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Field remains in flux. Here's what you need to know.



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A plan to spend \$448 million over 20 years on American Family Field's renovations continues to be negotiated among state legislators and Gov. Tony Evers' administration – an issue highlighted by four recent developments.

The Milwaukee Journal Sentinel has obtained information showing that immediate ballpark improvements, recommended by a study commissioned by the Milwaukee Brewers, total \$77 million over two years. That exceeds the \$70 million renovations fund maintained by the Southeast Wisconsin Professional Baseball District, the public agency which owns American Family Field.

On Thursday, the stadium district board approved plans for a new \$6.45 million scoreboard. But it rejected a request by the Brewers to pay for a \$2 million secondary scoreboard – raising questions about whether it's responsible for that item.

That same day, the Milwaukee County Board unanimously passed a resolution opposing the use of any county money to help pay for long-term ballpark renovations. Republican legislative leaders say Milwaukee County and the City of Milwaukee should be involved in the effort.

Finally, Major League Baseball Commissioner Robert Manfred, on a Thursday visit to Milwaukee, urged public officials to promptly reach a stadium funding agreement. He implied a failure to do so could result in the Milwaukee Brewers leaving Wisconsin – citing the planned move of the Oakland Athletics to Las Vegas as a cautionary tale.

Oakland's local government officials "made some unfortunate decisions not to maintain the ballpark in the way that it needed to be maintained," Manfred told reporters. That led to a decline in quality at Oakland-Alameda County Coliseum, he said, which meant lower attendance and less money for the Athletics to field good players.

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solution to ensure that the stadium district can meet its obligations, and sign a generational lease extension at American Family Field."

Here are more details about the stadium funding situation, and how it could affect Brewers fans and Wisconsin taxpayers.

Could the stadium district quickly run short of cash?

Evers proposed a \$290 million payment for American Family Field within his \$103.8 billion budget proposal. It would be combined with the \$70 million already set aside by the stadium district, along with interest earnings, to pay for \$448 million in renovations over 20 years.

In return, the Brewers would extend the lease from the end of 2030 to the end of 2043. The Evers administration says the ball club over 20 years would generate an estimated \$400 million in state income and sales taxes.

A report commissioned by the Brewers, and reviewed by a consultant hired by the Wisconsin Department of Administration, provides details on how that \$448 million, which includes an inflation contingency, would be spent.

Additional information obtained by the Journal Sentinel show that the report, done by Venue Solutions Group, a consulting firm based in Brentwood, Tennessee, recommends spending just over \$78 million during the first two years.

That raises concerns about whether the \$70 million fund, which itself could be depleted by such operating expenses as the ballpark's escalating insurance premiums, could handle the stadium district's immediate obligations.

Tim Sheehy, stadium district board chair, acknowledged Venue Solutions Group's recommendations for front-loading much of that proposed long-term spending.

But, Sheehy said, the stadium district can only operate under the terms of the current lease, which expires at the end of 2030 – not the proposed extension through 2043 which underlies the VSG report.

Sheehy drew this analogy: a homeowner who plans to stay in their house for 20 years will pay for major improvements, such as a new roof, while a homeowner who plans to sell their

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another

Meanwhile, the stadium district board on Thursday voted to spend \$6.45 million to replace the ballpark's main scoreboard, which Sheehy said is nearing the end of its 10-year life.

That scoreboard, to be ready for the 2024 season, will be the fourth-largest in Major League Baseball, he said, with double the size of the current scoreboard's video display board.

The lease requires the stadium district to pay for improvements present in at least 75% of all other MLB stadiums. It also says the district must replace or repair infrastructure items consistent with the replacement items of the top 25% of all MLB parks.

But the lease also says the Brewers are responsible for discretionary improvements. Those include such items as the X-Golf America golf simulators which launched in September, and the J. Leinenkugel's Barrel Yard restaurant and brewery that debuted at the club's April 3 home opener.

A question of whether the stadium district is responsible for adding a secondary scoreboard was discussed during an unusual three-hour closed session at Thursday's board meeting. Wisconsin's Open Meetings Law allows closed sessions for such things as competitive and bargaining items.

In open session, the proposal to fund the \$2 million secondary scoreboard didn't receive a motion to support it.

"It is the board's responsibility to uphold our end of the lease, and to do so as stewards of the tax resources that in part fund capital improvements," Sheehy said. "Our review of the secondary score board was based on a review of the current lease obligations."

County Board issues an emphatic "no" on ballpark funding

At another Thursday meeting, the Milwaukee County Board voted 17-0 to support a resolution calling for no county funding on American Family Field improvements.

Assembly Speaker Robin Vos says local funds should be part of the ballpark financing – which could help draw more support from his fellow Republican legislators.

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City of Milwaukee to levy a sales tax.

The County Board's vote united members whose ideologies run from conservative to socialist.

Supervisor Steve Taylor said he's heard Milwaukee County might be asked to provide \$4 million to \$6 million for the stadium – perhaps by reducing the amount of increased shared state revenue the county badly needs.

"I don't want to see the Milwaukee Brewers go somewhere else," Taylor said. "I just don't think it's right that the taxpayers foot the bill. And, if they are going to have to foot the bill, they should have a say."

Supervisor Peter Burgelis, whose district includes American Family Field, said his constituents support increased local spending for the Milwaukee County Transit System and county parks – but do not support such funding for the ballpark.

"We are all Brewers fans," Burgelis said. "But in terms of supporting reconstruction at the stadium our pockets are dry."

The baseball commissioner issues a stark warning

Just a few hours after that vote, Manfred spoke to reporters at American Family Field about the issue. Despite the County Board's decision, he said he was confident a ballpark funding package would be approved.

"When the ballpark was built, the district undertook certain obligations, including this maintenance obligation," Manfred said. "The only issue that's on the table is how are they going to figure out how to fund that obligation?"

"I remain confident that the Brewers are a great asset for the fans here in Milwaukee, and that the governmental entities are going to find a way to fund the obligation," he said.

A lack of funding to keep American Family Field up to MLB standards could lead to a scenario now playing out in Oakland, Manfred said.

A failure to properly maintain that ballpark led to "a decline in the attendance which had an impact on the quality of the product that the team could afford to put on the field," he said.

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Brewers owner Mark Attanasio, has said repeatedly he wants the team to stay in Milwaukee for the long term.

MLB's possible expansion from 30 to 32 clubs would theoretically remove two markets from a possible Brewers relocation plan.

Also, a new franchise would come with a roughly \$1 billion expansion fee dispersed to the 30 clubs, making it the preferred method of engaging a new MLB city.

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