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UNSNARLING LONGWOOD

DESPITE AN agreement among a private developer, the Red Sox, and neighborhood groups on the shape of development over the Massachusetts Turnpike, it is reasonable to wonder whether anything will be built there. Construction over a highway imposes a significant cost premium. If public assistance is needed for economic development in the area, the money ought to be targeted to the Longwood medical complex, not Fenway Park.

They key to the proposal by developer John Rosenthal is the construction of two parking garages above the turnpike on either side of Brookline Avenue. A consortium of 21 Longwood Medical Area institutions known as MASCO decided last week to examine whether it could finance the garages by using tax-exempt bonds.

The medical institutions crammed into Longwood need more parking for their employees, but the cost premium for air rights construction will weigh heavily on MASCO's deliberations. The garages are not a compelling public need and are best left to the private sector.

Hanging over any talk of development near Fenway Park is the \$100 million commitment the state made to John Harrington, the previous Sox owner, in 2000. Harrington wanted to build a \$350 million stadium next to the old ballpark, and the state agreed to help him out

with infrastructure improvements. The John Henry group, which succeeded Harrington (and includes the parent company of The Boston Globe), is putting \$200 million into Fenway Park, but these improvements are less dramatic and risky than Harrington's plan. Without the new stadium, the \$100 million should no longer be on offer.

The medical area employs 37,000 people — more than the capacity of Fenway Park — who desperately need better transportation options to the congested neighborhood. Longwood is imperfectly served by public transit. With the T strapped for cash, the rest of state government should assume the financing burden of any MBTA improvements.

The first priority ought to be the commuter rail system. Hospital executives would like the T to expand capacity at Ruggles Station so more trains could stop there and passengers could take advantage of a MASCO shuttle bus. At Yawkey Station, originally built as a makeshift stop for Red Sox fans, the platform needs to be lengthened to encourage commuters from the western suburbs to use the train. Preliminary estimates put the Ruggles improvements at \$24 million and the Yawkey upgrade at \$8 million to \$11 million.

No matter what happens to Rosenthal's proposal, the area is become increasingly desirable for development. The state will be doing its part if it makes sure that transit upgrades keep pace.