



NEW YORK STATE SENATOR

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A New Stadium for the Buffalo Bills Must Make Financial Sense for NYS & Taxpayers

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Football season is in full swing and that means thousands of Western New Yorkers are cheering on the Buffalo Bills and the team's ongoing quest for a Super Bowl trophy. In addition to what is happening on the field, a lot of attention is focused on a possible new stadium for the NFL franchise as part of a long-term lease to keep the Bills in Buffalo.

Representatives of the team, Erie County and New York State will have to decide whether to build a stadium to replace the current 50-year-old facility in Orchard Park. The lease at what is now Highmark Stadium expires in 2023 and the Bills are proposing a \$1.4 billion, 60,000-seat replacement be built across the street. Negotiations among the various entities will determine if it is built, who pays and how much.

Back in 2013, I supported a ten-year lease extension and a public-private partnership that included \$130-million in renovations at the current stadium. The state paid about \$54 million, with Erie County and the Bills sharing the rest. At the time, my decision was based on an analysis of the anticipated return on New York's investment. Over the past ten years, the revenue the Bills generated directly to the state from sales tax and income tax exceeded the cost to New York taxpayers.

A similar cost-benefit analysis must be conducted now. Building a new stadium will obviously be much more expensive for all parties involved, but it will come, presumably, with a long-term lease, keeping the Bills here for the next 20-30 years.

How much revenue will the team generate for New York State and Erie County over the life of the new lease? The numbers should help determine how much public money might be considered to help fund a new stadium.

We must also ensure the process is transparent. Simply put, if public dollars are going to be allocated for this project, the public must be informed as lease negotiations proceed. To that end, I have re-introduced legislation that would require those involved in negotiating a new lease to follow NY's open meetings law and make their deliberations public. Residents should also share their thoughts with their elected representatives in state and county government.

We have a wealth of assets that shape the culture of our region. The Bills are among them. The team is part of Buffalo's identity and one of the many things that make this a special place to live. Buffalo is fortunate to have an NFL franchise. Several teams have relocated because they could not reach a stadium agreement with their host city. No one wants to see that happen here.

How much are the Bills worth to our community? We need to review the numbers now and work together to find the answer in a timely manner.