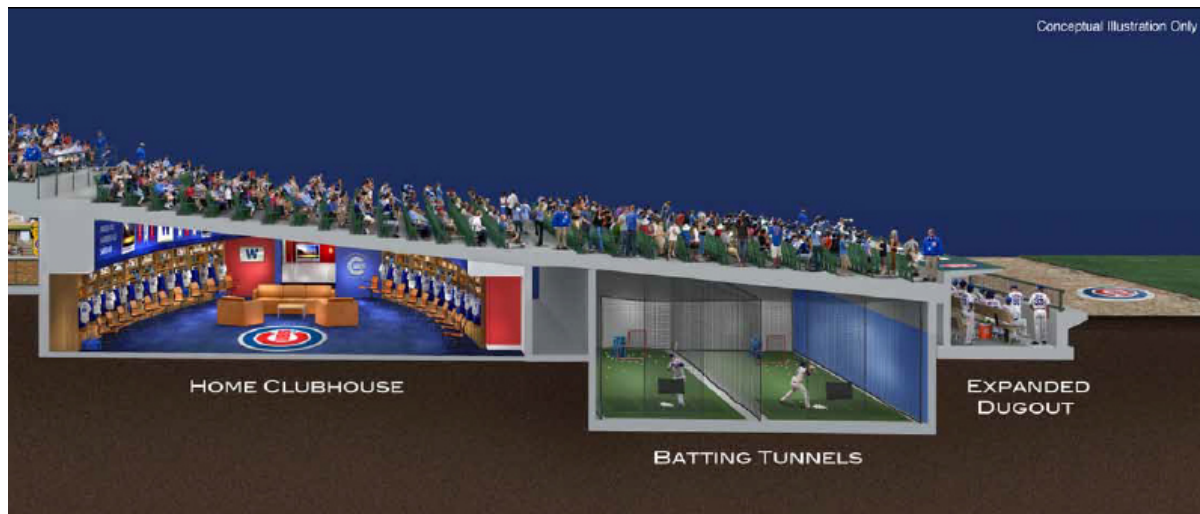


Why the Wrigley Field Renovations Matter

Written by Maury Brown
Wednesday, 17 April 2013 14:43



**The renovation to Wrigley Field helps the players as much as the fans
(Click to see in larger view)**

As baseball fans, the vast majority like their game experience to remind them of the “good old days.” Whether it was the retro movement spawned by the creation of Oriole Park at Camden Yards or the continued love of baseball oldest ballparks, that idea that you’re in a place that “feels” like an old historic place, resonates.

So, while the prior ownership of the Red Sox talked of building a new Fenway Park, when John Henry, Tom Wener and Larry Lucchino purchased the club, they chose an expansive renovation to baseball’s oldest ballpark, not going after new. Ten years later, the ballpark has many modern amenities found in brand new stadiums while being able to retain its sense of history.

Tom Ricketts isn’t stupid. He certainly had to see what the Red Sox had done with Fenway Park when he and his family ponied up \$845 million in August of 2009 to purchase the Cubs, Wrigley Field, and other assets. For Ricketts, the renovation had to happen; it was going to be the “how” that mattered.

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Just a few months shy of 5 years after the purchase, the Cubs are preparing to do \$300 million in renovation to the second-oldest ballpark in the league based around private funding from the Ricketts family. In exchange, a “framework” has been agreed to by Mayor Rahm Emanuel, Alderman Tom Tunney (44th Ward) and the Cubs that includes not only the updates to Wrigley Field, but a two-story Captain Morgan Club on Addison Street with a merchandise store and space for a visitors clubhouse and a number of opportunities for the Ricketts family to invest outside of the stadium, including a hotel that will accommodate 175 rooms, 75 parking spaces, food and beverage, retail and a 40,000 square foot health club, and a pedestrian bridge with public access over Clark Street connecting the hotel and plaza. All-in-all, \$500 million will be poured into Wrigley Field and the Wrigleyville community.

[SEE HIGH-RESOLUTION GRAPHICS OF THE PROPOSED RENOVATION](#)

The Ricketts family will be permitted to construct a building at the north end of the Triangle property to house Cubs offices, a hotel meeting space, as well as a plaza that will be managed by the team, retail shops and a kids zone. The Cubs will further be allowed to reconstruct the Brown Parking Lot on Eddy Street. These projects will go through the planned development and other formal approval processes with community input.

In addition, the Cubs will be allowed to place signage along the hotel, the office building, and the plaza to accommodate significant advertising and sponsorship opportunities. Included in this sign package will be a four screen video board within the plaza that, in addition to advertising, will allow the Cubs to broadcast Cubs games and ‘Movies in the Plaza’ for the community.

There’s significance in all of this. As was the case with Fenway Park, ownership (and the assumption is, with the league’s blessing) initially pushed for the vast majority of the funding to come from the public. While the deal is not 100% private (the Cubs are seeking tax breaks for renovation that come with Wrigley being a historic landmark), it is a substantial shift for deals that have been borne almost exclusively on the backs of the taxpayers (see the Marlins and Nationals stadium deals).

As with any deal of this magnitude—and especially in light of Wrigley Field’s uniqueness in being located in the heart of a residential area—there are requests that have been asked for, and granted as part of the framework reached.

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The agreement will allow the Cubs to extend beer sales to the end of the 7th inning or 10:30 pm, whichever is earlier; and will permit the team use of Sheffield Avenue for weekend home games between Memorial Day and Labor Day beginning two hours before a game and ending at the end of 2nd inning. In addition, the City would vacate a parking lane on Waveland Avenue for Cubs to build a new exterior wall.

According to a press release by the City of Chicago, changes include:

- A new parking plan for Wrigley Field which will call for 1,000 free remote parking spots with a shuttle to Wrigley Field. The Cubs, Alderman's office and the Chicago Department of Transportation will jointly develop a marketing and awareness campaign designed to educate fans to use remote parking or other transportation alternatives, such as bikes and the CTA.
- Additionally, there will be new Clark Street traffic lights to control game-day traffic and the Cubs will work with the City and community on a new public safety plan, which will provide 30 additional safety personnel outside the park after games for the safety of nearby residents.
- Finally, the Cubs will contribute to the School Street Play Lot funding effort and make annual contributions each of the next ten years for public projects benefiting the community agreed upon by both Alderman Tunney and the Cubs.
- In terms of the makeup of Wrigley Field, the proposal will call for a video board in left field as well as a right field sign in the style of the existing Toyota sign. The Cubs will work with the city on placement of both signs to minimize impact on nearby rooftops to the extent consistent with the needs of the team.
- The Cubs would also receive the ability to install signage inside the park, including the seating bowl, in locations which do not impact rooftop views.
- The proposal allows the Cubs 40 night games for baseball with mechanisms in place, such as a special City Council ordinance, to allow for additional night games including times when required by Major League Baseball's national television contract. This complement of 40 night games does not include the playoffs or other games excluded under the current ordinance. The framework will also allow four concerts per year to be authorized by special ordinance, six 3:05 starts on Friday afternoon, as well as greater flexibility for offseason and smaller events at Wrigley Field.

These changes allow the Ricketts family to not only work toward recouping funds, but having those revenue streams live on. The sticking point is the video board and how it impacts the Wrigley rooftop businesses. What was once just people hanging out windows or sitting on the roofs of homes across from the ballpark have turned into a massive cash-cow business. When the leaching became more than a bit of Americana and more a big business, in 2002 the Cubs,

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under former ownership of the Tribune Co., along with Major League Baseball, sued over copyright infringement. The sides settled in 2004 and an agreement was reached the rooftop owners would pay 17 percent of the gross revenues collected to the club. In exchange, these thirteen rooftop owners became "Official Rooftop Partners". Now, with the Cubs looking to build a new video board, the group is saying that they are willing to go to court to keep their views of the ballpark intact for duration of the 20-year contract they reached.

But, there's the likelihood that some type of an agreement on the design will be reached (although one wonders if matters get too heated if the Cubs would like nothing more than to pay a cash settlement and then construct *The Great Wall of Wrigley*) that will satisfy both parties.

What's key here are not only the increased revenues to fill the coffers (and, one assumes increase player payroll), but an upgraded facility for the players, as well.

Wrigley is known for not exactly being "state of the art" in terms of the clubhouse and the amenities that players are now accustomed to. As an example, the batting cages are not behind the dugouts, but rather under the right-field bleachers. So, while other teams have the ability to go back and take a couple of whacks during a game by taking a few short steps back behind their dugout, at Wrigley it requires going out to the far end of the ballpark to make it happen.

As part of the renovation, the Cubs will completely rebuild of the clubhouse, and add batting tunnels right behind the new expanded dugouts. So, one could say that the renovation to Wrigley Field not only provides additional financial resources, it adds resources that directly impact the players' ability to be performance ready.

So, the renovation matters from several perspectives. There will be less taxpayer dollars in play. With the Ricketts family providing the funds it allowed them to get concessions which will allow them to maximize not only the ballpark, but invest in Wrigleyville. It will make the ballpark more enjoyable to go to, not only for the fans, but for the players as well as the facility will see upgrades for the Cubs players.

What the ownership of the Red Sox knew, so soon will the ownership of the Cubs. The renovation to Wrigley Field is expected to take 5 years.

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