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Opinion

Opinion: Will a soccer stadium at The 78 meet the community's needs?

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Credit: Related Midwest/Gensler

A rendering of the proposed stadium's western facade near the Chicago River.

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The recent announcement to transition part of The 78 development into a privately funded soccer stadium raises



In February 2021, Chicago United for Equity and its partners released a Racial Equity Impact Assessment (REIA) conducted on the use of Tax Increment Financing (TIF) for the Lincoln Yards and The 78 developments. [The REIA found](#) that participants viewed the city's substantial financial commitments to these TIF projects as a poor use of public funds that primarily benefit affluent areas. Over the past 23 years, these TIFs have captured \$2.4 billion in tax revenue — approximately \$100 million annually. This spending now seems unjustifiable given the pandemic and budget shortfalls.

Since the REIA's release, major developments have stalled, leaving neighboring communities in uncertainty. Despite renewed interest in The 78 due to the soccer stadium, not much has changed since the REIA was conducted.

The vision for The 78

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The original vision for The 78 was transformative, intending to create a vibrant community with up to 13 million square feet of commercial, residential and institutional space, along with 12 acres of open space and 10,000 residential units. This was not only about structures but about fostering community and providing essential amenities for the residents of the South Loop and Chinatown. The city's use of TIFs to spur this development is justifiable, given the site's history of vacancy and neglect.

However, allocating a significant portion of this development to a soccer stadium raises concerns about whether it aligns with The 78's original vision. Will the stadium meet community needs, or will it prioritize profit over public interests?

Gentrification, housing and public infrastructure

The 78 has been marketed as a new neighborhood, joining Chicago's 77 defined community areas, but is deeply



These changes illustrate the gentrification affecting the Near South Side, particularly as it encroaches into the South Loop. Nearby Pilsen, with a majority-Latinx population, Chinatown, predominantly Asian, and Bronzeville, majority Black, are most vulnerable to displacement, as noted by the [DePaul Institute for Housing Studies](#), including their culturally significant local businesses and nonprofits.

The Roosevelt/Clark TIF District, with a maximum expenditure of \$1.1 billion, was primarily aimed at funding public infrastructure improvements. These included a new CTA Red Line subway station at 15th and Clark, as well as realigning the Metra tracks on Clark to enhance pedestrian and car access. However, the new soccer stadium plan has diverted attention and resources away from these critical infrastructure projects, as it does not incorporate the promised infrastructure improvements. It is unclear whether the removal of these critical infrastructure projects from the plan is due to cost increases since the initial plan approval.

At this juncture, Related Midwest is pushing new plans through City Council, without addressing how the existing Roosevelt/Clark TIF will be amended. When community members and concerned alders raised the question at the Chicago Plan Commission meeting, the Department of Planning & Development Commissioner Ciere Boatright said it was too soon to discuss. How can private development be discussed without addressing how public dollars will be used? Since the Roosevelt/Clark mega-TIF was approved in 2019, it has generated \$76 million as of 2024, yet there has been no transparency on how these funds will be spent now that transit infrastructure has been rolled back.

The Affordable Requirements Ordinance mandates that 20% of housing units in The 78 must be affordable. The potential presence of a soccer stadium raises concerns about balancing entertainment with housing needs. Could the stadium lead to increased property values and rents, exacerbating the housing crisis in an already vulnerable area?

Community engagement is essential

As the city looks to move forward with this plan, community voices must be included in the planning and decision-making processes. The development of a stadium should not be a unilateral decision made by developers and city officials without meaningful input from residents. Engaging the community in discussions about the stadium's design, accessibility and potential benefits is essential to ensure it serves as a true asset rather than a burden.

[The survey responses presented by Related Midwest](#) may not accurately capture the input of residents in Chinatown, Pilsen and Bronzeville, who would be most significantly impacted by increased property costs and changes in traffic patterns. Additionally, Ald. Pat Dowell, 3rd, has hosted two public town halls to date, both of which were held as Zoom webinars, where residents' questions were filtered and reworded. This type of limited engagement doesn't allow for full community representation regarding the updated plan.

Moreover, the city must ensure the stadium does not detract from the original goals of The 78. The soccer stadium should complement the outlined goals focused on creating a mixed-use environment that prioritizes affordable housing, public infrastructure and community spaces.

Converting part of The 78 into a soccer stadium offers both opportunities and challenges. While this development has the potential to generate excitement and boost economic activity, it is essential to ensure that it meets the community's needs. Prioritizing and centering the voices of those most impacted and striking a balance between entertainment and essential services will be key to the overall success of The 78.