

Evers proposes \$290M for Brewers stadium improvements

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Gov. Tony Evers wants to provide \$290 million in one-time state funds to the board that oversees the Milwaukee Brewers stadium to finance ongoing improvements.

In exchange, the Brewers would sign a deal to keep the team in Milwaukee through December 2043 — 13 years beyond its current lease — and commit to make its own contributions to the upkeep of American Family Field.

The gov will include the proposal in two-year budget plan he unveils tomorrow night. The Evers administration pitched the proposal as an investment that would work out for the state in the long run. The administration projects the state would collect \$400 million in sales taxes and other revenue off of the Brewers over the life of the 20-year commitment to remain in Wisconsin. The administration said that would mean the state would break even somewhere between years 11 and 14.

With the state projected to have a more than \$7 billion surplus at the end of this fiscal year, using cash instead of raising bonds for the work also would save the state in the long run, the administration said.

“Using just a small portion of our state’s historic surplus, we can not only save over \$200 million in taxpayer dollars in the long run, but keep good-paying, family-supporting jobs here and ensure the Brewers remain in Milwaukee and continue to play a critical role in our state’s economic success for another two decades,” Evers said.

Professional franchises have used threats to move as they have sought public funds for stadium construction and renovations. The Chicago Bears, for example, have bought property in the suburbs for a possible future stadium after disagreements with city officials over improvements to the publicly owned Soldier Field.

Rick Schlesinger, the Brewers’ president of business operations, said the team is prepared to commit to a lease keeping it in American Family Field for the next two decades.

“The Milwaukee Brewers are committed to working with policymakers on both sides of the aisle to extend the life of American Family Field and help make Major League Baseball possible in Wisconsin for the next generation,” he said.

The Evers administration said the money would be used for a host of maintenance to keep the 23-year-old park operational. That includes repairing the retractable roof and addressing outdated infrastructure such as fire suppression systems.

Still, the money could be used for any cost now covered by the agreement between the team and the Southeast Wisconsin Professional Baseball Park District, which was created to oversee the lease.

The lease requires the stadium district to cover improvements required by Major League Baseball. In the past, the public funds have been used for costs such as adding a ribbon scoreboard and LED stadium lights.

Under the proposal, the state would provide the \$290 million to the baseball park district, which would be allowed to invest the money and use proceeds to help finance improvements at the park. The district currently has about \$70 million in its reserve fund. Between the state’s commitment, what’s already in reserve and the earnings from investing the money, the effort would cover some \$448 million over the life of the deal.

The Brewers conducted a review of the stadium and estimated projects of \$428 million through 2043. The state Department of Administration did its own review, pegging the costs in the range of \$540 million to \$604 million worth of work on the campus to extend its useful life for another two decades.

The Evers administration and Brewers agreed to use the team’s assessment while adding \$20 million to the possible cost to account for inflation.

The stadium was built primarily using public funds from a five-county 0.1 percent sales tax that started in 1996 that generated \$605 million until it was retired in 2020. The tax was created to help fund the construction of the stadium as well as ongoing maintenance costs.

Schlesinger said the Brewers oppose bringing back the five-county tax to cover maintenance costs.