

The Columbus Dispatch

Opinion

Should Columbus City Council impose a ticket tax?

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Nationwide Arena is one of our community's most valuable assets, a place where families and friends can enjoy each other, a venue for high-school graduations, concerts, community events, amateur sports and professional hockey. In fact, Nationwide Arena is our civic arena. As our civic arena, it is a center and catalyst for thousands of jobs, businesses and an entire city district, allowing Columbus to position itself as one of the great cities in America. It is an asset that is more than bricks and mortar. It is part of our city.

But like any building, it requires maintenance and repair — capital improvements, so that families can enjoy in the future what we enjoy today.

Since casino tax revenues have never reached the levels experts predicted, maintaining our civic arena now requires a new funding source. Our goal is to identify funding sources that do not dip into city resources, do not impose a broad-based tax on the citizens of Columbus and do not depend upon revenue generated by any other nonarena venue in Columbus. In other words, our civic arena can become self-sufficient by relying on its own ticketed patrons. The capital needs of our civic arena can be supported long-term by those who attend events there; nearly 50 percent of the fans going to live entertainment events at Nationwide Arena don't reside in Columbus.

The arena's ticket-tax revenues can pay for capital repairs and improvements and also sustain arts and cultural programs in Columbus.

To achieve these goals, the Convention Facilities Authority joined in a partnership with the arts community to do just that — to provide for a user fee for all ticketed events at certain venues in Columbus to address arts sustainability and the capital needs of our civic arena.

Our civic arena is now almost 20 years old and deferring capital improvements and maintenance jeopardizes its viability for another 20 years. Delaying needed repairs puts at risk the great successes in a district that now contains 10,000 jobs, 1,000 apartments, condos, restaurants, bars, offices and retail outlets, for all of which the arena was the catalyst. Nationwide Arena is not just a "hockey

stadium.” It is a sports and entertainment venue that attracts world-class performances from around the world as well as National Hockey League games and other national sports events such as the NCAA Women’s Final Four Tournament.

Our Downtown civic arena generates millions of dollars in visitor spending and anchors a neighborhood recognized as one of the most stunning success stories in America.

Our civic arena is not only vital to attracting visitors to sporting events and concerts, but also large conventions such as Thirty-One Gifts or Avon Products, which used both our arena and convention center.

Our civic arena is also used by local colleges, universities and school districts, which routinely hold student orientation and commencement ceremonies there.

Without reinvestment, our civic arena will slide into obsolescence as did the downtown arenas in Cincinnati, Detroit and Milwaukee. Our civic arena should not become a drag on our city’s economy and reputation.

Through collaboration with the arts council, our civic arena will be a net contributor to our community’s nonprofit arts and cultural scene. Our civic arena will not only pay for its own capital needs through ticketed admissions there but also will contribute to sustain arts and culture in Columbus. Under the arts council’s proposal, Nationwide Arena not only will strengthen arts and cultural programs in Columbus, but also our city’s position as a visitor destination.

Provided with the facts, our community will see this modest fee as a small price to pay to ensure Columbus can continue to possess the public infrastructure we need to compete on a national stage and as a top-tier North American city.

Don Brown is the executive director of the Franklin County Convention Facilities Authority, which owns Nationwide Arena, the Hilton Columbus Downtown, the Greater Columbus Convention Center and a number of convention center parking facilities.