

Cardinals Opposed Bill to Secure Lots That Saw Dozens of Break-Ins Sunday

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Ryan Krull

Board Bill 80 would have required surface lots beef up security

Yesterday, as many as 30 cars parked were broken into near Busch Stadium as the Cardinals played the Dodgers.

According to KSDK, the break-ins occurred at several parking lots around the stadium, including on South Broadway, Clark Avenue and South 4th Street.

Last fall, a Board of Aldermen bill attempted to make parking more secure on lots like those around the stadium. But Les Sterman, chair of Citizens for a Greater Downtown St. Louis, says that among those opposing the effort was none other than the Cardinals' ownership.

Sterman is referring to Board Bill 80, proposed last September by Alderman James Page, who then represented downtown. It was killed in committee in February.

The bill would have required surface lots to have fencing, security lighting and be free from potholes. An attendant would have to be present during hours of operation. Lots with free parking or that are attached to a building would have been exempt.

The Cardinals did not immediately respond to an email seeking comment. (We'll update this post if we hear back.)

Sterman tells the RFT by text he doesn't know why exactly the Cardinals ownership opposed the effort to secure the lots.

"They were part of a group that included St. Louis Parking Co. and Lodging Hospitality Management (Hilton Hotel, Union Station, etc.) that opposed the bill," Sterman says.

"Generally, I believe that they didn't want to pay for fencing and gating their lots."

Sterman adds, "St. Louis Parking Company is the largest owner and operator of lots downtown and they had a lot of political clout. Eddie Pohrer, their CEO, was a former partner of former alderman Joe Vaccaro in a carwash business years ago."

"Vaccaro was the principal aldermanic opposition to the bill," Sterman says.

Vaccaro, who left the board this spring after years representing part of south city including the Hill, says that he was not business partners with Eddie Pohrer. (However, media reports do indicate he was once in business with Eddie's father, Gary.)

Vaccaro tells the RFT he opposed the bill because he thought it was unfair to pass the costs of the security onto people paying for parking. He also says he was worried about similar requirements eventually being put on church and hospital parking lots, too.

"Where does it end? Maybe we should put watchtowers up, with armed guards?" Vaccaro says.

Downtown advocates say car break-ins aren't just bad for the neighborhood's image. They are also a major source of the stolen guns that have caused problems across the metro.

Nationwide, more than half of all thefts of guns are from cars. In St. Louis, in a recent attempt to crack down on guns being left in cars, the victim of the theft can be charged with a crime if their gun was not in a locked case when it was stolen from their vehicle.

UPDATE: A day after the story's publication, Carson Shipley, communications manager for the Cardinals, followed up with the *RFT* with this statement: "The notion that the Cardinals opposed attempts to make City parking lots more secure is inaccurate. The Cardinals were supportive of the proposed Board Bill 80 with the inclusion of an alternate requirement of 24/7 security monitoring, which we provide for our surface parking lot and believe is the most effective way to prevent criminal conduct in parking areas in the City. We also believe that the increased parking security requirements of proposed BB 80 should be extended to apply to parking garages as well."

Editor's note: We updated this post soon after publication to include information about former Alderman Joe Vaccaro's ties to the owners of St. Louis Parking Company. We also updated it a day later to include the Cardinals' statement on Board Bill 80.

We welcome tips and feedback. Email the author at ryan.krull@riverfronttimes.com or follow on Twitter at [@RyanWKrull](https://twitter.com/RyanWKrull).

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