



STARTING
RIGHT,
NOW

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February 23, 2024

Dear St. Petersburg City Council members,

The Tampa Bay Rays are an essential part of the fabric of the Tampa Bay Region, and their contributions to our community stretch far beyond the field. The Rays partnership with Starting Right, Now (SRN) has not only provided financial support, they have helped us build connections with other nonprofits, opened doors to additional funding, and been strong supporters to help make us successful. This in turn makes our community stronger. We need to ensure the Rays are here to stay, and I'm asking you to support the Hines/Rays Historic Gas Plant Development proposal.

Starting Right, Now is a nonprofit serving unaccompanied homeless youth registered in Pinellas and Hillsborough high schools. We help them become self-sufficient citizens, breaking the cycle of generational homelessness and poverty. Our program includes long-term housing for homeless independent minors as well as holistic and personalized care for each young person to ensure they do not become chronically homeless adults. SRN has partnered with the Rays for over 15 years, and their contributions of time, money and support are essential to our success.

Since 2010, the Rays Baseball Foundation has contributed more than \$438,000 to our organization. We are predominantly privately funded, and the Rays' annual funding ensures SRN sustains our housing and that our youth receive our holistic programming. They have hosted events for our youth at Tropicana Field and at Al Lang. They have provided us with Human Power to paint our facilities. And their connections to other organizations, funders and community resources has been instrumental in building support for SRN.

Rays President Matt Silverman served as our board chairman since our inception and recently transitioned to chairman emeritus. He led us to financial stability. Our graduating seniors are accepted at universities and colleges throughout Florida. Some of our youth are now teachers and social workers in Pinellas County Schools. Without supporters like the Rays, these teens would not have been able to reach such milestones.

I know for sure that Starting Right, Now is one of many examples of how the Rays make a difference in the Tampa Bay region. The Hines/Rays development proposal includes initiatives that would extend such contributions, including millions for 1,200 affordable housing units, new job training and education programs, and other commitments to help ensure everyone has an opportunity to be successful, regardless of gender, race, ethnicity or economic status. We cannot afford to let these investments, or such an engaged corporate partner, slip away.

We are extremely proud to have the Rays Baseball Foundation as a partner. Please approve the Hines/Rays Historic Gas Plant Development proposal. It will have an enormous impact on St. Petersburg and the entire Tampa Bay region, and it would keep the Rays here for generations to come. Feel free to email me with any questions at Vicki.Sokolik@StartingRightNow.org.

Sincerely,

Vicki Sokolik
Founder/CEO