

# WORSE THAN WARM BEER

Redevelopment  
around the Dome  
is roosting tailgaters  
from their preferred  
spots, putting a crimp  
in Purple Pride.

BY GITA SITARAMIAH  
Pioneer Press

Avid Minnesota Vikings tailgater Steve Olson is unimpressed with the trendy lofts, modern office buildings and other Minneapolis attractions popping up in the downtown riverfront neighborhood.

Olson's idea of prime downtown real estate is the block after block of asphalt parking lots that once dotted the area.

"I wish they would have left Washington Avenue alone," he said.

He and other Vikings tailgaters have watched ruefully as the development boom has wiped out coveted parking lots where hard-core Vikings fans once braved the snow and cold to drink beer, grill hot dogs, and mix and mingle before heading to the Metrodome for the game.

VIKINGS TAILGATERS, 13A



1999 PIONEER PRESS FILE PHOTO

The development boom on downtown Minneapolis' riverfront has wiped out coveted parking lots where hard-core Vikings fans once braved the snow and cold to socialize, drink beer and grill hot dogs — or, in this case, deep-fry shrimp — before the game.

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### Vikings tailgaters

(continued)

Another year of tailgating, but with about 1,000 fewer parking spots, starts Saturday with an 8 p.m. preseason game against the Arizona Cardinals and their new coach — formerly the Vikings' coach — Dennis Green.

Signs of progress abound where pregame parties once flourished. The neighborhood is home to hundreds of new condos and offices as well as the Mill City Museum, the Old Milwaukee Road Depot and the new Guthrie Theater site.

Mike Sachi, a city parking engineer, estimates that up to 900 prime tailgating spaces have been eliminated.

Tailgating has always been restricted to city-licensed areas near the Dome. Now football fans have to leave home earlier to nab a spot.

Tailgating just isn't the same anymore, some say.

Joining a sea of other purple-clad fans in the once-massive Washington Avenue lots before games has been as much a part of the Vikings experience as watching the game, Olson said.

"It's about Vikings football, but it's also a social thing," said Olson, who lives in St. Louis Park.

Fan David Minkinen and a dozen friends bring a 26-foot truck, complete with a living room and kitchen, to pregame festivities. "It's like getting everyone together for a picnic before the game," said Minkinen, of Coon Rapids.

Last year, the City Council approved allowing more small lots near the Dome to be used for tailgating in an area bordered by the river and Sixth Street South and 11th and Fifth avenues south. Tailgating had been restricted to an area between Washington Avenue and the Mississippi River until the Vikings and the University of Minnesota asked Minneapolis City Council Member Paul Zerby to do something about the disappearing parking.

That one-year provision expires next month.

*Tailgaters complain that small lots in a wider area can't make up for the energy of a mass of tailgaters.*

Since he has heard few complaints, Zerby plans to propose extending the tailgating measure another year.

"This may not be the best compromise," Zerby said. "But this may be the best we can do."

Tailgaters are far from satisfied. They complain that small lots in a wider area can't make up for the energy of a mass of tailgaters along Washington Avenue.

Still, dedicated tailgaters aren't letting the parking crunch crimp their style too much.

"We'd be willing to go down there as early as we have to to be able to get a spot," said Pat Rein, a Chaska resident who has been a Vikings season-ticket holder for 30 years. Last year, she and her husband would arrive at 8 a.m. for a noon game. This year, Rein expects to pull up at 7 a.m.

Olson also has been honing his strategy, even casing the remaining lots during a recent trip downtown. Every year he's had to leave earlier to snag a spot.

"I don't mind," he said. "But I struggle to get my buddies to leave at 6 in the morning, and I have to keep them happy, too."

Some passionate tailgaters dream of a suburban Vikings stadium with a massive parking lot to keep the pregame parties from dying out, if officials ever agree on a new publicly financed stadium.

"There's just no place to put anything like that in downtown," Minkinen said.

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### Tough times for tailgaters

Development near the Metrodome is crimping the fun for Vikings fans who love to tailgate in downtown Minneapolis parking lots.



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