

Holiday flash sale! Subscribe to
BizTimes and save 40%!

[Learn More](#)

Limited time offer. New subscribers only.

Industries



By **BizTimes Staff**
Jun 10, 2015 12:00 am

The city of Milwaukee would create a new tax incremental financing (TIF) district to provide \$12 million toward the Bucks arena project, under the current proposal.

Last week state and local leaders announced a proposed deal for a \$250 million public contribution for a new \$500 million arena in downtown Milwaukee. The other half of the cost of the new arena would be paid for by the current and former owners of the Milwaukee Bucks.

As part of the proposed deal, negotiated on the city's behalf by Milwaukee Mayor Tom Barrett, the city would provide \$37 million for a new parking structure and \$12 million in TIF.


- Advertisement -



The city's \$12 million in TIF funds will be used for a public plaza east of the new arena. The parking structure would have about 1,240 spaces and would be built in the Park East corridor, northeast of North 6th Street and West Juneau Avenue. The revenue from the parking structure would be split by the Bucks and the city, which would use those revenues to help pay for the structure.

The city also plans to provide an additional \$8 million in TIF funds to the Bucks owners for the ancillary development. Those funds will be paid up front by the Bucks owners and



Holiday flash sale! Subscribe to  BizTimes and save 40%!

Limited time offer. New subscribers only.

the plaza and the parking structure owned by the city, Barrett said.

- Advertisement -

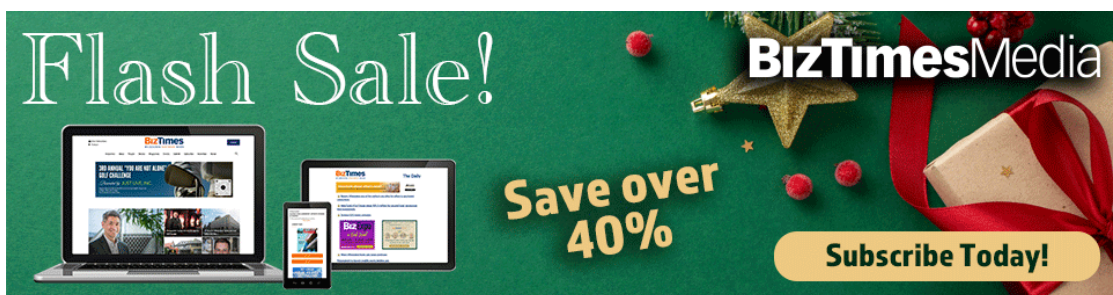


The new TIF district for the arena would overlap the city's existing TIF district for the Park East corridor, which means the boundaries of the Park East TIF would be changed.

The area for the arena TIF district includes Park East blocks between McKinley Avenue and Juneau Avenue, west of the Aloft Hotel to West Winnebago Street. It also includes a block and a half north of the BMO Harris Bradley Center and its parking structure, blocks north of West Highland Avenue between the Milwaukee River and North Fourth Street, and part of the block northwest of McKinley and North Dr. Martin Luther King Jr. Drive.


All of that area is currently in the Park East TIF district, and would be removed from the TIF and placed into the new arena TIF.

- Advertisement -



Some Milwaukee County Board supervisors at a Committee of the Whole meeting on Tuesday commented that Park East land that the Bucks want to buy to do ancillary development around the arena would be in the arena TIF and that it would be years before the county gained property tax revenue benefits. But that land was already in the Park East TIF.



Holiday flash sale! Subscribe to 
BizTimes and save 40%!

Limited time offer. New subscribers only.

The TIF will be able to recover its costs without the land that it would lose to the new arena TIF, said Department of City Development Jeff Fleming. Much of that land is vacant and government-owned and currently generates no property tax revenue.

In addition to the land from the Park East TIF district, the arena TIF district would also include: the current Bradley Center site, a vacant lot southwest of North 6th Street and West State Street, the Milwaukee Journal-Sentinel block, blocks south of Highland Avenue between the Milwaukee River, North 4th Street and State Street, and the north of the Park East corridor between McKinley, 6th Street, West Vliet Street and Old World Third Street.

When TIF districts are created the property tax revenue those goes from those areas to local governments is frozen at existing levels. As property values rise, the increased tax revenue (the increment) is used to pay for projects in the TIF district. Once those costs are paid for the TIF is dissolved and the tax increment is then collected by all local governments.

The arena deal is still subject to approval by the state Legislature and Milwaukee Common Council.



milwaukee **journal sentinel**

OPINION | Editorial *This editorial reflects the opinion of this publication's Editorial Board.*

Thanks to a clear-eyed public investment in Fiserv Forum, we have the Bucks -- and an NBA championship

Milwaukee Journal Sentinel

July 28, 2021 | Updated Aug. 3, 2021, 11:14 p.m. CT

Savor this NBA championship, Wisconsin. In a very real way, your investment made it possible.

All of Wisconsin has a share in the Bucks' remarkable rise from small-market doormat to NBA champions. None of it would have happened without a new arena, built with \$250 million of public money.

Fiserv Forum may be the House that Giannis Built, but the shared contribution of Wisconsin taxpayers poured the foundation.

Without that commitment, there would be no Giannis, no Khris, no Jrue playing together for the Milwaukee Bucks this season. There would likely be no NBA team in Milwaukee at all. No four weeks of playoff excitement. No Deer District. No #BucksInSix. No joyful celebrations after more than a year of pandemic cabin fever.

Without the new arena, the Bucks were as good as gone.

Need a news break? [Check out the all new PLAY hub with puzzles, games and more!](#)

RELATED: [Two massive celebrations in two days. How Milwaukee and the Bucks pulled off huge events after a year of pandemic](#)

RELATED: [Finally! Milwaukee Bucks finish off Phoenix Suns to win first NBA title in 50 years](#)

That it didn't turn out that way is a testament to a clear-eyed public vision of what could be; to strong, passionate leadership and, in the end, to [bipartisan agreements](#) in an era of fractious politics when finding ways forward toward common goals is very hard to do.

There are lessons in how the Bucks were saved — lessons that a region that sometimes thinks too small and too parochially should commit to memory.

"I think this victory can profoundly resonate for the city," Bucks President Peter Feigin said in an interview this week. He called Milwaukee's extended star turn on national television a "global commercial" of inestimable value, where "we were able as a city and state to show our authenticity, our character, our charm."

"This is not a magic wand that solves everything," Feigin said, "but it can certainly be a catalyst to thinking about renewed investment."

The public's investment in a new arena not only saved the team, it led to the coolest space in the city — the Deer District, where 100,000 screaming fans celebrated history made. And it is leading to millions of dollars in additional investment nearby, helping to transform an area west of the Milwaukee River that has been a virtual desert since the old Park East Freeway spur was razed more than 20 years ago.

[The Fiserv Forum cost \\$524 million](#) — \$250 million from taxpayers in various forms, \$174 million from the team's owners and \$100 million from former Sen. Herb Kohl, who saved the team from leaving Milwaukee not once but twice.

That investment is looking pretty good today, but it easily could have turned out differently.

Let's say community leaders settled instead on trying to retrofit the old [BMO Harris Bradley Center](#) instead of taking the much harder road of seeking funding for a new arena.

Would the Bucks have stayed in Milwaukee? Would there be a Deer District or new development nearby?

Milwaukee would have lost its NBA franchise and been saddled with a mostly empty and decaying arena in a mostly empty and decaying part of downtown.

But thanks to a lot of hard work by lawmakers on both sides of the aisle, business leaders, the Bucks organization — and taxpayers — we have a new state-of-the-art arena, a new favorite community gathering space and a championship team to celebrate.

“This put us on a national stage and shows, frankly, our culture in a different way that’s hard to capture any other way,” said Kathy Henrich, CEO of MKE Tech Hub Coalition.

Henrich said the Bucks have built a “blueprint that long-term investment leads to long-term success.”

RELATED: [The Bucks championship could help attract young talented workers and pay other dividends for Milwaukee for years to come](#)

That includes important work on racial and economic justice issues.

After a Kenosha police officer shot Jacob Blake seven times, for example, [Bucks players decided](#) to take a public stand last year and sit out a playoff game — a move then [imitated by other teams](#). Bucks players also spoke with state Attorney General Josh Kaul and Lt. Gov. Mandela Barnes about policing of Black people, and several marched in a protest after George Floyd was murdered.

The Bucks reached a deal with arena workers on [a \\$15 an hour minimum wage](#), and as the new arena was being built, encouraged [an apprenticeship program](#) to diversify the region's workforce and help young people learn the skills they need to land family-supporting jobs.

Jrue and Lauren Holiday began working on improving the quality of life in Milwaukee [the day after he was traded to the Bucks](#), through their [Social Justice Impact Fund](#), launched when he decided to commit \$5.5 million of his 2020 salary to charitable causes.

And in the heart of one of the nation's most racially segregated cities, night after night, the exuberant, diverse crowds in the Deer District projected a hopeful vision of what a more inclusive future could look like.

Feigin described what it was like to see a sea of people converging on the Deer District during the parade to celebrate the championship.

"And then you ride down McKinley on a double-decker bus and you see the most diverse, the most optimistic, the most celebrating crowd you've ever seen in your whole life," he said. "And if you didn't know any better, you'd be like this is the most diverse, vibrant city all rooting for the same thing ... we couldn't paint the picture better."

After the team won the title, Bucks forward Khris Middleton said he hoped it could in some way help the city's Black residents. "I think it would be huge, especially for the city of Milwaukee, the African Americans all over here," he said.

But none of those good works, none of the priceless free international marketing, none of the thrills provided by a hard-working, [blue-collar team](#) would have ever happened without the new arena. And that couldn't have happened without a public commitment from taxpayers across the state.

Eight years ago, as the debate over whether to build a new arena was taking shape, the late Marc Marotta, chairman of the BMO Harris Bradley Center board of directors, acknowledged at a conference organized by Marquette University Law School that the city's problems, ranging from poverty to poor educational outcomes, needed to be addressed. But he said the city also [needed to improve quality of life](#) to attract young people and businesses — and that all of this improvement would be intertwined.

"If we don't attract talent and companies and jobs, we will never be able to address those issues in the way we should," Marotta said in a story written by longtime Journal Sentinel reporter Don Walker.

Neither Marotta or Walker would live to see the Fiserv Forum open. They both died too young, within weeks of one another in 2015 (the media center at the arena is named in Walker's honor).

But with a little help from a transcendent basketball hero, who is humble enough [to use the drive-thru when craving fast food](#), Marotta's vision was realized and we can see the fruits of public investment in a shared community asset.

Giannis Antetokounmpo, the Bucks megastar who signed a long-term deal with the team in December, has endeared himself to fans with his play (50 points, five blocked shots in the finale) and his effervescent enthusiasm for his adopted city.

"[This is why I love Milwaukee](#)," he said in the Chick-Fil-A drive-thru the morning after winning the title. "This is why I chose to stay, because we celebrate together. It's been like this since day one. It's been like this since day one and I love this."

The night before, he thanked Milwaukee's fans. "Coming back, I was like, this is my city. They trust me. They believe in me. They believe in us," Antetokounmpo said.

"It's easy to go somewhere and go win a championship with somebody else. It's easy. I could go to a super team and just do my part and win a championship.

"But this is the hard way to do it and this is the way to do it and we did it. (Expletive) did it. We did it, man."

Indeed, we did.

Together.

Editorials are a product of the USA TODAY NETWORK-Wisconsin Editorial Board, which operates independently from the network's news departments.

Email: jsedit@jrn.com

Why we [publish editorials](#). Meet [the members](#) of the Editorial Board.

