

Brewers maintenance funding bills pass Assembly with bipartisan support

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The Assembly today approved 69-27 with bipartisan support a deal to keep the Brewers in Wisconsin through 2050.

The two bills will provide \$546 million in public money in exchange for extending the team's lease through 2050.

They now head to the Senate.

An Assembly committee last week amended the package to require the city and county to contribute \$135 million combined toward the costs over the next 27 years. The state would kick in \$411 million in exchange for the team extending its lease through 2050. It now expires in 2030.

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Assembly Minority Leader Greta Neubauer, D-Racine, even before the Assembly took up the deal for debate said her caucus is divided on the current version.

"Our caucus is split on the bill today because we can hold many things to be true," she said. "The Brewers are a real asset to our state. And this bill could have done more for the people Wisconsin."

Speaker Robin Vos praised the deal for being a win for Wisconsinites, the local community and the team. He noted the plan included in the deal to winterize the stadium would mean even more revenue for everyone involved.

"The Milwaukee Brewers, millions of people every week, hear the name and

associate a professional sports team with their community,” he said. “People visit, they bring their dollars here, they cheer for the team. While the brewers are a statewide team, there’s no doubt about it, the most direct economic benefit is for the city and the county of Milwaukee.”

The Rochester Republican also stressed the fact that the team would lose hundreds of millions of dollars if they decide to leave under the new deal.

Rep. Supreme Moore Omokunde ripped the bill, saying it’s an example of “stick it to Milwaukee” rhetoric, arguing the Legislature won’t help regular Wisconsinites, “but we will move heaven and earth to make sure billionaires get what they want.”

The Milwaukee Dem noted only Milwaukee is burdened with paying for the team while previous stadium deals involved four surrounding counties pitching in too.

“It’s like all of Wisconsin wants to enjoy all Milwaukee has to offer, but few want to see Milwaukee prosper,” he said.

Rep. Rob Brooks, who Vos charged with leading deal negotiations, said the “stick it to Milwaukee” comments were “insulting,” adding “sometimes it’s best to say ‘thank you.’”

The Saukville Republican argued many Wisconsinites pay into Milwaukee’s coffers already when they visit American Family Field and other attractions.

“Well, on behalf of the residents of the 60th district that drive down from Ozaukee and Washington County, we apologize for spending our money in Milwaukee,” he said.

Previous deals would’ve required the county and city of Milwaukee to pitch in \$202.5 million, but negotiators reduced that after many Milwaukeeans balked at the price tag.

Now, the deal requires Milwaukee County to contribute \$2.5 million per year for the next 27 and the city would match the county’s overall contribution with monies collected through sales taxes revenue by the Department of Revenue.

A provision reduces the percentage of sales tax revenue the Department of Revenue takes to cover administration fees for handling local sales tax contributions to the general fund.

DOR would take 1% of revenue collected from the city of Milwaukee's 2% local sales tax and use it to pay the city's \$67.5 million local share.

The Department of Revenue currently takes 1.75% of local sales tax payments for administering the county and municipal sales and use tax. Under the bill, other units of government with a local sales tax would only pay 0.75% for administration.

DOR would still take 1.75% from the city's portion and whatever DOR doesn't use for administrative purposes would go to the district until the city contributes \$67.5 million. That could mean the city could pay off its half of the \$135 million before the 27-year deadline. When that happens, DOR would drop its administration fee down to match the rest of the counties at 0.75%.

The Legislative Fiscal Bureau in a memo published today estimates the change would decrease the transfer to the general fund by \$6.5 million in 2024-25, \$6.7 million in 2025-26 and \$6.9

million in 2026-27. By 2049-50 when the lease agreement ends, LFB estimates the reduction to the general fund would \$13.6 million.

LFB also estimates the city of Milwaukee will pay off its obligation by 2045 as annual payments grow from \$100,000 next year to \$4.1 million in 2044 and then \$3.8 million in 2045 to pay the remainder.

LFB also notes Dane County would see the biggest impact from the fee reduction with DOR collecting \$884,000 less annually.

The deal also includes a provision to form a study committee involving the team and local leaders to consider redeveloping the area around the ballpark, which includes over 12,000 parking spots among 16 lots.

But the Assembly will have to take the measures up again if the Senate makes any changes. Sen. Steve Nass, R-Whitewater, is demanding the bill include some more safeguards and a new way to raise revenue.

Nass' office last week told WisPolitics he wants to see the deal include a thorough audit of the existing Stadium District Board to figure out how the current financial situation occurred and an independent audit of the new lease agreement with the team once it's finalized. His office said he's also been talking with colleagues about adding some kind of ticket tax, but Nass favors a tax on non-Brewers events.

Rep. Rob Brooks, who Vos charged with leading negotiations on the deal, in an Assembly GOP press conference ahead of today's floor session said everyone at the table know "that a non-Brewers ticket tax is forthcoming."

"The dollar amount of that and how it will be allocated is yet to be determined," he added.

The Saukville Republican also said everyone at the table is interested in some kind of audit to make sure the stadium district board is acting responsibly.

"You know, there will be other amendments forthcoming," he said. "I've heard everything from a middle-class tax cut to you name it, and people trying to pile into this bill. Those are things that we have never discussed."

See the Legislative Fiscal Bureau memo:

<https://www.wispolitics.com/wp-content/uploads/2023/10/231017LFBBrewersMemo.pdf>