Madison Parks Division

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Date: November 13, 2026
To: Board of Park Commissioners
From: Eric Knepp, Parks Superintendent
Re: Big Top Proposal for Private Investment into Breese Stevens Field

Introduction

Big Top Events, LLC, ("Big Top") has made two informational presentations to the Board of Park Commissioners regarding their proposal to privately fund improvements at Breese Stevens Field. You can find a description of the proposed improvements in the September 8, 2026, memorandum. The presentations that Big Top made regarding the improvements can be reviewed with the legislative files for the September 9, 2026 (Legistar # 94638), and the November 4, 2026 (Legistar # 95377), Board of Park Commissioners meetings.

At the November meeting, Park Commissioners requested additional information on how the proposal may impact the community. This memo provides an analysis of the benefits and risks of the proposal, which stakeholders benefit and who is burdened by the proposal, a review of the current users of the stadium, and four case studies of public private partnerships at soccer stadiums to consider as context for the proposed Breese Stevens Field Second Amendment.

Benefits and Risks

The table below lists the potential benefits and risks of entering into the proposed Second Amendment to the Use Agreement. Staff have negotiated with Big Top to reach a tentative agreement that puts the City in a better financial position than the current agreement. Staff and Big Top have negotiated to minimize risks to the City, though they are certainly not eliminated. The table also includes potential benefits and risks to Madison residents. In considering the proposal, the Commission should weigh the potential benefits to the long-term stewardship of the facility, along with the economic, cultural, and community benefits, against the risks and impacts on the surrounding neighborhood.

City of Madison / Parks Division / Madison Residents Benefits	**City of Madison / Parks Division / Madison Residents Risks**
Long-term commitment for positive, purposeful uses of the park in alignment with the Parks Division mission.	Additional concerts (up to 20) will bring traffic congestion in the neighborhood, which can create safety and quality of life issues for neighbors.
City becomes owner of a permanent locker room/concession building at no initial capital investment.	Additional school night concerts (from 3 to 5 per year) may disrupt families with school the next day.
City becomes owner of a professional stage at no initial capital investment.	Concerts may compete with other events on the Isthmus if enough notice cannot be given to require a blackout date.
Owners of artist hospitality buildings at no initial capital investment.	The number of concerts and shows may not bring in a significant amount of revenue, leaving the City to use other capital funds if/when major building repair is needed.
Owners of stormwater improvements at no initial capital investment.	If Big Top is not successful and terminates the contract, the City will need to determine an alternate use for the improvements.
Stronger financial outlook for Big Top, reducing risk of City needing to invest operating dollars.	Renters in the area may experience increased rent, if home values increase.
Long term commitment for men's and women's soccer teams (Forward Madison FC & Rally Madison FC).	
New revenue stream (ticket fees & show fees) dedicated to use at Breese Stevens Field, freeing up capital funds for use at other parks.	
Predictable expected uses of the stadium on a long-term basis will give neighbors and prospective buyers stability.	
Reduced number of hours for the Parks Division to maintain the facility, and reduced liability for maintenance of entire facility, freeing staff to focus on issues at other parks.	

Who Benefits and Who is Burdened

The following table examines how the proposed amendment may distribute benefits and burdens among various stakeholders. This comparison considers who stands to benefit from the capital improvements, financial changes, and increased concert activity, and who may bear the impacts of the changes. The Park Commission should consider whether these benefits and burdens are distributed in an acceptable manner, particularly given that Breese Stevens Field is a public asset maintained for the entire community.

Who benefits?	**Who is burdened?**
Big Top Events, LLC., its owners, employees, and investors	Neighbors near the stadium who are affected by traffic congestion and reduced parking availability
Concert goers, concert promoters, performing artists	Neighbors near the stadium who are affected by increased noise levels during the concerts
Community users of the stage and field	Families in proximity to Breese Stevens Field during school night concerts
Professional, amateur, and youth soccer teams and their fans	People concerned with the authenticity of historic buildings and landmarks that do not agree with the changes
Other users (Ultimate teams, high school and college athletics, other events and event organizers)	Event organizers at other locations in the area that may compete with concerts
Neighbors concerned with large semi-trucks during concerts	Nearby businesses that may have traffic disrupted, but do not get an increase in event-related business
Event-adjacent businesses (nearby restaurants, ride-shares) that experience more economic activity due to concerts and events	
Madison residents and park users will benefit from capital funding dedicated to Breese Stevens Field, allowing the Parks Division Capital Budget to be spent on other park needs.	

Past and Current Uses of the Stadium

As a facility that is now 100 years old, there is a long history of how the building was used. Acquired to address the fact that Madison needed more athletic fields to address its needs, it was first used as an athletic field for its high schools. Since 1926, it has been home to semi-professional baseball teams and a multitude of high school athletic teams. Currently, it is home to Forward Madison FC (soccer), Rally Madison FC (soccer), Madison Radicals (Ultimate). In addition, the field is used for a multitude of other events, ranging from field trips, comedy shows, concerts, and festivals. The City does not contribute to the operating expenses associated with these events. It is the goal of the Parks Division that this continues to be a historic building that serves a present purpose, not just an empty landmark.

Use Type	Total Uses	# of User Groups	Attendance	User Groups
Forward Club	184	37	11,585	FMFC, Big Top Events, FMFC Academy, Triple MMM, Cap East Soccer Club, Cheshire Cat Comedy, + 31 more
Forward Madison FC	164	1	70,522	Forward Madison FC (FMFC)
Youth Academies (FMFC / Rally)	120	2	11,253	FMFC Academy FMFC / RMFC Academy
Rally Madison FC	32	1	18,516	Rally Madison FC
High School & College Athletics	23	4	5,415	MMSD, Edgewood High School, Edgewood University, High School Soccer All Stars
Additional Athletic Uses	28	6	1,469	MSSC, Goaltimate Frisbee, UW, I9 Sports, Deloitte, MSCR
Professional Ultimate	11	3	9,754	Madison Radicals, AUDL, Milwaukee Monarchs
Festivals & Special Events	21	9	46,996	Big Top Events, Brothers Molloy Events, Dane County Farmers Market, Madison Festivals, Inc., Madison Malt Society, Melissa Bennett, + 3 more
Field Trips	11	11	713	Adventures in Learning, Bee Balm Learning Center, Camp Bayside, Camp of the Lakes and Camp Wildcat, Camp Pleasant Valley, Cap Care, + 5 more
Concerts	4	3	27,822	FPC Live, AEG, American Family Insurance
Community, Civic & Media	5	5	540	MPD & MFD, MSCR, National Guard, Starion, Zappos
TOTAL	**603**		**204,585**	

Comparison Case Studies

The case studies below describe four soccer stadiums that are publicly owned and used by professional soccer clubs. The venues range in size, and they reflect that there are very different approaches to sharing costs between the public and private sectors. As each of these locations and stadium deals are unique, we have not identified a model that is identical to that which exists at Breese Stevens Field.

Kezar Stadium

Location: San Francisco, California

Owner: City and County of San Francisco

Facility Description: A historic outdoor venue in Golden Gate Park, built in 1925. It was reconstructed in 1989-1990 into a 10,000-seat stadium.

Public Capital Contribution: None related to agreement with Golden City FC. Most recent major City-funded renovations in 2015.

Team Contribution: In the 2025 license with the City, the Golden City FC (MLS Next Pro expansion club) must privately fund $10 million in capital improvements, with approximately half of that to go towards a modern natural grass pitch and irrigation system. Other required upgrades include replacing all stadium seats and bleachers, installing a high-definition LED scoreboard and new PA system, refurbishing the press box and concession stands, and completing ADA accessibility upgrades. Golden City will be responsible for maintenance of improvements. In return for the capital investment, Golden City FC receives credits against their fees, with a minimum permit fee of $55,000 per year.

Operation: The Recreation and Parks Department leads operations of the facility. Golden City FC is allowed up to 20 games per year, but does not hold practices or otherwise operate the facility.

Term: 15 years with three 5-year renewals (up to 30 years)

American Legion Memorial Stadium

Location: Charlotte, Mecklenburg County, North Carolina

Owner: Mecklenburg County

Facility description: The stadium is an historic stadium opened in 1936. It is now a 10,500-seat stadium. In 2018, Mecklenburg County commissioners approved a $40 million renovation to modernize the venue, which re-opened in 2021. The stadium is the home field to Charlotte Independence (Division III professional men's soccer) and Carolina Ascent FC (Division One professional women's soccer). Other teams have access to rent the stadium for games and events.

Public Capital Contribution: $40 million (County, City of Charlotte, and Charlotte Regional Visitors Authority)

Team contribution: Queen City Soccer (parent company to Charlotte Independence and Carolina Ascent FC) will pay $2.12 million in rent over 10 years, 15 percent of the revenue from parking, concessions and naming rights, and $3 from every ticket order placed online for up to 30 games per year.

Operations: Mecklenburg County Parks and Recreation manages and operates the facility for broader community events, festivals, and high school sports.

White Stadium

Location: Boston, MA

Owner: City of Boston and Boston Public Schools

Facility Description: Originally opened in 1949, White Stadium is a 10,500-seat stadium. Stadium is currently undergoing a major renovation/expansion funded through a public-private partnership.

Public Capital Contribution: The City of Boston committed $135 million to construction.

Team Contribution: The Boston Legacy FC owners committed $190 million to $252 million to build the team facilities and shared infrastructure.

Revenue Share: The soccer club shares 10% of in-stadium advertising, 10% of field/scoreboard naming rights, 3% of concession revenue. An additional 40% of advertising revenue, 15% of field naming rights, and 5% of concessions go to dedicated capital maintenance reserve fund. $1 per ticket goes to the Franklin Park preservation fund.

Operations: Boston Legacy will start using the stadium in 2028. Boston Legacy can use the stadium for a maximum of 20 home matches per season. The club is responsible for maintaining the natural grass playing field. Boston Public Schools holds scheduling priority for student athletics.

Term: Lease runs for 10 years, with two 10-year renewal options held by the club (30 years). Annual rent starts at $400,000 per year, increasing by 3% per year.

SeatGeek Stadium

Location: Bridgeview, IL

Owner: Village of Bridgeview

Facility Description: Built in 2004, seating for 20,000 during games and up to 28,000 capacity during concerts. A natural grass field and a permanent stage are part of the stadium.

Public Capital Contribution: $98 million

Team Contribution: Chicago Fire FC had originally held a 30-year lease through 2036, but in 2019 bought out of the lease and moved back to downtown Chicago. Chicago Fire contributed $5 million to surrounding capital improvements as part of their buy-out package. Oak View Group now operates the facility and committed to $1,950,000 in stadium food and beverage infrastructure over the course of the agreement. Oak View Group shares revenue with the Village.

Operations: The stadium is operated by the private firm Oak View Group 360, offering multiple sport tenant use agreements. Oak View Group also licenses the stadium for major music festivals, community festivals, etc. and operates concessions for events.

Term: The Village has two agreements with Oak View Group. The Food & Beverage / Hospitality Agreement is for 10 years with a 5-year option.