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**Milestones and Overcoming Uncertainty: How
Nashville, Tennessee Secured the Relocation of the
Houston Oilers**

Since the 1950s cities have competed with one another to acquire major league sports franchises to symbolize a city's prominence. Although many cities have received teams through major league expansion, several teams relocated to new cities. During the 1950s and 1960s Los Angeles, San Francisco, Milwaukee and Atlanta were among the cities that attracted major league sports teams through the promise of new, publicly-subsidized facilities tilled with cheering fans. Although the pace of

franchise relocation slowed during the 1970s and 1980s the 1990s were marked with cities making increasingly extravagant offers to teams to switch cities. Among the most aggressive cities was Nashville, Tennessee.

To convince a major league team to relocate, however, groups often had to meet specific milestones to prove the city's ability to host major league sports. These milestones have been related to the sale of tickets and luxury suites and various legislative approvals. Achieving these milestones have been often has been complicated by uncertainties, including public referenda, which have threatened and occasionally forestalled a city's efforts to attract a team. To better understand the nature of these problems and the reactions by groups and individuals, this paper focuses upon the case of Nashville and its recruitment of the Houston Oilers of the National Football League (NFL). By doing so, this paper hopes to offer a better understanding of how requirements have been satisfied and problems solved when cities have attempt to attract major league sport teams.

In a span of three years during the mid-1990s Nashville began construction on two major-league standard facilities, an arena and a football stadium. While the arena was built on the speculation of a tenant, the football stadium was built only after tenancy was guaranteed by the Houston Oilers based upon the achievement of a series of milestones between July 1995 and May 1996. The milestones detailed in the contract between the Oilers and city of Nashville were legislative approvals from the state and local governments, the sufficient sale of personal seat licenses (PSL), and a certain number of contracts for luxury suites and club seating. Failure to achieve any of these milestones could have allowed the Oilers to terminate the contract. However, several problems arose, during the process that jeopardized the achievement of these Milestones. Partisan politics, an opposition-forced referendum and a sales shortfall all potentially could have nullified the agreement between the city and Oilers. However, groups and individuals took actions that helped to overcome these problems and allow the deal to move forward. To analyze these milestones and problems, this paper explores the actions taken by groups and individuals through a variety of primary sources, including newspaper articles, public election records, the mayoral

files of Philip Bredesen and interviews with key decision-makers in the process.