

## The Public Price for a new Stadium

The era of large 1+ billion stadiums is here. Since 2005 there have been 5 stadiums that have hit the 1 billion mark for cost. With this in mind we need to ask ourselves, where is all that money coming from? Enter Mr. and Mrs. Taxpayer. "Since 1995, a staggering 29 of the 31 stadiums that house NFL teams receive public subsidies for construction, renovation, or both." (Iljazi) It's not fair to the taxpayers to fund a "public" stadium when in reality the venue is only used on average 36-40 hours a year for its intended purpose. While some stadiums have gone further to design for a multi purpose venue that does not only support the NFL team there, but also is able to host a variety of other events. Outside of those events and the scheduled NFL games, the "public" stadiums have little to do with the public interest and are more often than not empty buildings. "The lone beneficiaries of sports subsidies are team owners and players." (Keating) How can stadiums that are billed as public facilities, use large amounts of taxpayer money, and commonly occupy prime real estate be only occupied when an event is taking place? Isn't the idea of "public" one that allows all people to utilize the facility?

"The inefficiency of government, and the negatives of higher taxes all argue against government sports subsidies. Indeed, the results of studies on changes in the in the economy resulting from the presence of stadiums, arenas, and sports teams show no positive economic impact from professional sports. " (Keating) It is clear that even having a top 5 team in terms of fanbase, does not mean that your economy will be stimulated because of the presence of you franchise. In fact, one could argue that it is harmful to build a new billion dollar stadium. What make a new stadium a poor investment, is the relative low rate of return that it offers. Say every game were sold out at the new Minnesota Viking Stadium, that's 66,655 seats a game, and multiply that by

the average ticket price of ~ \$115. On a game by game basis the Vikings receive ~ 7.6 million in ticket sales. Going off that revenue stream, it would take ~ 142 games to pay off the stadium. Given that there are only 8 home games in a season, that equates to 18 years before the stadium is payed off.

MetLife Stadium, which is the home field for both the New York Giants and the New York Jets, is actually twice as efficient in rate of return as there are 16 home games played there each season instead of just 8. While not every NFL stadium has the ability to host two different NFL teams as their “home field”, it does enable the stadium to be more widely used and cost efficient.

*“A large academic literature critically examining these issues has emerged over the last 15 years, much of it in response to claims of huge economic gains generated by new professional sports facilities. Most of these claims were supported by economic impact studies issued by those who proposed the stadiums and the subsidies; these amounted to little more than promotional advertising.”* (Coates) There needs to be a better plan for developing a stadium that can involve the public outside the use of the NFL, only then can a stadium really become a true multi purpose facility worthy of the taxpayers money.

### **The Repurposability of old and Current Stadiums**

In the past 12 years we have seen and heard large discussions regarding the cost and impact of an Olympic Park on a city and country's resources. The past three games, held at Beijing, London, and Rio de Janeiro, have begun to set the standard for the repurposability of the multi billion dollar investments for infrastructure. With each passing year the Olympics get larger and

larger, with more people attending more events than the previous year. It only makes sense to have a plan from the beginning to support a reuse of the constructed facilities. While the Olympic Games are much larger in scale than an NFL stadium, their study can make for good precedent in how to handle large sporting developments. The same questions that we are asking about the Olympic parks we should be asking about NFL stadiums: how can these large investments become adapted into more daily life for the public?

Repurposing old buildings to fit a new program is not a new concept. “The issue is no longer about new versus old, but about the nature of the vital relationship between the two.” (Powell) Why then can’t we apply the same methodology to our stadiums? New Era Field sits empty 357 days of the year and is only truly utilized for its intended purpose of NFL games for ~ 36-40 hours between the 8 home games a year. This is an extreme underutilization of infrastructure that cost the public millions. If a stadium lasts 50 years should we not have a plan in place that can accommodate a change of program if the facilities become unable to support its intended program?

### **The Public (and not so Public) Space of Stadiums**

Stadiums are billed as “Public” however, they are extremely private facilities with one typically needing permitted access to the grounds. There is a loss for the public every time a new stadium is being built. Not only are funds being used to finance the multi million if not billion dollar facility, but that money is being diverted from other public domains that might need the money more. *“A considerable share of public life continued, after all, to take place in the plazas; because of this there persisted some measure of their public significance as well as many natural*

*relationships between the squares and the monumental structures that framed them.” (Glazer) Along with the fact that stadiums are not really public is that 80-90% of the population that pays for it, won’t ever use it. When you take that into consideration the location of many stadiums being in an urban area, it’s a lost space that could be turned into a more publicly used facility. With stadiums that are located in a more suburban area, like New Era Field, they are landmarks in the neighborhood. They stand out as a beacon, but these beacons are not lit. They are an empty shell that, in Buffalo especially, reminds the people of the decline that the Buffalo area has seen.*

### **The Buffalo Bills: A stadium for the people**

New Era Field has a unique opportunity in its near future. With the lease for the stadium ending after the 2023 season and the talk from NFL Commissioner Roger Goodell saying the Bills need a new stadium, there is little doubt that the Bills and the City of Buffalo are approaching a crossroads. (Dargon) (Wagner) Even though Buffalo is the second smallest NFL market, after Green Bay, the commissioner is still pushing for a new stadium for Buffalo. While he doesn’t have the power to make the Bills build a new stadium, the owners of the Bills have stated that they know the issues and are looking into stadium options for the future. (Rodak) The only other large issue facing a new stadium is the fact that fans don’t think they need a new stadium. *“Building a new stadium that will cost at least a billion dollars just seems a non-starter for our economic realities here in WNY. It might be viable if Buffalo had a major college football team that would draw big crowds to the stadium and spread some of the costs beyond just Bills fans, but that’s not reality. With no major college or pro teams to make a new stadium genuinely multi-use, I just don’t see one being sustainable in Buffalo, especially with the NFL’s requirements about each team being in a facility that meets ever more demanding criteria. A new stadium won’t be new for long and the NFL NEVER stops*

*grabbing for more cash.*” (Bills Fan Forums, user: Greywolf) This is just one of many fan comments regarding a new stadium on the Official Bills Fan Forum. Is the current stadium the best in the league? No, but it has a history to it that many Bills fans would be hard pressed to forget.

There is a culture out in Orchard Park that fans love. Buffalo isn't a large market and fans know that, but there is a love for this team that rivals any other sports franchise in the US. How else would you explain a sell out crowd for a late December game when it is -20 degrees out, the wind is whipping, snow is falling, and the Bills will yet again miss the playoffs for a 17th straight year? Because the Bills are in such a small market, the way they play and how well their season goes has an impact on the people of Buffalo. The city has been in decline since the mid 1900's and there is little city pride to speak of. The Bills give the people of Buffalo something to hold onto, something to root for in our times of hardship.

### **The current Bills Stadium to the fans is “all they need”**

There are many sides to a new stadium being built, but in reality the only question that needs to be asked is: does the community need a new stadium? Not the team, not the owners, and not the NFL, but does the community that will ultimately pay to built it, pay to watch their teams play in it, and pay for any renovations that it might need over its lifetime, need it. With Buffalo being such a small market, there is a valid argument to be made against a new stadium and instead using a quarter of the money that would be spent on a new stadium, and repurpose the current one adding more program to engage the facility more than just the 8 time a year for home games.

New Era Field has a chance to become more than a stadium. Similar to what the Harbor Center for the Sabres has become. It has a chance to become a new blueprint on how we see NFL stadiums. They don't have to be large facilities that sit empty most days of the year, they can be community centers, civic centers for the people, or even shopping centers. The current stadium is extremely disconnected from the suburban fabric surrounding it. There are ways to appease the NFL in wanting better revenue streams from the Bills while also not placing such a financial burden on the public to finance a new stadium. In becoming a better utilized facility and allowing more people to access it throughout the year, New Era Field could very well continue to house the Bills home games as well as increase revenue for the NFL. With the addition of new program, the stadium can be a place of gathering, not social desolation when not in use. It can be a hub of growth and give usable space for programs not available to people in the area. A place that Buffalo can be proud of.

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