

# Ya LaFord

Fine Art

May 15, 2024

Dear St. Petersburg City Council:

I am writing to express my wholehearted support for the development of the Historic Gas Plant District, particularly concerning the proposed new ballpark for the Tampa Bay Rays and the inclusion of community-focused arts initiatives such as the Booker Music Hall and The Woodson African American Museum. As a member of the creative community deeply invested in both the historic gas plant neighborhood, baseball, and the arts, I believe this development presents a unique opportunity to enrich the cultural fabric of St. Petersburg and foster community engagement in exciting new ways. St. Petersburg is a special, dynamic, and unique city, and the completion of this development offers a space for not only the magic of Rays baseball but also spaces for education, reflection, and celebration of heritage, all of which are means to enrich the cultural fabric of St. Petersburg and serve as a beacon of excellence and inclusivity.

Baseball holds a special place in the hearts of St. Petersburg residents, with a rich history dating back over a century. The construction of a new ballpark for the Rays signifies a continuation of this legacy, ensuring that St. Petersburg remains one of the select communities with an MLB team. It's exciting to imagine how the flexible spaces will accommodate civic events, graduations, concerts, festivals, and other artistic activities, fostering a sense of unity and pride among old fans and new. Over the last 10 years, I have facilitated arts and creative experiences for hundreds of students many of whom attended story-telling leadership series in the Central Avenue tunnel leading to Tropicana Field. Working closely with the Rays Leadership team they truly realize their impact is important on and off the field. The Ray's commitment to Ya LaFord Fine Art's student initiatives has demonstrated their ability, commitment, and responsiveness to foster meaningful connections and stimulate cultural exchange. Moreover, the Ray's dedication to working with youth has already had an impact on the St. Petersburg community for generations to come.

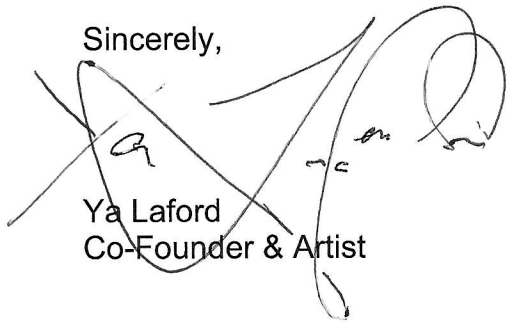
Importantly, the development of the Historic Gas Plant District extends beyond the confines of the ballpark, with plans to integrate the surrounding neighborhoods and businesses into the gameday experience. Second Avenue South will become a bustling hub of activity, featuring exciting stores, restaurants, and gathering spaces that will enhance the sense of community and create a festive atmosphere during Rays games.

In addition to its impact on sports and entertainment, the development of the Gas Plant District presents an opportunity to elevate the arts within our community. I am

particularly excited about the prospect of public art installations and community-based arts initiatives in the district. These initiatives have the potential to celebrate our city's rich cultural heritage, honor important historical figures and events, and inspire creativity and connection among residents and visitors alike.

In conclusion, I wholeheartedly support the development of the Historic Gas Plant District and believe that it has the potential to enhance the quality of life for residents, promote economic growth, and celebrate the unique identity of St. Petersburg. By combining the excitement of baseball with the power of the arts, this development will create a vibrant and inclusive community space that reflects the spirit and character of our city.

Sincerely,

A handwritten signature in black ink, appearing to read 'Ya Laford', with a large, stylized flourish extending to the right.

Ya Laford  
Co-Founder & Artist