cities have built minor league ballparks within downtown areas. These ballparks have been a key part of urban revitalization efforts, because they have helped transform underutilized or vacant sites into places that attract new visitors and commercial and residential development.

After studying these examples, the City worked with the St. Paul Saints and a team of experts to develop a plan to build a new ballpark at the Diamond Products/Gillette site. The plan also included transforming the current Midway Stadium into a commercial/industrial property. While the Diamond Products/Gillette site is a light-industrial building in an urban area, Midway Stadium is an urban-use building in a light-industrial area.



The current Lowertown Ballpark plan is the best solution because it allows for the reuse of the site, redevelopment of the Midway Stadium area, creates a new economic asset for downtown Saint Paul, and works within the \$54 million budget. The plan has been approved by the City of Saint Paul, the Saint Paul City Council, the Minnesota Legislature, and Governor Mark Dayton.

A Fiscally Responsible Use for the Diamond Products/Gillette Site

Environmental remediation

To help market the site, the Saint Paul Port Authority conducted an in-depth, due-diligence report on the current condition of the buildings, the roof, the utility and mechanical systems, the environmental contamination, and the scale and price of work needed to make it possible to reuse the site for storage on the lower end and light-industrial uses on the higher end. It would cost:

- **\$12 million dollars** just to bring the building to code.
- **\$31 million dollars** to make the site viable for high-end use.

Is it feasible to reuse the Diamond Products/Gillette building?

No. During the design and planning process, different groups have suggested the City attempt to reuse as much as 60% of the existing Diamond Products/Gillette building for event, retail and commercial space. This plan would require millions of dollars to complete selective demolition and environmental remediation. These costs would be in addition to the \$54 million cost of the ballpark and make any plans to reuse the building financially unworkable.

**\$1.2
million**

Selective demolition: According to the Saint Paul Port Authority assessment, it will cost nearly \$3 million to demolish the entire building. If 60% of the building is saved for retail and commercial space, it would cost nearly \$1.2 million to demolish the remaining portion of the building. However, this selective demolition would require structural reinforcement and would far exceed the port authority's demolition cost estimate.

**\$6
million**

Low-end industrial uses: After the selective demolition, it would cost \$6 million to make any low-end industrial uses possible in the building. This number is based on the port authority's due-diligence report.

**\$15
million**

Retail and commercial uses: After the selective demolition, it would cost \$15 million to make it possible for retail and commercial uses in the building. This number is based on the port authority's due-diligence report.

\$7.2 million-\$16.2 million: Total additional cost to reuse the building

Creating a Great Place to Play and Watch Baseball

Reusing the Diamond Products/Gillette building sacrifices the quality of the ballpark

The Lowertown Ballpark is a regional ballpark for the St. Paul Saints and Minnesota's amateur baseball community. The ballpark will be an iconic anchor for Lowertown and support year-round community events driving economic development. Reusing the Diamond Products/Gillette building adds significant cost, compromises the experience for players and fans alike, and saves a building with no architectural or historic value.

- **Player and fan experience:** To minimize solar glare for the batter, the playing field needs to be oriented on an imaginary line drawn from home plate through second base in the range between northeast and southeast. The Lowertown Ballpark will be oriented just a few degrees south of due east. This orientation would not be possible due to space concerns if the Diamond Products/Gillette building was reused. Additionally, substantial reuse of the building forces the ballpark to circulate on more levels, decreasing fans' connection to the game when they are out of their seats.
- **Orientation:** From an urban planning perspective, the ballpark should be located parallel to Broadway Street to maximize the opportunity for pedestrian engagement. The available width with this orientation also helps accommodate the playing field dimensions, increases seating capacity, and makes it easier for fans to circulate on the concourse. Reusing the Diamond Products/Gillette building would require the ballpark to be orientated in such a way that fans would not be able to walk around the concourse.
- **Height:** The Diamond Products/Gillette site slopes down from the northwest corner, which complements the ballpark's seating bowl structure. Once the building is removed, the playing field would be at the former basement level and the concourse would be at the street level. This design eliminates the majority of excavation; allows space for locker rooms, batting cages, and other baseball program areas; and provides naturally accessible routes for people with disabilities. Using this design, the ballpark would be 2.5 to 3 stories at its highest and include lighting just under the FAA height restrictions for Holman Field.

Putting parking in the basement of the Diamond Products/Gillette building would raise the ballpark an additional 26 feet, violating FAA restrictions. This would result in shorter lighting structures that do not meet industry standards and would hinder the ability to support a professional baseball team and attract national tournaments.

- **Light and sound:** The sunken ballpark design will allow the ballpark to fit more naturally in Lowertown. Reducing the height of the ballpark's light poles will reduce the effects of glare and light spill, and the lowered playing surface will help shield the surrounding community from potential noise impacts.
- **Dog park:** The current design of the Lowertown Ballpark makes it possible to incorporate space for a dog park. If the Diamond Products/Gillette building was reused, there would not be enough space on the site for a dog park.
- **Access to trails:** The Lowertown Ballpark design provides an important connection between the Bruce Vento Trail and downtown Saint Paul. This connection requires adequate space around the outside ballpark to increase the trail's visibility and accessibility. This would not be possible if the Diamond Products/Gillette building was reused for parking.