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PLAYOFF HOOPLA: A TALE OF TWO CITIES

This area's supporters of tax funding for new stadiums justify the use of tax dollars on the basis of the new vitality and economic benefits the stadiums bring to Pittsburgh. Recent events would seem to indicate that the stadiums, instead of being the promised "economic engines," are now reduced to mere talking points for politicians and economic development officials attempting to persuade outsiders that Pittsburgh is not as bad as they think.

During the Steelers' run toward the Super Bowl, the Pittsburgh Regional Alliance spearheaded a public relations campaign aimed at informing the rest of the country that Pittsburgh has changed for the better. With "New Steelers, New Stadiums, New Pittsburgh," as the mantra, Pittsburgh was pitched at parties in "Steelers bars" around the country, to business prospects invited to playoff games at Heinz Field, and to policymakers and media representatives throughout the nation. Contrast the hoopla here with a near total absence of "Patriots fever" among professionals responsible for economic development and tourism in Boston.

Glowing reports of monies flowing into the coffers of the City of Pittsburgh have graced various news stories here; but, thus far, neither the Greater Boston Chamber of Commerce nor the Greater Boston Convention and Visitors' Bureau have bothered to undertake a study of the economic impact on their region of the Patriots' championship season. No boiler plate stories concerning parking tax receipts; no claims of tax windfalls from the one playoff game at the Patriots' old stadium in Foxboro; and, no whining about the loss of tax revenues due to the fact that the Patriots had to travel to Pittsburgh to win their conference championship, and to New Orleans to win the Vince Lombardi Trophy. So far as can be ascertained, the "news" has been confined to the Patriots' on field performances—not a single attempt to pitch the Patriots' contribution to New England's quality of life or as a means of luring new business.

The difference in approach between the two cities is stunning. It seems economic developers in the Boston area are focused on reality—factors that will actually make the area more competitive. Consider the expressed priorities of the Greater Boston Chamber of Commerce:

- Making health care costs more competitive;
- Keeping workers compensation costs competitive;
- Lowering unemployment insurance rates; and,
- Protecting Internet Privacy.

Shockingly, the Greater Boston Chamber of Commerce did NOT lead a charge for a new stadium for the Patriots; they have not bothered to offer an opinion on it at all. By the way, CMGI

Field—the new Patriots venue, which is scheduled to open in the fall of 2002—is being privately financed. A minimal amount of public money will be used for infrastructure near the stadium.

Steelers' fans may remember that the Patriots once claimed Boston as their home. They left the city in 1971 and moved to suburban Foxboro when plans for a new stadium fell flat. Since then, Boston has not just survived, but has shown a decent rate of growth. And, survival meant weathering the collapse of its textile industry, the loss of 30,000 defense-related jobs between 1970 and 1972, and the decline of the minicomputer industry in the late 1980s resulting in a loss of an additional 100,000 jobs at former industry giants such as Data General, Digital Equipment, and Wang.

	Population (2000)	Population Change, % (1990 to 2000)	Median Household Income (1997)	Private Nonfarm Employment (1999)	Private Nonfarm Employment Change, % (1990 to 1999)
Allegheny County (Pittsburgh)	1,281,666	-4.1	\$38,893	683,062	5.4
Suffolk County (Boston)	689,807	3.9	\$36,260	547,063	7.3
Norfolk County (Foxboro)	650,308	5.6	\$54,528	324,342	9.3

While not outstanding compared to the national performance, the Boston metro area outperformed Allegheny County and the City of Pittsburgh during the last decade. If economic development leaders in Boston were to take the same public relations approach as Pittsburgh's "leaders," they would, at least, have a better story to tell, for the Greater Boston Chamber of Commerce seems focused on helping the area become more business friendly. The area already boasts such priorities as meaningful highway and road investment, a government bureaucracy that does not perceive itself morally and intellectually superior to the private sector, and a cadre of corporate leaders who see growing their enterprises as their primary mission.

Amazingly, the Super Bowl victory of the New England Patriots generated the following comment from one member of the Boston news media, even as the cheers of 1.25 million fans that jammed into Boston to celebrate that victory were still ringing in his ears: *[Patriots' owner] Kraft had his day, as well he should. But let's hope the pols, now getting beaten up by Patriots Nation, don't learn the wrong lessons from all this when new Red Sox owner John Henry comes calling in the not-too-distant future. The correct lesson is this: The Patriots built their handsome new stadium with precious little public help, and the Red Sox should do the same. Let the Red Sox and the rest of us learn from these Patriots. And that most definitely includes when it comes time to pay for a stadium.* ---Steve Bailey of the Boston Globe. **Good advice.**

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