

**PAY TO PLAY: EXAMINING THE ECONOMIC OPPORTUNITY
COSTS OF PUBLICLY SUBSIDIZED PROFESSIONAL SPORTS
STADIUMS**

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Between 1970 and 2020, state and municipal governments allocated \$33 billion in public subsidies to construct 135 major-league sports venues in the United States and Canada, with the median public contribution covering 73 percent of venue construction costs (Bradbury, Coates, & Humphreys, 2022). Based on professional stadium and arena construction trends over the last 50 years, North America is entering another boom for new sports facilities. Since 2023, more than a dozen Major League Baseball (MLB) and National Football League (NFL) organizations began plans to build new publicly funded stadiums (Lieb, 2023). For example, the MLB team formerly known as the Oakland Athletics will soon be playing in a new ballpark in Las Vegas, roughly one mile from the newly constructed Allegiant Stadium, home of the NFL's Raiders, also formerly of Oakland. Combined, the two stadiums will end up receiving more than \$1.1 billion in public funding, not counting tax breaks. Similarly, elected officials for the city of Buffalo, New York committed \$850 million of public money toward the Bills' new NFL stadium, and Tennessee politicians recently approved a record \$1.26 billion subsidy for the construction of a state-of-the-art facility, in Nashville, for the NFL's Titans (Moore, 2024). Supporters of public subsidies for new professional sports venues often tout the importance of civic pride and substantial economic impact to host cities. Opponents, however, point to this perceived misuse of public funds as a gross lapse of fiduciary responsibility by elected local and state officials. This study examines the financial implications of using public subsidies to support sports facility construction and the economic opportunity costs associated with building these new professional sports venues.