

CASE STUDY

Washington State Major League Baseball Public Facilities District

SEATTLE, WA OVERVIEW

Seattle's publicly-owned major league baseball ballpark, completed in 1999, had been home to the Seattle Mariners for 20 years – and the team's original lease was about to expire. The Washington State Major League Baseball Public Facilities District (or PFD), the ballpark's owner, turned to Husch Blackwell for assistance in striking a new agreement with the team.

Challenges

Long-term arena and stadium leases are complex and high-profile transactions. Deals struck decades ago often didn't anticipate the ongoing investment required to keep these facilities current with changing trends and created conflicts over how much the public sector and the team should each contribute to such investment. In Seattle, although T-Mobile Park had been well-maintained by the Mariners, the ballpark itself was aging and the Mariners' original lease didn't provide as many protections for the public's investment that the community now demanded. Because sports facilities are not a high priority in today's Seattle market for public spending, any new deal struck with the Mariners would need to shift significant responsibility to the team for the ballpark's long-term upkeep while demonstrating significant community benefit from keeping the team at T-Mobile Park.



Industry

Real Estate, Development &
Construction

Services

Arena & Stadium Development
Public-Private Partnerships (P3)

Legal Team

Andrea Austin
Kevin H. Kelley

Solution

Our team negotiated and drafted a new lease that implements new quality standards to ensure the ballpark remains in the top one-third of all MLB ballparks, holds the Mariners responsible for all operations and maintenance and capital improvements, with narrowly defined contributions from the public, and increases public oversight of capital plans to make sure the ballpark stays competitive. Rent from the Mariners will also help fund improvements to areas surrounding the ballpark to improve the overall fan experience. A new non-relocation agreement strongly discourages the Mariners from seeking out a home other than T-Mobile Park for the duration of their 25-year lease extension.

Result

Our team helped the ballpark's public owner navigate a political and market environment that, unlike decades ago, no longer favors significant public contributions perceived to benefit pro sports team owners. The Mariners' new lease ensures the team will amply invest in the ballpark to maintain its status as a top-tier facility, gives the PFD new tools for safeguarding the public's investment, and ensures that the Mariners will call Seattle home for another generation of baseball fans.