

Poynter.

Neil Brown
President

March 5, 2024

Dear members of the St. Petersburg City Council,

The Hines/Rays Historic Gas Plant Development proposal represents a historic opportunity for St. Petersburg to ensure the Tampa Bay Rays are here to stay and to create a mixed-use development that honors the past and acts as an economic engine for the future. I urge you to support this visionary proposal whose positive impact will be felt throughout the city and the entire Tampa Bay region.

This is a model public-private partnership that will provide long-term benefits on so many levels. For example, the Poynter Institute is a member of the St. Petersburg Downtown Partnership and located in the St. Pete Innovation District. The Hines/Rays development would help the city meet critical needs by adding affordable housing, office space, hotel rooms – and creating thousands of jobs. This is exactly the type of development that will help Poynter and other institutions in the city attract thought leaders and build partnerships that will enhance the innovation and creativity that makes St. Petersburg so special.

It's also important that we keep in our city excellent corporate partners like the Rays, whose impact on St. Petersburg stretches far beyond the field. The support of the Rays Baseball Foundation has been central to the success of Write Field, one of Poynter's most inspiring and forward-thinking programs in helping talented young people find their voice and creativity. The program is a writing and mentoring program serving Black and Hispanic young men in middle and high schools in Pinellas County. The Rays foundation partnered with Poynter to create the Write Field program in 2011, and it has served more than 330 young men. Poynter is particularly proud of this initiative and of our enduring partnership with the Rays. It's quite simply a model for how organizations can join forces to make a meaningful difference in the lives of individuals and our community.

The connection is real and impactful. In 2023, Rays pitcher Pete Fairbanks and his wife organized a Rays' players and families donation of sneakers to the boys in the Write Field program. Rays players surprised them at the annual group trip to a Rays game with a backpack and tennis shoes hand-picked for each boy. The Rays also support our annual Poynter fundraising gala each year and have contributed more than \$180,000 to Poynter since 2017.

Through their actions and words, the Rays embrace the values Poynter cares so deeply about. The franchise has invested significant time and money in local efforts to provide opportunities for everyone to succeed and to be heard, regardless of gender, race, ethnicity, sexual orientation or income. Perhaps more than any other professional sports franchise, the Rays have spoken out on key policy issues affecting us all. They are a powerful reflection of the importance of exercising the constitutional right to freedom of speech and of actively participating in democracy – issues that are dear to Poynter.

As a lifelong baseball fan, I've seen how a Major League Baseball team can unite a community. As a resident of St. Petersburg for 30 years, I've witnessed how our city has thrived and how baseball and the Rays have been an essential part of our success. Now we have an opportunity to simultaneously secure the future of our MLB franchise and attract billions in private investment in a thoughtful development that will help drive the economy of our city and the entire Tampa Bay region. I urge you to approve the Hines/Rays Historic Gas Plant Development plan.

Sincerely,



Neil Brown
President