



Northwestern University

Northwestern's Ryan Field Rebuilding Plans

Media Coverage

August 10, 2023

Index

Evanston Round Table, August 2, 2023

Letter to the editor: Still 100% behind the Ryan Field rebuild

<https://evanstonroundtable.com/2023/08/02/letter-to-the-editor-100-behind-the-ryan-field-rebuild/>

Evanston Round Table, July 20, 2023

Letter to the editor: Northwestern, don't give up on Ryan Field

<https://evanstonroundtable.com/2023/07/20/letter-to-the-editor-northwestern-university-dont-give-up-on-ryan-field/>

Crain's Chicago Business, July 17, 2023

Northwestern hazing scandal shouldn't stop Ryan Field redo: Opinion

<https://www.chicagobusiness.com/letters-editor/northwestern-hazing-scandal-shouldnt-stop-ryan-field-redo-opinion>

Chicago Tribune, July 7, 2023

Northwestern University addresses Ryan Field noise, concert concerns

<https://www.chicagotribune.com/suburbs/evanston/ct-evr-ryan-field-concert-concerns-tl-0713-20230707-fgech4qpifhqxna2hq3dnvl5hq-story.html>

Evanston Now, July 7, 2023

Reid backs Ryan Field plans

<https://evanstonnow.com/reid-backs-ryan-field-plans/>

Evanston Round Table, June 23, 2023

Letter to the editor: Residents indifferent on Ryan Field stand to gain from rebuild

<https://evanstonroundtable.com/2023/06/23/letter-to-the-editor-residents-indifferent-on-ryan-field-stand-to-gain-from-rebuild/>

Evanston Round Table, June 22, 2023

Guest essay: A new public benefit proposal for the Northwestern stadium

<https://evanstonroundtable.com/2023/06/22/guest-essay-ryan-field-public-benefit-proposal/>

Evanston Round Table, June 11, 2023

Letter to the editor: City, residents must be good neighbors to NU

<https://evanstonroundtable.com/2023/06/11/letter-to-editor-ryan-field-northwestern-good-neighbors/>

Evanston Round Table, May 5, 2023

Letter to the editor: Rebuilding Ryan Field will help Evanston thrive

<https://evanstonroundtable.com/2023/05/05/letter-to-editor-rebuild-ryan-field-evanston-thrives/>

Evanston Now, March 27, 2023

A neighbor favors Ryan Field plan

<https://evanstonnow.com/a-neighbor-favors-ryan-field-plan/>

Evanston Now, March 23, 2023

Turner-Walsh to manage Ryan Field project

<https://evanstonnow.com/turner-walsh-to-manage-ryan-field-project/>

Evanston RoundTable, March 5, 2023

Guest Essay: Sally Mabadi on real estate, property values and the new Ryan Field

<https://evanstonroundtable.com/2023/03/05/guest-essay-sally-mabadi-on-real-estate-property-values-and-the-new-ryan-field/>

Evanston Now, February 28, 2023

Why hotel backs stadium rebuild

<https://evanstonnow.com/why-hotel-backs-stadium-rebuild/>

Evanston RoundTable, February 17, 2023

Letter to the community: NU's proposed stadium is a 'field of opportunities'

<https://evanstonroundtable.com/2023/02/17/letter-to-the-community-nus-proposed-stadium-is-a-field-of-opportunities/>

Evanston Now, February 16, 2023

Neighbors organize to back NU stadium plan

<https://evanstonnow.com/neighbors-organize-to-back-nu-stadium-plan/>

Evanston Round Table, February 3, 2023

NU's promise for minority jobs helps gather project support

<https://evanstonroundtable.com/2023/02/03/nus-promise-for-minority-jobs-gathers-support-at-press-conference/>

Evanston Now, February 2, 2023

Ryan Field backers talk jobs, community

<https://evanstonnow.com/ryan-field-backers-talk-jobs-community/>

Evanston RoundTable, January 31, 2023

Open letter to the city: Evanston Chamber strongly supports modernizing Ryan Field

<https://evanstonroundtable.com/2023/01/31/open-letter-to-the-city-evanston-chamber-strongly-supports-modernizing-ryan-field/>

Evanston Now, January 30, 2023

Restaurateur: City needs new stadium

<https://evanstonnow.com/restaurateur-city-needs-new-stadium/>

Evanston Now, January 26, 2023

NU survey: Most favor Ryan Field concerts

<https://evanstonnow.com/nu-survey-most-favor-ryan-field-concerts/>

Fox 32, January 26, 2023

New poll shows support for rebuilding Ryan Field

<https://www.fox32chicago.com/sports/new-poll-shows-support-for-rebuilding-ryan-field>

Evanston RoundTable, January 18, 2023

Letter to the editor: Ryan Field project is opportunity to build Black and brown wealth

<https://evanstonroundtable.com/2023/01/18/letter-to-the-editor-ryan-field-project-black-brown-wealth/>

Evanston RoundTable, December 12, 2023

Letter to the editor: 'Positives are impressive' for new stadium

<https://evanstonroundtable.com/2022/12/12/letter-to-the-editor-positives-are-impressive-for-new-stadium/>

Evanston Review, November 21, 2022

Northwestern's Ryan Field upgrade would bring in \$1.2B: study

<https://www.chicagotribune.com/suburbs/evanston/ct-evr-ryan-field-update-tl-1124-20221121-3ntxll645ncodnmuxan7kjqc2q-story.html>

The Patch, November 21, 2022

Renovated Ryan Field To Generate More Than \$1.2B For Evanston: Study

<https://patch.com/illinois/evanston/renovated-ryan-field-generate-more-1-2b-evanston-study>

Evanston Round Table, November 19, 2022

Letter to the editor: Downtown Evanston backs Ryan Field revamp

<https://evanstonroundtable.com/2022/11/19/letter-to-the-editor-downtown-evanston-backs-ryan-field-revamp/>

Evanston RoundTable, November 10, 2023

Letter to the editor: Let's work with NU to improve Ryan Field changes

<https://evanstonroundtable.com/2022/11/10/letter-to-the-editor-ryan-field-changes-northwestern/>

Chicago Tribune, September 30, 2022

Editorial: Northwestern's new football stadium looks like a luxury game-day experience with unimpeachable funding

<https://www.chicagotribune.com/opinion/editorials/ct-editorial-northwestern-football-stadium-20220930-y2oqnuyjebhtpk57np3aeu3gl4-story.html>

Chicago Tribune, September 28, 2022

Northwestern football: New design for smaller stadium

<https://www.chicagotribune.com/business/ct-biz-northwestern-ryan-field-20220929-uaxljauxb5g27duqpexpcbfksq-story.html>

EVANSTON ROUNDTABLE

Letter to the editor: Still 100% behind the Ryan Field rebuild

By Raju S. Ghate, M.D. - August 2, 2023

As a Northwestern alumnus, I was deeply dismayed and disappointed by the stories uncovered by the Daily Northwestern and other media outlets regarding the NU football and baseball programs. President Schill had to make tough decisions in dismissing the top coaches in those programs and launching a new effort to make sure all NU student athletes are protected from abuse. We all hope the athletic program can meet a higher standard going forward.

As someone who lives one block from Ryan Field, pays Evanston taxes and sends my children to Evanston public schools, I write to make clear that my family and many more still stand 100% behind the new Ryan Field project despite the problems in the athletic program.

The simple truth is games will be played for decades to come, but rebuilding Ryan Field is a once-in-a-lifetime opportunity that will create 2,900 good-paying jobs, provide tens of millions in tax revenue to Evanston, give local businesses a much needed boost and open more than \$200 million in contracts for women- and minority-owned firms.

While this year's city budget seems to be manageable, City Council members are already hinting that next year could be very different, when the city loses nearly all federal pandemic aid.

Every Evanstonian should know that without the millions in revenue from this project, Evanston may face a budget shortfall next year that could include closing a fire station, cutting desperately needed youth jobs and violence prevention programs and leaving key city positions open.

If you look down my street, you will see signs for and against the Ryan Field project. That's Evanston. That's healthy debate. But if the majority of the City Council makes 75,000 Evanstonians pay through the nose in lost economic opportunities, lost tax revenue and lost city services where Evanston needs them the most just to placate a few loud voices from the wealthiest part of the city who pounced on a scandal to get their way, then to me, democracy and decency will have failed us.

Let's get to a reasonable number of concerts, the best financial arrangement NU can muster and pass the Ryan Field rebuild. Let's put the needs of the many above the demands of the few and let NU athletics heal from these deep scars separate from that political process.

Raju S. Ghate, M.D.
NU alumnus and Ryan Field neighbor

EVANSTON ROUNDTABLE

Letter to the Editor: Northwestern, don't give up on Ryan Field

Credit: Northwestern University – July 20, 2023

As a longtime Evanston resident, Northwestern University student-athlete, alumnus and community supporter, I was disturbed to learn of [allegations of misconduct](#) involving the university's football program. I built a business in Evanston. My wife and I raised our five children here. We are true investors, financially and heartfully.

All of Northwestern's talented students work hard to get accepted to this prestigious, academically challenging university. They deserve an uplifting and positive experience.

That said, allegations surrounding the football program should not derail plans to renovate Ryan Field, as [opponents to the renovation have suggested](#). I urge the university: Don't give up on what is truly a generational investment in our city.

The generosity of the Ryan family toward Northwestern has been profuse and appreciated; their legacy can be seen throughout Evanston and the greater Chicago area. The family's commitment to build a new stadium is a magnanimous extension of that generosity.

But the renovation of Ryan Field has always been about more than just football. It is a project with a much more deeply rooted mission: to create an economic engine for Evanston; celebrate a once-in-a-lifetime, privately funded opportunity; and establish a year-round amenity for Evanstonians to enjoy.

Northwestern football plays seven home games a year. The new Ryan Field is not, and has never been, centered around those seven days. It is about creating a hub of community activity, providing jobs for our neighbors and driving new revenue and investments into Evanston.

The project is estimated to bring more than \$10 million to Evanston in direct fees the first year alone, millions in subsequent years, and more than \$659 million in overall economic impact while generating nearly 3,000 jobs during construction. This includes a commitment to at least 35% spending with local minority- and woman-owned businesses.

Its promise is its potential as a community hub for winter festivals, holiday celebrations, nonprofit fundraising, farmers markets, yoga classes, park activities and, yes, a handful of outdoor concerts at a facility built with private dollars. This project should not be viewed narrowly in the here and now. It will be a cornerstone of our community for the next 100 years, like the current Ryan Field.

There is no question Northwestern University and the students exposed to ugly and unspeakable acts of misconduct face challenges that must be dealt with expeditiously and compassionately. No one disputes that. But those efforts are unrelated to the construction of a community amenity. It is shameful opponents of the stadium are using these challenges as leverage to suppress the promise of a generational gift to Evanston.

JOSEPH FLANAGAN
Chairman and CEO
Acquirent

CRAIN'S

CHICAGO BUSINESS.

Letter to the Editor: Northwestern, don't give up on Ryan Field

By Joseph Flanagan – July 17, 2023 at 9:01 a.m.

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JOSEPH FLANAGAN
Chairman and CEO
Acquirent

Chicago Tribune

EVANSTON

Northwestern University addresses Ryan Field noise, concert concerns

By Corey Schmidt – Jul 07, 2023 at 11:33 am

Evanston residents have voiced concerns about Northwestern University's Ryan Field rebuild proposal including as many as 12 concerts and community events a year.

Northwestern addressed these concerns at a June 27 community meeting by bringing in consultants to discuss concert operations and noise levels.

Acoustics consulting firm Wrightson, Johnson, Haddon, Williams put together a report addressing current on-site sound levels and modeled how sound could be generated with the new proposal by using an environmental sound analysis software called CadnaA, a sound assessment states.

"We looked at the acoustics of the community by getting our boots on the ground with sound level meters to get what the ambient sound levels are," WJHW Principal Greg Hughes said. "The measurements were taken on both game day and nongame day weekends."

Hughes said measurements were taken from the existing Ryan Field parking lot and throughout the neighborhood to "understand what we're experiencing in the community" and "residential areas."

He said data collected by the study and environmental sound analysis can be used to provide structural design choices to limit potentially disruptive noise. In previous Ward 7 community meetings, Northwestern University Project Manager Steven Himes, who also worked on the 2018 Walsh-Ryan Arena renovation, said the stadium's design would include facades and a canopy to help contain noise.

"The stadium would have facades that are partially enclosed on its vertical surfaces — not entirely but partially — and then there is a 360-degree canopy extending from the perimeter over the seating bowl to help reflect (and contain) sound into the stadium," Himes said at a November meeting.

WJHW's sound assessment predicts game day events' sound levels to last six to eight hours and typical concerts to last three to four hours. It estimates concert noise levels in surrounding residential areas to range from 55 to 75 decibels A's, which is similar to the stadium's existing game day activities.

"The results of this analysis show sound generated at the new stadium (during concerts) is projected to the north and west," the assessment states. "Areas to the east and south also show sound impact, but less so than to the north. Sound transmission to the south could be described as noticeable but generally does not substantially exceed the ambient sound levels measured in the area."

The consulting firm's analysis pointed to the proposed Ryan Field stadium's design and reduced capacity as a positive when containing sound.

"We think the design of the new Ryan Field, and the reduction in stadium capacity, will be helpful in reducing sound impact when compared to the current stadium's design," the assessment states. "However, as with football game days, concerts will generate sound (so) there is no way to reduce it to zero."

The assessment goes on to say the city and Northwestern will have to work together to find a balance between the noise generated by potential concerts and the social and economic benefits the concert would bring the city.

Consulting Firm Kimley-Horn sent Senior Transportation Engineer Peter Lemmon to speak with residents regarding the project's impact on transportation issues. He said transit plans for game days and concerts are currently utilizing the university's on-site parking lots, shuttle buses and the Chicago Transit Authority — neighborhood parking would be restricted from non-Evanstonians on concert days.

[Residents](#) have expressed concern about the potential for increased noise levels from concerts held at the venue. Some compared the plan back in November of last year to Wrigley Field, saying increased use of the field could lead to a change in the neighborhood. Others have said they don't appreciate the commercialization of their neighborhood.

Both groups have teamed up to form the Northwestern Accountability Alliance to hold the university to its promises and encourage the city to hold approval of any plans until a community benefits agreement is completed. Those [promises](#) include increased sustainability efforts and offering 35% of "total subcontracted spending (to) local, minority-owned and women-owned businesses for the Ryan Field project, with priority given to businesses and individuals located in Evanston," according to [Northwestern University's Rebuild Ryan Field website](#).

The website also states the rebuild would not be financially viable by only hosting seven football games a year.

Land Use Commission Chair Matt Rogers said [residents concerned about the rebuild](#) will have the chance to give public comment and recommended comments be submitted in writing beforehand as commenters will be given limited time to speak. Those wishing to submit a public comment can email them to publiccomment@cityofevanston.org.

Reid backs Ryan Field plans

By Desiree Shannon – July 7, 2023

Ald. Devon Reid (8th) gave full-throated support to Northwestern University's \$800 million plan to rebuild Ryan Field at a ward meeting Thursday evening.

"If there was opportunity for the city to take over that land, to build something that was not a stadium, I'd be the first one in line to support that," Reid said.

But since that's not a possibility, he added, "Let's make sure that we can get the most out" of the stadium "for the residents and taxpayers of Evanston."

He conceded, though, that the city also has a responsibility to consider the concerns of residents living near the stadium.

Reid noted that some communities have implemented pilot agreements with universities engaged in similar projects which allow for payment in lieu of taxes to the local community.

If Evanston negotiated a similar agreement, he said, it could bring in millions of dollars a year, including more financial support for local schools.

Reid said he may be the only city council member who publicly supports the Ryan Field project.

Evanston Corporation Counsel Nicholas Cummings, who also spoke at the meeting, said that there were opportunities for the city to raise revenue from ancillary services which Northwestern would need from the city to operate a stadium offering more frequent events.

He said that the city could collect fees related to parking, entertainment, liquor and garbage pick-up if Ryan Field is more heavily utilized.

EVANSTON ROUNDTABLE

Letter to the editor: Residents indifferent on Ryan Field stand to gain from rebuild

By Jane Grover – June 23, 2023

Counting yard signs or letters to the editor doesn't tell us anything about where most Evanston residents are on the issue of Ryan Field. There's another way to assess public sentiment about the university's proposal and the larger community's interests.

Residents are on a spectrum of support when it comes to the stadium – some oppose any stadium there or any activities at the football stadium, including football. And some support as many stadium activities as possible and wonder, what's the use of all those seats if they're empty for all but 10 days of the year?

Most Evanston residents – about 59,000 of us of voting age – are somewhere in the middle. And many of our neighbors are simply indifferent to the issue, if they're even aware of it. Let's call them typical Evanstonians.

We won't hear from typical residents who don't care about the stadium or proposed live performances. Those residents won't email their council member, talk to their neighbors, write a letter to the editor, attend a meeting, sign a petition or put a sign in their front lawn.

Typical Evanstonians would not be upset if only sports and graduations happen at Welsh-Ryan Arena or Ryan Field. And let's be fair – the same residents would not be upset if the university rebuilds the stadium and adds live performances at Welsh-Ryan Arena or Ryan Field.

The Evanston folks who are indifferent – who may never experience a live performance at Ryan Field or the burden in north Evanston of additional traffic and noise – might be just the people who benefit the most from the new Ryan Field. They might own a local construction company, business or restaurant. They might work as stadium vendors or security. And residents who are indifferent to the stadium also pay property taxes to support Evanston's schools and city government and would benefit along with the whole community from the stadium's new tax and fee revenue.

We can all understand that there are many residents in our community who have not weighed in, yet who stand to benefit from the rebuild of Ryan Field and the proposed additional live performances. But don't misinterpret their indifference as neutral. Count them in.

Jane Grover
Ryan Field neighbor
Seventh Ward resident

EVANSTON ROUNDTABLE

Guest essay: A new public benefit proposal for the Northwestern stadium

By Richard Murray – June 22, 2023

The proposed Northwestern stadium bothers me. And I'm skipping past its potential nuisance factor for residents and businesses in the neighborhood (including Equity Schools, my firm located on Central Street), as well as my own belief that \$800 million could be spent more meaningfully in, well, probably 800 million other ways.

Nevertheless, the truth is it's Northwestern's property, there's been a stadium there for a very long time, and if someone wants to donate \$800 million to create a new stadium, that's their choice as well. Of course the details matter but, like it or not, it's their property and their money.

What bothers me is the rare opportunity that might be missed to do something special, as a public benefit for all of Evanston. Let me offer a proposal of my own. It might sound unrealistic (it's not) or unrelated to the stadium (it wouldn't be).

College trust proposal

What if every future graduate from Evanston Township High School could receive up to \$20,000 for college or other postsecondary education?

I realize quick minds might dismiss this as yet another expensive program the city and taxpayers cannot afford, and just as quickly some folks are thinking Northwestern would have to foot the bill and would refuse.

But this program would not be funded by taxpayers nor even directly by Northwestern or its donors.

Rather, every person who buys a football or event ticket would pay a \$5 surcharge. That's it.

The ongoing attendance at the new stadium would fund an "Evanston College Trust" strictly dedicated to paying those benefits for new ETHS alumni who go on to any college or other postsecondary education.

How trust would work

Legally and financially, the Evanston College Trust would be relatively simple. The funds would flow into a private incentive trust, established so the only beneficiaries to qualify would be ETHS graduates who have gone on to and completed postsecondary education (completion creating an important incentive). This means the trust could not be raided for any other uses; the money would be there only for the qualifying alumni.

Once alumni earn their postsecondary degree or certificate, they would apply for funds by showing their ETHS diploma and the postsecondary degree or certificate. For fairness, awards would be highest for alumni who attended Evanston schools the longest. To establish need, the

beneficiaries would have to show they incurred debt for their education, which in these times would apply to all but the very wealthiest families.

Back at the stadium, every ticket sold would contribute \$5 to the trust which, although not exactly noise abatement or traffic control, ought to soften some of the upset. Everyone in Evanston would know that for every football game and event, a substantial cash contribution would help pay for ETHS graduates continuing their education, a significant public benefit.

What about Northwestern and its donors? They would not be required to make any monetary contribution (although, if offered, it would of course be welcome). All they would need to do is collect the \$5 and send it to the trust.

How funds would build

And how does this work, practically speaking? The funds flow and begin accumulating in the trust as soon as the stadium opens, and they also begin earning investment income. But the ETHS students still need to graduate and then go on to earn degrees or certificates in postsecondary education; they do not begin to receive benefits until (and unless) they complete those postsecondary programs within a reasonable amount of time.

It's math. Collect \$5 from hundreds of thousands of tickets, invest it, and later pay out to qualifying beneficiaries over the years to help pay off their education debts.

The charts look like this (assuming 18 annual events at 85% of stadium capacity and a trust rate of return averaging 7%)

The impact of the trust

Although the beneficiary payouts wouldn't begin for a few years, and even then would start gradually, the positive effects of the trust would be immediate. Evanston would be the first in the nation to establish a trust of this type. (Other college "promise" programs exist, notably the first one in Kalamazoo, Michigan, but none are set up as I propose for Evanston.)

Sure, bragging rights are nice, but think about it for a moment. The trust would immediately have a positive effect in real terms on helping retain families with children and influencing others to move to Evanston. That ought to be a positive factor on property values simply because Evanston will become a more desirable location, an even more livable city.

Therefore, while the future ETHS graduates would directly benefit, so would everyone in Evanston just by the trust's existence (and indirectly so would District 65, ETHS and the city). And Northwestern and its donors, without being forced to make financial contributions, would be supporting both higher education and the local community; an exceptionally good deal.

In sum, the stadium bothers me primarily because a substantial public benefit might be missed. A new project of this scale comes along perhaps once in a generation, and it should be used to benefit the entire Evanston community. That could be the Evanston College Trust, or it might be some other public benefit on a scale that is both meaningful and sustaining. But in any event, it should be for all of Evanston.

Murray is president of [Equity Schools](#), a benefit corporation based in Evanston working nationally to create or improve access to quality education for as many students as possible. The firm works with school leaders throughout the U.S. to plan and implement school creation,

renovations, expansions, and rescues – with an emphasis on sustainable, alternative funding models.

EVANSTON ROUNDTABLE

Letter to the editor: City, residents must be good neighbors to NU

By Peter Kelly – June 11, 2023

My name is Peter Kelly. I have no affiliation to Northwestern University.

During my 50 years as an Evanston homeowner I've been consistently impressed by Northwestern's many contributions to our civic life. Over those years Northwestern has consistently demonstrated that it is a good neighbor.

But neighborliness is a two-way street. You are addressing Northwestern's request that it be permitted to rebuild Ryan Field and use it as a venue for live entertainment that will produce revenues that will serve as a critical component of the revenues for that project.

Stated simply, our neighbor, Northwestern, wants to improve property it already owns and use that property in a way that will produce enormous economic benefits and significant cultural benefits to the City of Evanston, its residents and its businesses.

It is time for the city and its residents to show Northwestern that we can be good neighbors too.

YIMBY!

Peter Kelly

EVANSTON ROUNDTABLE

Letter to the editor: Rebuilding Ryan Field will help Evanston thrive

Lara Hamann, stadium neighbor – May 5, 2023

I was thrilled to see your coverage of the Evanston Thrives report being discussed at a [Fourth Ward meeting](#), and noted the irony in the [adjacent story](#) about the owner of Mt. Everest restaurant explaining how difficult it is to stay in business in the post-pandemic world.

Among the report's findings are that people in Evanston want more to do and see in Evanston, and that business developers and brokers want compelling reasons to choose Evanston. The report lays out four ways to achieve this:

1. Invest in events and programming that provide more to do to attract customers and bring residents together.
2. Fund placemaking initiatives that strengthen and reinforce the identity of retail districts across Evanston.
3. Shift toward a proactive economic development strategy to get ahead of local business needs and attract new businesses to Evanston.
4. Forge a symbiotic relationship with Northwestern University that will benefit residents, students and businesses.

Of course, there's a significant cost to all of this, and nobody wants higher taxes, so could there be a more opportune and important time for Northwestern University to want to invest \$800 million in rebuilding Ryan Field and creating a world-class multiuse venue?

Yes, there's opposition to different aspects of the Ryan Field project, which I totally understand and respect. But it feels like Evanston is at a crossroads, and when you step back and look at the city as a whole, the work required to shine like we used to, and the funds needed to do that, it feels like a no-brainer to embrace the investment NU wants to make.

Businesses and organizations in all eight business districts and residents from every neighborhood have an opportunity to benefit from this project directly through jobs and project contracts. The city will benefit directly from fees required for the project and incremental tax revenues. And we'll all benefit indirectly from having a gold-standard, fully accessible, architectural gem in our backyard, drawing visitors from near and far who want to spend their money with us.

If you're excited about the job and contract opportunities during construction, if you're a business owner who would benefit from increased foot traffic in Evanston or if you're like me, and simply want to see Evanston return to the vibrancy that brought many of us here in the first place, email your council member to communicate your support.



A neighbor favors Ryan Field plan

By Michael O'Connor - March 27, 2023

I have been listening carefully as proponents and opponents of a new Ryan Field share their thoughts and advocate positions.

I am proud we are not a monolithic community and believe we are made better by a diversity of thought.

However, I am dismayed by a devolving tenor. Much of what I'm hearing of late is overheated, hyperbolic and misinformed. In the continuing dialogue, we'd all do well to refresh our understanding of the history of collegiate athletics in Evanston and not overlook critical facts.

1905: That's when NU started playing football at Central and Ashland – before much of the residential neighborhood surrounding it was even built. College athletics and other public events have viably co-existed in northeast Evanston for well over a century.

Eight square blocks of beautiful, meticulously well-maintained facilities: Through thoughtful redevelopment of its 117-year-old athletic campus – mostly done over the past two decades – the streetscapes of Isabella, Ashland and Central have never looked better.

Even the west parking lot, previously an ugly gravel and dirt patch, is now an attractive, more secure and eco-friendly space.

This newly modernized athletic complex adds value to all nearby, and the reimagined Ryan Field – replacing the outdated 1926 stadium – will be the capstone.

NU Athletics – a reliably good neighbor:

- Northwestern lends use of its facilities to the community – including high school commencement ceremonies, the annual E-Town Showdown and other youth athletic tournaments.
- With limited game-day usage, the west parking lot primarily accommodates Evanston Hospital staff – enabling another critical community institution to operate effectively within the middle of a residential neighborhood.
- In rebuilding the west lot in 2016, Northwestern worked closely with neighbors to address aesthetics, environmental impact and security – ultimately investing \$6 million to ensure all goals were met.
- Northwestern has been a key partner of Canal Shores during its recent turnaround and is committed to supporting the upcoming restoration of the treasured course and green space that's been cared for by a neighborhood-based non-profit for over a hundred years.

Ryan Field gamedays are community-enhancing: Those who live closest to the stadium know there are three basic choices on game days: leave, shut in, or engage and enjoy.

Many neighbors are season ticket holders. Some host open tailgate parties. Many sell off-street parking. Neighbor-to-neighbor interaction and socializing on game days is never greater except perhaps for annual block parties.

Concerts at Ryan Field will bring the same community dynamic but in more temperate weather than during the football season.

Proposed stadium utilization is just 5%: Under the plan put forward by NU, large-scale events at the new stadium would – at maximum – be just 18 of 365 days which equates to only 5% utilization.

An \$800MM privately funded, yet so publicly accessible complex is unprecedented. There are no parallels in Illinois.

Year-round, more intimate “plaza” events will transform Ryan Field into a spontaneous and casual destination for Evanston, Wilmette and nearby communities – bringing more patrons to nearby businesses.

We all must judge for ourselves, but when one focuses on the facts and not unfounded fears, the new Ryan Field is a winning proposition all around – for the university, the surrounding neighborhood and our broader community.

Turner-Walsh to manage Ryan Field project

By Bill Smith, March 23, 2023

Northwestern University Thursday announced it has selected a partnership between Turner Construction and Walsh Construction as its construction manager for redevelopment of Ryan Field.

The stadium project has targeted 35% of its total subcontracted spending to be local, minority-owned and woman-owned businesses, with priority given to businesses and individuals located in Evanston.

The University and Turner-Walsh will host an initial community outreach session at 10 a.m. on April 5, at the Wilson Club in Welsh Ryan Arena.

The session will focus on the opportunities for local contractors and businesses and provide information on bidding processes and timelines, workforce training and planning and other strategies Turner-Walsh will be using to partner with the local business community.

It's the first in a series designed to connect local businesses to the opportunities offered by the project.

"We are looking forward to the opportunity to work with the Turner-Walsh team to deliver such a transformational project for Northwestern and the City of Evanston," Luke Figora, NU's vice president for operations said in a statement. "These two firms have an unmatched track record of success that includes a strong commitment to local workforce development.

Figora says the school expects to submit its planned development application for the stadium project to the city in April, with hearings to follow at the Land Use Commission and City Council.

Figora says, "We want to enable Turner-Walsh to start the efforts they've committed to, while we work through the final stages of approval with the city."

Unrelated to the redevelopment of Ryan Field, Northwestern is also launching a set of maintenance projects on its Central Street athletics campus.

The university and its construction managers are hosting an information session specific to the bid packages for those projects at the Wilson Club in Welsh Ryan Arena at 10 a.m. on Wednesday, March 29. Interested contractors can [RSVP here](#).

EVANSTON ROUNDTABLE

Guest Essay: Sally Mabadi on real estate, property values and the new Ryan Field

March 5, 2023

Author's note: This article addresses one topic that has been raised about the new Ryan Field; it is not designed to address all of the open issues that need to be resolved between the city and Northwestern University. The author supports the work to negotiate a desirable outcome with NU that addresses parking, traffic, noise concerns, policing and other issues of concern to residents.

Like many others living and working in Evanston, I am excited about the new Ryan Field proposal and the musical offerings it will bring, enhancing Evanston's growing art and entertainment scene.

A secondary consideration, being in the real estate business, is what impact it will have on property values. I've heard a lot of opinions on this topic, mostly from those who are opposed to the stadium and claim the new field will negatively impact property values.

I'd like to share what I know about property values in Evanston based on my experience selling real estate here for the past 12 years.

Basic economics comes into play regarding the price of housing, just like any asset. When there is increased demand with a stable supply, prices go up, which we have seen in the Evanston market over the past few years.

When people say the new stadium will negatively impact property values, they assume demand will drop significantly for homes near the stadium once it is built. There is nothing to support this claim. The stadium has been a hub of activity for nearly 100 years and home values in the neighborhood have increased at the same rate as the rest of Evanston.

In real estate, like in life, what's desirable to some may not be desirable to others. Many neighbors who live close to Ryan Field, including several of my clients, chose to buy a home in the neighborhood because of the proximity to athletic events and all of the excitement that comes with it; the new stadium will offer more of what they love.

There are also neighbors who think it's a bad idea no matter what the outcome; they don't like the current stadium events so a new stadium with more events is not what they want.

The varied response to this proposal is what we would expect to see from potential buyers. Different people like different things! There is not a universal response that would sink demand for housing near the stadium. We'd expect to see property values increase in this neighborhood as they have historically, on pace with the rest of the city

Outside of the immediate neighborhood, we also see positive outcomes for property owners. Evanston is already a very desirable destination for many different types of residents, which is one of the things we love about our community.

We often see younger families moving to Evanston from Chicago for our good schools and beautiful neighborhoods while retaining proximity to the city.

We also find empty nesters are moving from the north and western suburbs to Evanston for our great restaurants and the many entertainment options on offer, without having to go into Chicago. Like Northlight Theater, the new Ryan Field will only increase the events that draw people to our town and local businesses.

In researching the impact of new stadiums on local real estate, we found data that show home prices increase when new stadiums are built nearby.

The premium on these homes can range from 3 to 15% (reonomy.com, 2020). According to Trulia.com, two-thirds of the 31 neighborhoods containing pro football stadiums have higher housing values than non-stadium neighborhoods. (Via trulia.com, 2016)

I think it's difficult to estimate a potential increase in values because there are so many factors that impact the value of any property, but it's clear to me that the new development of Ryan Field will only invigorate our community by being more desirable to potential new residents, bringing new tourists to our local businesses, and adding revenue to our tax base. The fact that Northwestern is paying for all of it makes it that much more of a win for the city and its residents.

Sally Mabadi is a real estate broker and team leader at The Mabadi Group. She lives and works in Evanston.



Evanston Now

Why hotel backs stadium rebuild

By Shannon Townsend – February 28, 2023

Since 2001, the 178-room Hilton Garden Inn has been a mainstay in Evanston.

Located on land that was once a public works yard that generated no local revenue, our hotel has worked hard to be a favorite of both business and leisure travelers coming to the community.

We regularly host conferences, celebrations, business seminars and special events for both local and out-of-town guests — and have served over two million in our 22 years in Evanston.

The hotel often uses Evanston suppliers and vendors, and we have successfully employed Evanston residents in our hotel and dining facilities.

Not surprisingly, Northwestern University is the largest driver of customers to the hotel.

Visitors doing business and research come from all over the world to the university. Parents visit their children who are studying. Faculty bring top scholars and meet in our facilities. Musicians and actors who are performing or teaching stay in rooms and use our services. Games at Ryan Field and Welsh-Ryan Arena attract fans, coaches and athletes to our hotel.

Yet the last few years have been a challenge for the hospitality industry like no other. Hotels in Evanston and around the nation are still struggling to come back after the pandemic slowed travel.

That's why we couldn't be more excited about the plans for a new Ryan Field. The new state-of-the-art stadium will host football, other sports, concerts and events.

We relish this opportunity for with it will come more visitors to stay in Evanston hotels, eat in Evanston restaurants and shop in Evanston retail and service establishments.

The additional rooms the Hilton Garden will fill, the added meals we will serve and the increased meeting spaces the hotel will rent can be an important revenue source for our property.

With a new Ryan Field, as our hotels do better, so does the City of Evanston from room, sales and liquor taxes. And we would expect to add staff to serve these new guests, which means more jobs for Evanston.

The Hilton Garden Inn strongly supports the proposed new Ryan Field and the plans for more events at both the new stadium and Welsh-Ryan Arena.

This is an opportunity for Evanston, its businesses, its residents, and for the future of the community that we are proud to call home.

EVANSTON ROUNDTABLE

Letter to the community: NU's proposed stadium is a 'field of opportunities'

February 17, 2023

According to a recent poll by President Biden's pollster, John Anzalone, nearly 70% of Evanston residents support having 10 concerts at Ryan Field.

We agree with the majority that the new plans for Ryan Field, including a reasonable number of concerts and other non-athletic events, will create an economically stronger Evanston that is more vibrant, beautiful and fun.

We believe city officials should gauge what's best for the entire community, especially those who cannot afford to stay in their homes due to tax hikes and those who need access to good-paying jobs and a career path in the trades.

The Ryan Field project can help solve both problems. There must be a collaboration that is driven by what is best for all, not what is best for a few.

Our concern is that the voices in opposition seem much louder than the thousands who support this sensible, once-in-a-lifetime opportunity. For that reason, we have launched a grassroots group – Field of Opportunities – comprised of neighbors, business owners, former elected officials, faith leaders and other residents to advocate for this project. We invite you to join over 100 founding supporters who want their voice heard on this project.

As a group, we live in Evanston, in part, because it's home to a world-class university that enriches Evanston economically, socially and culturally. We believe the relationship between Northwestern and Evanston is symbiotic. When one of us thrives, both of us thrive. When one of us suffers, both of us suffer.

We care about the environment and don't want to see the university spend hundreds of millions of dollars on a stadium that they only use for six or seven football games a year; that's a waste.

We want to see the new, remarkable, LEED Gold-certified, ADA-accessible facility used year-round for a reasonable number of non-athletic events, including concerts. We support the rezoning of Ryan Field and Welsh-Ryan Arena to allow for music, other events and responsible alcohol use.

We expect Northwestern to be transparent and honest with their intentions, responsive to legitimate neighbor concerns and committed to the city's long-term viability.

This means an increased and extended financial commitment to the city, as well as subcontracting 35% or more of the construction project to local, minority- and women-owned businesses and providing preferential consideration to similar Evanston-based businesses for

the ongoing operations of the stadium. We intend to hold Northwestern accountable to its promises.

We trust that our city manager and mayor will do their best to negotiate terms that are in the best interest of our city.

In the end, the question is: Can we have a new Ryan Field that creates opportunities for residents, families, local businesses, student-athletes, taxpayers, music lovers, minority and women-owned businesses, those with functional needs and our city and university, while addressing legitimate issues, such as parking, raised by some nearby neighbors? We believe we can.

Please join us in supporting this once-in-a-lifetime project. Together, we can create opportunities for many in Evanston.

Field of Opportunities supporters

Peggy Baxter

Hon. Omar Brown

Mike Cassidy

Rev. Monte Dillard

Joe Flanagan

Margaret Flanagan

Dr. Raju Ghate

Hon. Jane Grover

Hon. Steve Hagerty

Cheryl Judice

Hon. Jay Lytle

Amy Morton

Mike O'Connor

Kristin O'Connor

Bryant Wallace

Tracy Wasserman

Dr. Eric Witherspoon

Jim Young



Evanston Now

Neighbors organize to back NU stadium plan

By Bill Smith – February 16, 2023

A new community group supporting Northwestern University's plans to rebuild Ryan Field announced its formation today.

Peggy Baxter, a member of the new "[Field of Opportunities](#)" group, says she lives right next to the stadium and can see Welch-Ryan Arena out her window.

She said she's been really excited about the school's plans for the project, including holding concerts at the stadium and the arena.

"When I listen to neighbors opposed to the project," Baxter added, "What I hear is objections to the positive impacts it could have on Northwestern. I've never been focused on that — that's almost entirely irrelevant. What matters to me is how the community stands to benefit."

Baxter said there's no other development opportunity on the table that promises to be as enduringly beneficial as the new stadium. "It will have benefits way beyond the 7th Ward," she added.

More than 100 people have already [offered their names](#) in support of the group which is also seeking more supporters.

Raju Ghate, an orthopedic surgeon at NorthShore University HealthSystem, says he's lived a block south of the stadium for almost 18 years.

He says there "are a lot of myths in the neighborhood about what happens on game days."

"One of those myths that's always out there is that there are people urinating on people's lawns," Ghate said. "We just don't see that. It's an idea that's been exaggerated beyond belief."

Cheryl Judice, owner of Hecky's Barbecue in Evanston, says, "Running a business, anything we can do to attract more business to Evanston, particularly coming out of the pandemic, I'm all for it."

"I'm dismayed when I go downtown at how fragile the business community looks," Judice said, "We need to take advantage of this opportunity."

Kimberly Holmes-Ross, interim executive director of Evanston Cradle to Career, who was born and raised in the 5th Ward and now lives in the 2nd Ward, said she's "super excited" about all the possibilities that the stadium brings to the city for business and for recreation.

Former Evanston Mayor Steve Hagerty, who lives less than a mile east of the stadium, said it would be a lost opportunity for the entire city if the project doesn't go through, and he urged residents who support the project to contact their council members to show their support.

Hagerty noted that the City Council voted 5-4 while he was mayor to let the university test holding special events at Welch Ryan arena. But after that test was sidetracked by the pandemic, the current council voted 8-1 not to give the university an extension of time for the experiment.

“This can be a great benefit to the city,” Hagerty said, adding that the concerns about parking and noise can be addressed by the university.

“I don’t want to see this decision drawn out by the city while more businesses are going out of business,” Hagerty added. “We need more economic activity, and this project will provide it.”

EVANSTON ROUNDTABLE

NU's promise for minority jobs helps gather project support

By Gina Castro – February 3, 2023

The promise of jobs for minorities, especially Black residents, is a driving force for many to support the new Ryan Field football stadium.

On Thursday, Feb, 2, more than 40 people squeezed into a room in the Family Focus building, 2010 Dewey Ave., to hear community leaders and neighbors of the stadium speak in support of Northwestern University's project.

"I'm excited about the opportunity to have work come into the Black community as well and get Black professionals, Black trade resources, engaged," said Clarence Weaver, Central Evanston Business Association member and co-owner of C&W Market and Ice Cream Parlor, 1901 Church St.

The university said **35% of its subcontracted spending** will be with Evanston, minority-owned and woman-owned businesses. Northwestern estimates the project will create 2,924 jobs and pay \$11 million in direct fees to the city. The project will require **zero** tax dollars.

"This is an opportunity for those groups to generate generational wealth," said Dave Davis, Northwestern's executive director of Neighborhood and Community Relations.

Some people wore white T-shirts with "Fans of Ryan Field" on the front. "I am thankful that we all get to witness and contribute to that which will likely only happen once in a lifetime," said Sr. Pastor Monte Dillard of First Church of God.

Northwestern did a presentation on the project for the First Church of God, and Dillard and the clergy are hopeful about the job prospects Northwestern is promising, he said. Dillard is also chair of Evanston Own It, which a total of 16 Evanston-based churches participate in.

"I also am in great expectation, as I have stated in private, about the components of the project that are going to ensure that Black individuals have access to contribute significantly to the building of this project," Dillard said.

Former Fifth Ward City Council Member Delores Holmes, who turns 86 this year, recalled the way Northwestern assisted her in growing the Family Focus nonprofit.

"A lot of the furniture, probably still here, came from Northwestern," she said. The university connected the nonprofit with volunteers, too, Holmes said.

"I'm supportive of Ryan Field because it's going to mean so much more to my community as well as the over all Evanston community," Holmes said.

Much of Ryan Field's opposition comes from the Sixth and the Seventh Wards. More than 150 residents came to a Seventh Ward community **Jan. 31** to oppose the rebuild.

These two wards are among the wards with the highest white population and wealth in the city, according to the [Evanston Project for the Local Assessment of Needs \(EPLAN\)](#).

Holmes said to the audience at the press conference that the Sixth and the Seventh Wards also opposed the referendum to bring a school back to the Fifth Ward.

“They voted it down, so this is my opportunity,” Holmes said.

Mike O’Connor, who lives a block from Northwestern’s athletic campus, said Ryan Field enhances the city’s quality of life.

“I think the streetscapes of Isabella, Ashland, Central have never looked better in my entire lifetime,” O’Connor said. “I think that the rebuild of Ryan Field will complete that athletic campus as maybe one of the best in the nation.”

Others in attendance at the meeting said they were excited about the project’s plans to be “the most accessible stadium in college football,” as the project’s [website](#) says.

“They’re going to exceed all of the ADA requirements,” said Jim Young, who has lived in Evanston for more than 23 years. An accessible stadium means a lot to Young as he was diagnosed with Parkinson’s Disease three years ago.

“The outlook for people with Parkinson’s is not very good because it’s a degenerative neurological disease,” Young said. “One part of [the project] that is especially attractive to me, is the commitment by the Ryan family themselves to disability.”

The Ryan family are contributing the funds to rebuild the stadium, which is the university’s largest donation in its history. The family has a child who is in a wheelchair, Young said.

One voice spoke up in opposition to the Ryan Field project at the press conference.

Kevin Brown doesn’t buy Northwestern’s commitment to hire Black and other minorities for the project, because he said the university doesn’t promote diversity internally. Brown is on the Board of Community Alliance for better government. He is currently suing the city for firing him because of alleged racial discrimination.

“The university is not even doing the things that you can do to increase the Black student enrollment, to increase the number of Black staff and to increase the amount of Black programming for its students for their development,” Brown said.

“So when it makes these promises about creating opportunities for the Black community, it really needs to start with its educational program before it reaches out and enters into the entertainment space.”

The RoundTable also spoke with David DeCarlo, one of the founders of the Most Livable City Association. DeCarlo didn’t attend the press conference. The RoundTable called him after he emailed asking to respond to Thursday’s press conference.

He published a [letter to the editor](#) in October and is concerned with how fast the Ryan Field project seems to be moving. When asked what he thought about the jobs for minorities Northwestern is promising, DeCarlo said the city should complete its own economic impact study beforehand to verify Northwestern’s claims.

“What’s the rush?” DeCarlo said. “This is an important project for the community to get right. And so why don’t we wait until we have the city’s own analysis before rushing anything through.”

Ryan Field backers talk jobs, community

By Bill Smith, February 2, 2023

Several community leaders from Evanston's west side spoke out at the Family Focus building Thursday afternoon in support of Northwestern University's plan to rebuild Ryan Field.

Former 5th Ward Alderman Delores Holmes said the jobs that the project could bring to the community "are just fascinating to me."

"It's going to mean so much more to my community, as well as the overall Evanston community," Holmes added. The stadium, she said, "is not in my backyard, but it's in my community, and I want to see it flourish."

Northwestern has set a target of doing 35% of the projects total subcontracted spending with local minority-owned and women-owned businesses and giving priority to businesses and individuals located in Evanston.

Clarence Weaver, owner of the C&W Market and a minister at Second Baptist Church, wearing a "Fans of Ryan Field" T-shirt, said, "Any time you have a business opportunity of this scale that can impact the community — I'm excited about that."

"A billion dollar effort is not an easy task, it comes with a lot of risk and a lot of issues," Weaver added, "but unless we're engaged, we can't be a part of the resolution of those issues."

Monte Dillard, pastor of First Church of God, said he's "excited and hopeful about this tremendous project" the likes of which "will likely only happen once in a lifetime."

The project has drawn opposition from some residents — especially among stadium neighbors — over concerns about a proposed increase in large-scale events, including music concerts.

But the university says it will provide nearly 3,000 jobs during the rebuild and that the project will have nearly \$660 million in economic impact to Evanston.

EVANSTON ROUNDTABLE

Open letter to the city: Evanston Chamber strongly supports modernizing Ryan Field

January 31, 2023

Dear Mayor Biss and Evanston City Council,

After much discussion with our Board of Directors and the greater Evanston business community, Evanston Chamber of Commerce would like to express our strong support of Northwestern University's proposed plan to reconstruct and modernize Ryan Field.

The plan presented by Northwestern officials this past fall demonstrates significant time invested into soliciting community feedback from residents, businesses and stakeholders. We believe that input gathered for this process ensures the construction proposal is an improvement for the entire community, and not just for the university.

Unlike capital projects and athletic venues constructed elsewhere, Northwestern has presented Evanston with a unique opportunity to address many of the problems with the current Ryan Field, including traffic, noise, light pollution and aesthetics, funded entirely by private donations to the university.

Evanston Chamber is also pleased to see plans in place to prioritize the selection of local vendors for both the construction and ongoing operation of the stadium, where applicable.

Additional year-round programming of Ryan Field/Northwestern Athletics complex, including alcohol sales and concerts, presents significant new partnership opportunities that will strengthen Northwestern's connections to the Evanston business community. The Chamber is eager to work closely with Northwestern and other community organizations to help program and promote these venues in a manner that will strengthen and uplift the Evanston business community with minimal disruption to the surrounding residential neighborhood.

Evanston Chamber acknowledges that additional cooperation and communication between Northwestern, the City of Evanston and local business will be needed during the intervening seasons while Northwestern Football is not playing home games in Evanston. We offer our full support in partnership as transitional plans are developed going forward.

Sincerely,
Garrett Karp
Executive Director
Evanston Chamber of Commerce
garrett@evchamber.com



Restaurateur: City needs new stadium

By Daniel Kelch – Jan 30, 2023

I support Northwestern University's efforts to not only build their new state-of-the-art sports stadium but also to expand the uses allowed within the stadium beyond football games.

This project will serve the community in many different ways, providing new uses that local residents can enjoy but also creating a much needed draw for visitors into our community.

Those visitors are an essential component needed to support both City finances as well as small locally-owned businesses.

As those visitors patronize local businesses, this directly supports our employees, the majority of whom are also Evanston residents.

Please bear that in mind, it's not just small business owners, it's the thousands of employees we all collectively provide employment to.

Direct and immediate beneficiaries will be our local resident employees who will do better when our businesses do better.

As the current chairman of the North Shore Convention & Visitors Bureau, this project provides a marketable destination to expand customer draw into our community.

And there is no better tax revenue stream than visitors coming into a community and spending money.

Tax revenue coming from those outside of our community should be the most prized revenue stream that a municipality can hope to enhance.

They are people who do not live here, do not require extensive City, educational or support services, yet provide direct tax revenue to the community at large.

The benefits of this project are far reaching, something most communities can only dream of achieving.

We all need to step up and embrace this project. Work with the University to mitigate any potential issues, but let's make this happen, concerts and all.

NU survey: Most favor Ryan Field concerts

By Bill Smith, January 26, 2023

Northwestern University Thursday afternoon released results of a public opinion survey that says most Evanstonians favor the Ryan Field rebuild project — including holding concerts at the new stadium.

The survey, conducted for the school by [Impact Research](#), showed 56% of Evanstonians, when initially asked, supported the rebuild, while only 29% were against it.

After the researchers providing additional information about the project, the support level increased to 63%

The researchers say 64% of respondents favored hosting a dozen concerts a year at the new field. Cutting the concert count to 10 raised support to 69% and reducing the count to eight raised the share of supporters to 74%.

The researchers say residents living within a mile of the stadium were almost equally supportive of the project, compared to residents elsewhere in the city.

The poll was conducted Jan. 13-17 surveyed 500 residents across the city's nine wards. The margin of error for that sample size is +/- 4.5 percentage points at the 95% level of confidence. Three quarters of the interviews were conducted by cell phone.

More details of the survey results are available [online](#). (.pdf)



New poll shows support for rebuilding Ryan Field

By Fox 32 News – January 26, 2023

EVANSTON, Ill. - There appears to be growing support for changes at Northwestern's Ryan Field.

[A poll](#) conducted by Impact Research shows 56 percent of people support a current rebuilding project.

The poll calls for a smaller, more environmentally friendly stadium that is accessible to everyone.

The current stadium is 97 years old.

The new stadium is being funded entirely with private money.

EVANSTON ROUND TABLE

Letter to the editor: Ryan Field project is opportunity to build Black and brown wealth

January 18, 2023

The Ryan Field project in Evanston is an initiative by Northwestern University to rebuild its stadium. With a gift from the Ryan family, the proposal is to construct a state-of-the-art football stadium in the same space where the current stadium stands.

The project is an incredible opportunity for the Evanston community, and Black and brown people in Evanston, to partner and collaborate with the university. Such a partnership must include access to revenue from contracting with the construction and becoming permanent partners in the future for games and events.

A \$1 billion project has the potential to help build generational wealth for Black and brown families in Evanston. As Northwestern has pledged and promises to work with marginal groups in our town, I will support this “once in a generation opportunity.”

Rev. Dr. Michael C.R. Nabors

EVANSTON ROUNDTABLE

Letter to the editor: 'Positives are impressive' for new stadium

December 12, 2023

Just a short note to add my support for the new stadium. I understand the concerns of nearby residents (my family lives about 10 blocks away) but the positives are impressive, not the least of which is the economic boost it will give to so many workers and their families. I also find the design very attractive. It definitely is enough to lure me back into attending NU football games.

Bottom line: As a 50-plus-year resident of Evanston who has not always been enthralled by downtown developments, this stadium and what it brings to the city excites me. I truly hope it happens.

Phil Roden

Chicago Tribune

Evanston Review

Study says upgrade to Northwestern's Ryan Field would bring in \$1.2 billion to area by 2031

By Corey Schmidt - November 21, 2022 at 6:55 pm

An [independent study](#) completed by consulting firm Tripp Umbach shows a new Ryan Field stadium would have a \$1.2 billion economic impact in Cook and Lake Counties by 2031, with \$659.9 million in economic impact to the City of Evanston during the construction process alone.

“Our numbers show that rebuilding the stadium provides powerful possibilities that greatly enhance an already vibrant, thriving community,” Paul Umbach, founder and president of Tripp Umbach, said. “Our study shows that the stadium will bring significant tax revenue to Evanston from visitors to the community, thereby allowing the City to invest in civic improvements, public safety and quality of life.”

The study estimates football and game day visitors economic impact will grow from \$50.4 million in 2021 to \$65 million per year by 2031. In addition to game day festivities, the study notes that its increased external, concert events will also contribute to Evanston's economic growth by contributing \$36.1 million in new economic benefits by 2031 as well. The study also showed that it could create roughly 3,000 more jobs with 35% of these being target toward minority and women-owned businesses.

“Northwestern greatly values our relationship with all of our neighbors and sees this amazing, privately-funded project as a big win for everyone,” said Dave Davis, executive director of Neighborhood and Community Relations for Northwestern. “We will finally have a state-of-the-art venue more befitting of Northwestern's Big Ten status for athletes and fans alike, and the City of Evanston will receive a beautiful community asset along with an enormous economic boost through increased direct and indirect tax revenues, job creation and local partnership opportunities.”

The construction, maintenance and repair of nonresidential structure will experience the greatest amount of economic growth from the project. It is also expected that planning, designing and constructing Ryan Field will create 5,942 jobs in Cook and Lake Counties and 2,924 jobs in Evanston.

The project is funded privately through donations, especially from the Patrick and Shirley Ryan family, to Northwestern University, taking the financial weight off Evanston residents.

Residents have voiced [concern](#) regarding the new stadium and its proposed updates uses becoming a nuisance to nearby residents. Northwestern [outlines](#) fixing these past issues raised by residents as a top priority in the short-term but has not directly discuss how it will accomplish that or a long-term plan.

Pioneer Press reached out to several Northwestern University and Northwestern Athletics staff members, including Deputy Director of Athletics Deneé Barracato, but none could immediately be contacted.

University representatives have previously stated that a smaller capacity and a canopy will help address noise and light concerns. In a recent [news release](#), the university also said there will be new gathering spaces and landscaping buffers around the stadium's perimeter.

Corey Schmidt is a freelance reporter with Pioneer Press.

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Nov 21, 2022 at 4:41 pm

EVANSTON ROUNDTABLE

Letter to the editor: Downtown Evanston backs Ryan Field revamp

By Mike Smylie, Chair Downtown Evanston - November 19, 2022

Downtown Evanston is where Chicago and the North Shore meet. We represent over 300 businesses, property owners and managers, nonprofit organizations and major institutions – all of whom make up the vibrant and rich culture of Evanston’s central business district.

It cannot be denied that one of our biggest assets in Evanston is the presence of a world-class university. The Northwestern University campus is adjacent to downtown and our businesses have had a positive, collaborative relationship with University students, faculty, and administrators for years. Just as important are the tens of thousands of visitors Northwestern attracts annually for conferences, speakers, prospective student visits, student/family/alumni events and weekends, performing arts, and Big Ten sports events. The University community and its visitors represent significant consumer spending through hotel stays, dining, shopping, and the use of business services.

Northwestern’s announcement to rebuild Ryan Field, turning it into a state-of-the-art stadium, and increasing the number of events the facility can host, is literally a game-changer for our local business community. According to the recently released independent economic impact study, when the new stadium opens in 2026 for football games plus additional concerts and other special events, it will nearly double the amount of yearly economic impact in Evanston – from \$50.4 million in current spend to \$98 million – and five years out, that number is even bigger. Much of that new spending from Ryan Field patrons will be concentrated in downtown Evanston.

The hospitality and retail sectors of downtown Evanston include several hotels, 60 restaurants offering a variety of cuisines, and a myriad of shopping experiences and services. Most of these businesses are independently owned. Their presence in the district results in a walkable, charming business community that works together to support this unique neighborhood. Unfortunately, like in other towns across the country, owners of Evanston businesses were hit particularly hard during the COVID-19 pandemic. While some businesses were able to adapt to take-out or online purchasing, the loss of physical walk-in customers created a substantial hardship and, sadly, we lost some businesses.

But, with the concerts and sporting events that will augment the Big Ten football schedule, more people will come downtown for dinner or shopping, and some will stay in an Evanston hotel.

The Downtown Evanston board of directors wholeheartedly supports the exciting plans for a new Ryan Field. We ask the City of Evanston to work with Northwestern and the Ryan Field neighborhood to fashion a plan that minimizes the externalities of the added events on neighbors while taking advantage of this incredible opportunity to welcome more visitors to our community. These are challenges we can solve. Together, let’s embrace this powerful possibility for Evanston.

EVANSTON ROUNDTABLE

Letter to the editor: Let's work with NU to improve Ryan Field changes

November 10, 2023

I am writing as a longtime resident of the Seventh ward and a proud Evanstonian. I grew up in the Seventh ward and 10 years ago moved my family from Boston to Evanston so my children could be raised in this vibrant university community.

My husband and I are not employed by Northwestern, we are not Northwestern alumni and our family members did not attend Northwestern. We have bought two homes within spitting distance of the stadium and currently live in one of the four homes that are adjacent to the stadium. When we bought our current house in 2019, we fully accepted the risks and the benefits of having Ryan Field, Welsh Ryan arena, the softball and baseball fields as our direct neighbors.

My biggest fear for our community and the alderpersons that represent us is that we fall complacent to the easier path of anchoring in the old arguments of Evanston vs. Northwestern in response to the unveiling of the plans for the new Ryan Field.

I understand there are longstanding residents who have felt wronged by past Northwestern projects. While I don't share that experience, I appreciate the apprehension and concern brought to planning sessions and I'd also hope this project can represent another chance to build goodwill.

I also appreciate that we have new leaders at Northwestern that are delivering on their commitment to provide a transparent process, including community input, and have formed a working group which includes residents that represent a diverse set of viewpoints. Many of the initial concerns brought forward have been addressed in the preliminary plans. The stadium footprint is smaller, with a new canopy designed to contain lighting and noise. The initial plan reveals green space, park settings, additional parking with drainage technology and a walking path with landscaping to provide an additional buffer to those residents directly adjacent to the new venue (thank you). And yet, we still have important work to do.

For good reason, the biggest sticking point is the potential addition of several concerts to the new outdoor stadium. Instead of rejecting this proposal out of hand, I'd strongly urge my neighbors and fellow community members to come to the table to listen and learn about what this could mean for Evanston through ticket sales and tax revenue, as well as how such concerts can positively impact local vendors and businesses. Yes, it's easier to sit on the sidelines, not speak up, or complain, but we all win when residents act like decent human beings and contribute to the conversation and bring a solution-oriented mindset.

Instead of leading with "no," let's put our energy into coming together and crafting our asks of Northwestern. Let's recommend the parameters that we, the community, would want to see in place that will make this a win for Evanston. It might not be perfect yet but let's work together to

get it closer to what we want. We should be looking hard at ways for this opportunity to benefit neighbors, the broader community and the university. It can and it should, but only if we work together.

Peggy Philip Baxter

Chicago Tribune

Editorial: Northwestern's new football stadium looks like a luxury game-day experience with unimpeachable funding

By The Editorial Board – September 30, 2022 at 10:50 a.m.

Thanks to the Chicago Bears and the perennial arguments over Soldier Field, conversations about stadiums and renovations are commonplace for us. But the plan put out in recent days by Northwestern University for a new Ryan Field in Evanston breaks the typical mold of these things in two fascinating ways.

One is that the proposal for what is essentially a new college football stadium in Evanston is fully funded with nary a dime, it seems, to be procured from the public purse. Thanks to the foundational largesse of the Patrick G. and Shirley W. Ryan family (insurance can be a profitable business), the cost of this massive Central Street, Evanston project — reportedly as high as an eye-popping \$800 million — is to be fully funded by private donations.

Northwestern, always mindful of the political implications of these things, has been anxious to note that the stadium will not affect tuition costs or take away from faculty raises or scholarships or whatever. It's touted as a self-contained venture. And assuming this is what the Ryan family specifically wanted to support, that would appear to be the case.

The second — equally striking — is that the stadium actually will have some 12,000 fewer seats. Instead of the current capacity of 47,130, the new Ryan Field will only seat about 35,000.

When did you last hear of a new stadium project designed to reduce capacity by some 25%? We can't recall, either.

The architects of the new stadium, Kansas City sports architects HNTB, who've been quietly on this job for some time, were previously involved in the renovations of both the famed horseshoe at Ohio State and the Big House in Ann Arbor. For the record, the \$226 million expansion of Michigan Stadium, completed in 2010, added a new tower with 83 suites and 3,200 club seats. Michigan Stadium seats 107,601. And in Columbus in 2019, HNTB helped Ohio State spend \$42 million to add loge boxes. Ohio Stadium now seats 104,944.

And at the University of Nebraska, KNCB pushed the seating capacity up to 90,000 after a \$64 million renovation.

In all those cases, the work was about renovation, but also about adding capacity and increasing the potential gross ticket sales.

Not only has Northwestern gone in precisely the opposite direction, but it has done so to a major extent. Building it 25% smaller amounts to far fewer fannies in seats, even if the old benches now will be seats with backs. Looking back at the various reports on these plans in professional publications, it looks like Northwestern first intended to redo the existing stadium and then switched gears and decided to start over.

Those with no love for purple will snicker that this small capacity (some 15,000 below the next-smallest Big Ten stadium) is a not-so-tacit self-acknowledgement of the limited appeal of Northwestern football, even in the decades to come. Unlike many of its Big Ten rivals, Northwestern rarely sells out and on the rare occasions when it does, the capacity crowd usually comes courtesy of the Chicago-based fans of the visiting team.

Certainly, this is an admirable and rare dose of realism since the improvements genuinely appear focused on improving the fan and student-player experience, and they're clearly designed to match Northwestern's brand as a private school with one foot in traditional Big Ten football madness (for those who wish to partake) and one foot in something more, well, refined.

If this plan were for a hotel, it would be for an upscale boutique operation designed to contrast with the huge, convention-oriented Marriott in that other college town. Ah, the luxury of lots of donated money.

The smaller capacity also is a mighty clever way to head off likely opposition in Evanston, notoriously known for NIMBY tendencies and for disapproving major development projects that bring traffic and crowds to residential areas. By reducing capacity, Northwestern effectively has blunted any possible opposition on those grounds from neighbors. The university also has promised to turn the new Ryan Field into a place that the community can use for various activities. There's even what looks to be a lovely new public park alongside the stadium.

The only issue here is likely to be the university's plan for an unspecified number of concerts in the new stadium, perhaps drawing concert business away from Wrigley Field. That will be subject to neighborhood scrutiny, we'll wager, but there is precedent for concerts in this part of Evanston. The venue known as Space presented Elvis Costello in an outdoor setting this summer, not far from the stadium at the Canal Shores Golf Course. If Evanston can stand that "mini-Ravinia," they probably can handle the likes of Billy Joel playing like a Wildcat on the piano.

And many neighbors likely will see these shows as a convenient amenity.

The original stadium was the work of the illustrious architect James Gamble Rogers, known as a master of so-called "collegiate gothic" and well represented at Yale University, too. But what is now Ryan Field has been messed around with plenty over its history so it's hard to imagine too many lamenting its exit for something fresh. Whether the new building will end up being "architecturally significant," as the university claims, remains to be seen.

But Northwestern fans will look forward, we bet, to hearing, "We're going to 'Move. Those. Chains.'" ringing out in new digs.

Unlike deals where the Chicago Bears and other NFL and major league teams from other sports have requested all kinds of public largesse for their dreams, the Northwestern plan certainly is unimpeachable on financial grounds, and it sure looks like it will be a spectacular place to watch college football.

As notable philanthropic gifts in Chicagoland sports go, this one is a big deal.

And since stadiums take a while to build, maybe old Soldier Field is about to see more comings and goings than we thought.

Chicago Tribune

Northwestern unveils design for new, smaller football stadium — a replacement for the 97-year-old Ryan Field

By Brian J. Rogal – September 28, 2022 at 9:19 p.m.

Northwestern University released renderings Wednesday of the proposed design for a new football stadium, a replacement for the 97-year-old Ryan Field.

A \$6.1 billion fundraising drive completed last year ensures developing the 35,000-seat stadium won't require taxpayer financing, hurt the university's research efforts or come at the expense of students, faculty and staff, according to school officials.

"I have no doubt that the privately funded stadium will be a game-changer for our football program, athletics department and the community, and will be in line with our other excellent facilities including Welsh-Ryan Arena and Ryan Fieldhouse," said Derrick Gragg, vice president for athletics and recreation.

The design for a new Ryan Field was shaped by feedback received over the past year from Evanston community members during meetings organized by 7th Ward Councilmember Eleanor Revelle. Many residents wanted to see less traffic and noise on game days, while others suggested using the new facility year-round for concerts and other community events.

University officials said that's one reason they unveiled a 35,000-seat proposal, 12,000 fewer than the current Ryan Field, which would be demolished after the 2023 football season. They also plan to include a canopy over the new stadium to reduce noise and light pollution in the surrounding neighborhood during games.

In addition, if approved, the new Ryan Field would include plazas for tailgating fans, a community park as well as public green spaces modeled after Maggie Daley Park in Chicago. The facility also would replace the existing stadium's benches with comfortable seats and include high-tech scoreboards and concession stands supplied by local restaurants.

According to a statement from the university, because a new stadium wouldn't be financially viable if it hosts only seven football games each season, the school also will consider allowing some concerts but hasn't decided how many.

Northwestern "is exploring all options," the statement said, for a temporary home venue for the Wildcats during construction, which is expected to be completed before the 2026 season.

The massive project still needs a green light from Evanston, but before it starts moving through the entitlement process, Northwestern will spend several months gathering more feedback from the community and city officials about the proposal, according to Northwestern President Michael Schill.

The school's lucrative fundraising drive was pushed over the goal line by a \$480 million gift, the largest in its history, from the Patrick and Shirley Ryan Family. The gift also will support biomedical and economics research.

“The new Ryan Field will be more than just an amazing home for Wildcat football,” said Patrick Ryan, a Northwestern graduate and retired CEO of Aon Corp. “Our hope is that through this new stadium campus, Ryan Field is re-imagined as an architecturally significant year-round gathering place for the Northwestern and Evanston communities that is accessible to all.”