

NEW SPORTS STADIUMS OFFER HIGH SCORING OPPORTUNITIES WHEN LINKED TO NEW URBANIST PRINCIPLES

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Controversial? To some, certainly. Yet new stadium projects are changing the face of downtown America, spawning unique opportunities for revitalizing city centers and their adjacent neighborhoods. Huge public investments, new stadiums, when situated appropriately within their broader context, justify the expenditure by drawing large crowds to downtown and attracting spin-off development of various types. More than just "post-card images," new stadium projects can be leveraged to attract substantial additional investment capital, giving cities a once-in-a-lifetime opportunity to correct infrastructure problems which impede their growth. Stadium projects provide the impetus for a new framework for development, for new urban districts, and for stimulating construction activities that expand and enliven America's downtowns.

In many ways, stadiums are like "Big Box" retailing: they are single purpose facilities that demand easy access, large parking reservoirs, and large sites for footprints that may approach 400,000 sq. ft. The construction of new highway interchanges, streets, parking facilities, parks, and plazas inevitably accompany stadium projects. Empty and dark most of the year, stadiums are not, themselves, hosts to daily urban life. On event days, though, they become transformed into exciting venues whose impact can be felt well beyond the stadium perimeter. The real value of stadiums in downtown location is their potential to create adjacent districts of unique character.

Cincinnati, a beautiful city on the Ohio River, provides a case in point. For over two centuries, the river contributed to the city's growth and prosperity. Then, during the post-World War II highway boom, downtown Cincinnati was cut off from its riverfront by the construction of a major highway, Fort Washington Way. Cinergy Field and an adjacent arena were built on the riverfront, surrounded by parking lots and connected to downtown by pedestrian bridges. The riverfront became vehicle-dominated; Cinergy Field was encased in a parking garage. While the teams could boast that the stadium emptied faster and got its fans on the highways faster than any other professional sports facility in the country, the city fathers conjectured that the opposite -- maximizing fans' stay downtown -- would actually be more beneficial.

Voters approved the construction of two new stadiums and a steering committee was established to oversee both the site selection process and redesign of the central riverfront. The Steering Committee, comprised of city and county political leaders, sought to maximize the return on the public investment, ensuring that the interests of the city would supercede all individual agendas. Embracing New Urbanist principles, the committee retained Urban Design Associates of Pittsburgh to lead the design effort.

Both teams favored a central site adjacent to a historic suspension bridge designed by John Roebling, but it became clear during the public design process that Cincinnati citizenry thought a

new riverfront district and riverfront park were higher, more appropriate uses for that site. Consequently, stadium sites were selected to bookend the new district. The stadium projects lent renewed urgency to a federal highway initiative already underway. The design alternative chosen will link downtown to the riverfront with a framework of new city streets and development blocks yet preserve access to the interstate highway. Now under construction, the new Fort Washington Way, will create a new front door to the city and provide improved access to both the stadiums and downtown. The new riverfront district will feature the National Underground Railroad Freedom Center, new housing, street-oriented retail uses, and underground parking for stadium events and commuters. Through a carefully conceived and implemented urban design process, Cincinnati's political leaders and citizens have successfully leveraged public funding of stadiums to expand and improve their downtown.