

Background

History of the Memorial Stadium Site

High School Memorial Stadium was built by the Seattle School District in 1947. The land on which the stadium sits (274,344 sq. ft.) was deeded to the School District by the City in 1946 (Ordinance 74740), for one dollar, on the condition that the stadium continue to be used as a public athletic stadium.

Previously, the site housed Civic Field, part of the original 1927 civic complex that formed the north and eastern boundaries of what is now Seattle Center. In addition to Civic Field, the complex included the Civic Auditorium (later to become the Opera House and now incorporated into Marion Oliver McCaw Hall) and the Civic Arena (now known as Mercer Arena).

The “Memorial” part of the stadium is the Memorial Wall outside the east end of the stadium that bears the names of Seattle High School students who lost their lives in World War II. In the years since they were deeded the stadium property, Seattle Schools purchased the parcels immediately east of the stadium, which now comprise a surface parking lot (116,336 sq. ft.) owned and operated by the School District.



Throughout the 1950's and 1960's high school football games drew well in Memorial Stadium, sometimes filling the 12,000 seat stadium to capacity. In the years since then, attendance at high school athletic events has dwindled to the point that 1,500 people is considered a large turnout at a Memorial Stadium game. Because Memorial Stadium and the adjacent parking lot occupy such a large area (nine acres) of what is now Seattle Center, the City and Seattle Schools have engaged in sporadic discussions going back 30 years over how the City could reclaim the site for Seattle Center while meeting Seattle Schools' desire for a centrally located athletic facility.

The Seattle Center Long Range Land Use Plan that was part of the 1990 Seattle Center Master Plan suggested that the Memorial Stadium site eventually return to Seattle Center and be developed as a combination of open space and building sites built over two levels of below-grade parking.



In the mid-1990's the City and Seattle Schools came to an agreement for the City to reclaim the stadium site in exchange for providing a site for construction of a smaller stadium across the street on the old “Bus Barn” site (now the new home of the Bill and Melinda Gates Foundation). When a school construction bond issue failed, and a revised, smaller bond program did not include funds for the District to construct a new stadium, this deal died.

The Seattle Center Century 21 Master Plan, adopted by the City Council in August 2008 (Resolution 31071), proposes a creative alternative to this long-standing issue – shared use of the site by the City and the School District.

Background

Redevelopment of the Memorial Stadium Site

Expanded Open Space

With the concrete walls down and the sports field moved to the eastern edge of the site, the International Fountain lawn is expanded by almost four acres. This expansive space is returned to the public realm to meet the significant open space demands of the growing residential and employment populations of the urban center. The space is enlivened throughout the year with Frisbee tosses, family picnics, surprise public performances and community gatherings. Today, the walled-off property sits empty on most days.



Athletic Field

The playing field is realigned in a north-south direction at the eastern end of the site. During the spring and fall, the School District hosts football and soccer practices and games. Summer graduations take place here in June. For sports events, there is a capacity that meets School District needs of 5,000 seats, with half under cover on the east side of the field and half on the tiered hillside on the west side.

Summer Concert Venue

During the summer months, including the Memorial Day and Labor Day weekends, Seattle Center converts the space into an amphitheatre

for outdoor concerts, festival performances and other activities. The artificial turf field is protected and the covered stadium seating on the east is converted to a stage house. Seating on the field, along with the tiered seating on the west side, combines for a flexible capacity of 5,000 to 12,000. For festivals, the expanded International Fountain lawn area to the west can be used to increase the capacity to 20,000.

Memorial Wall

The Memorial Wall, bearing the names of Seattle Public School students who died in World War II, enjoys a prominent and respectful placement in a newly developed stadium site, protected by Historic Landmark designation. Today, the 40-foot long wall faces onto a surface parking lot, obscured by shrubs, its water fountains filled with debris.

Transportation and Services Hub

Currently the athletic field is located well below the grade of the rest of the campus, offering the ideal opportunity to convert the below grade space to a variety of functions. The International Fountain lawn expansion serves as a green lid on top of this 1,300-space underground parking garage, bus and truck loading, maintenance facility, trash/recycling center and multi-modal transportation hub.

Accessibility

Accessibility for all visitors is enhanced. Patrons with disabilities and families with young children no longer need to cross busy streets to reach Center activities. Elevators deliver visitors directly to performance venues and Center House, much as the University of Washington central garage now does for that campus.