

CRAIN'S CHICAGO BUSINESS

Here's the Bears' vision for Arlington Heights

The team says it will not seek public funding for a new stadium, but it will for the rest of a surrounding entertainment district in the northwest suburb.

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A rendering of the stadium-anchored entertainment district.

The Chicago Bears will not seek public funding to build a new stadium in Arlington Heights but plan to pursue taxpayer help in building out the rest of a sprawling entertainment district near the venue—one the team projects will generate billions of dollars in local economic impact.

In a public letter issued today, the team began lifting the hood on its vision for a massive, stadium-anchored entertainment district to replace the shuttered Arlington International Racecourse property in the northwest suburb, offering the first public glimpse at renderings showing the scale of what the franchise could develop on the

326-acre site. Images show a stadium along the northwest portion of the property, near the intersection of state Route 53 and Northwest Highway, while a mixed-use district would be built on the southeast portion of the property.

The letter marks the first time the team has conceded it will seek financial assistance for the project. It also lays out what the Bears estimate would be one of the largest development projects in the state's history and projections on the potential economic benefits for the area.

“While the Bears will seek no public funding for direct stadium structure construction, given the broad, long-term public benefits of this project, we look forward to partnering with the various governmental bodies to secure additional funding and assistance needed to support the feasibility of the remainder of the development,” the team said in the letter.

The team estimates the entire complex, if completed, will have an economic impact of \$1.4 billion per year, spinning off \$16 million annually in local tax revenue, plus \$60 million per year in property tax revenue for Cook County and state. Construction of the project would create 48,000 jobs, and the completed project would create 9,750 "long-term jobs," the letter said.



Rendering of a view from the planned stadium looking toward downtown Chicago.



"Any development of Arlington Park will propose to include a multipurpose entertainment, commercial/retail and housing district that will provide considerable economic benefits to Cook County, the surrounding region and the state of Illinois. The long-term project vision for the entire property is an ongoing work-in-progress, but could include: restaurants, office space, hotel, fitness center, new parks and open spaces, and other improvements for the community to enjoy."

The team said the stadium would be "enclosed" and "worthy of hosting global events such as the Super Bowl, College Football Playoffs and Final Four."

The letter and visuals come as the team prepares to discuss its vision for the property at a public meeting on Thursday from 7 p.m. to 9 p.m. in the gymnasium at John Hersey High School, at 1900 E. Thomas St. in Arlington Heights.

The Bears emphasized in the letter that there is still no guarantee the team closes on its \$197 million purchase of the Arlington Park property, and that it may not redevelop the site even if it does complete the acquisition.

"Much remains to be decided, but any decision will be made in the best interests of the Bears long-term future, our fans and the Chicagoland community," the letter said. As team officials have stated publicly, the Bears reiterated in the letter that they will "not be discussing or exploring" any other stadium opportunities while under contract to buy the Arlington Park site, including a potential renovation of Soldier Field.

"We are taking serious steps to evaluate the unique opportunity presented to us. The Bears remain committed to Soldier Field and will honor the terms of its lease. While the

prospect of a transit-oriented mixed-use and entertainment district anchored by a new enclosed stadium is exciting for the Bears and the entire state, there is much work to be done before we can close on the property, and then, whether we will develop it.”

Mixed-use developments have become the norm in recent years among new stadium developments across major U.S. sports. Retail spaces, restaurants, hotels and music venues are among the revenue-generating projects that professional teams—including the Chicago Cubs in Wrigleyville—have targeted.

The upcoming public meeting is slated to be held six weeks after Mayor Lori Lightfoot unveiled a plan to add a dome to Soldier Field and update its surroundings to boost accessibility and add more activity to the overall lakefront museum campus. That vision is part of Lightfoot's effort to entice the Bears to continue playing at Soldier Field, where the team has played since 1971. The Bears' lease to play at the stadium expires in 2033.

Lightfoot said today at an unrelated press conference that the city will “keep fighting that fight as long as we possibly can” to convince the Bears to stay in Chicago.

But, Lightfoot said “we’ve got plan B, plan C and others in the works as well if the Bears decide that they’re going to abandon the city of Chicago.”

Justin Laurence contributed.