

Support for New Sport Stadiums; The Baltimore Case

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Urban attempts to lure existing or future professional sports teams or to retain existing teams have forced city and state officials to approve expensive stadia while other needs go unfulfilled. The City of Baltimore and the State of Maryland have faced such a challenge since the midnite departure of the football Colts to Indianapolis in 1984. Efforts to keep the baseball Orioles and to attract another professional football team include the construction of separate stadiums for baseball and football. The political battle over the site for the stadiums was a factor in the 1986 democratic primary for Governor and the plans to finance the stadium were debated in the State Legislature which eventually approved the creation of a Stadium Authority (1987) with permission for the group to raise \$235 million for construction. Attempts to challenge the legislature's decision by forcing a state-wide referendum was negated when a Maryland Court ruled that the decision was not an issue for a referendum. This study was an attempt to assess the attitudes of Maryland residents to the need for a new baseball stadium, the funding plan for the stadium, and whether voters should have had an opportunity to approve the spending of state money for a sports stadium. Also studied were the characteristics of those favoring and opposing the new stadium: being a sports fan, believing in the economic value of a sports team, and supporting the Governor who made the stadium a high priority. Data were obtained during the Fall 1987 poll of Maryland residents conducted by the Survey Research Center at the University of Maryland. Random digit dialing techniques were used to contact 502 residents who consented to telephone interviews. Although fans (37%) were more likely than non-fans (16%) to support a new stadium, those who favored a new stadium were the minority. While 69% of residents believe a professional sports teams provide at least a moderate economic benefit to a city, only 24% agreed that the Orioles need a new stadium. Support is greatest (43%) among those who feel that a sports team provides a large economic benefit, but drops to 20% and 22% respectively for those indicating that sport has a moderate or little economic impact. Even satisfaction for the Governor (52%) was at odds with support for the stadium (24%). Finally, 81% of

all respondents who had an opinion on the stadium indicated that the voters should have had an opportunity to approve the funding plan for the stadium. Even those who favored the stadium believe that the referendum should have been held (72%). Implications of the Baltimore case for other cities were also discussed.