

A14

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Opinion

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A's have not made an exhaustive effort to stay in Oakland

OAKLAND A's managing partner Lew Wolff is a talented and smart businessman.

But if Wolff thinks anybody is buying his sob story about why the A's have to leave Oakland, he's seriously underestimating the intelligence of the team's fan base, the press and the people of this city.

Wolff has been telling anyone who will listen that the A's have done everything possible to build a new ballpark and stay in Oakland. As Wolff put it in a recent statement, the team has "exhausted (its) time and resources over the years" with the city.

Claiming the A's have made an exhaustive effort to stay in Oakland is like George W. Bush saying he did everything he could to stay out of Iraq — it's not a "reality-based" statement.

Here is the truth: A's owners and Major League Baseball have been plotting to abandon Oakland for at least 10 years. They have never been partners in the city's efforts to build a new stadium and keep the franchise in Oakland.

Collusion between A's owners and the league has been evident since 1999, after a settlement gave Oakland and Alameda County the right to force a sale of the team to different owners. A team of buyers committed to keeping the club in Oakland

JOHN RUSSO

My Word

stepped up and a price was set. But, for the first time in anyone's memory, Major League Baseball denied the transfer of a franchise to a qualified ownership group.

The lords of Baseball made it clear that they do not see American cities as partners, but rather as ATMs that exist to provide them with ever greater amounts of taxpayer dollars.

A few years later, when Oakland hired the nation's most respected stadium architects to look at possible sites for a new ballpark, the A's refused to provide any support for the firm's search. The city brought together a commission of business and com-

munity leaders to work on options for a new stadium, and spent hundreds of thousands of dollars on staff time and consultants.

However, the team demonstrated no interest in the process or in the architect's favored site — a spot in downtown Oakland, next to two BART stations, with enough land for the city and the team to build a dream ballpark. Instead of a new downtown ballpark, we now have condos.

It's telling that Wolff's only proposal to stay in Oakland depended on the city using eminent domain to take the property of about 100 blue-collar businesses in East Oakland. Wolff is too smart to not know that his proposal was totally unrealistic.

Mayor Ron Dellums and other Oakland leaders have made it clear that the city is prepared to continue working on feasible options for a new ballpark.

Moving the A's to San Jose — which is contractually Giants territory — would require a special deal with Wolff's old fraternity brother, MLB Commissioner Bud Selig. Such a deal would be a blatant example of

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collusion in baseball and would likely be tied up in court for years.

The idea that the A's have made an exhaustive effort to stay is disingenuous at best. With some imagination and a real partnership among the city, the business community and the ballclub, the A's could build a new ballpark and remain the team of the people of the East Bay.

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