

Ryan Field Redevelopment
1501 Central Avenue
Project Narrative

Overview

Ryan Field has been an important part of Evanston since 1926. The time has come to rebuild the stadium in a way that reflects the needs of a world-class university and the community.

Northwestern University, with the support of the Ryan family and at no cost to the public, has a once-in-a-generation opportunity to replace the existing football stadium located at 1501 Central Avenue with a venue that will offer cutting-edge technology and modern amenities and accessibility for all; provide an exceptional experience for students, alumni, fans, and the surrounding community; establish Ryan Field as a premier regional concert venue limited to 10 public-facing, full-capacity concerts, subject to the separately-submitted text amendment application; and serve as “town square” for the broader Evanston community. The stadium redevelopment will help support the broader not-for-profit mission of Northwestern University, allowing for ongoing support to Northwestern’s other non-revenue generating sports and its ability to maintain and operate its athletic facilities.

Proposed Development

Northwestern University (“Northwestern” or the “University”) is proposing a 116-foot-tall stadium development that will seat approximately 35,000 spectators for athletic events (the “Development”). The Development will be 23 feet shorter and seat 12,000 fewer visitors than the existing stadium. 1,365 surface level parking spaces will be provided and located on the U2 campus and dedicated parking lot across Ashland Avenue. The seating capacity for the proposed concert uses is estimated to be approximately 28,500. Additionally, the Development will feature three public plazas, one public park, and a noise and light canopy to dampen the impact of the Development on the surrounding neighborhood.

The Development was designed with the Evanston community in mind. The architectural design incorporates materials such as limestone, perforated metal and glass to create a sense of continuity between the stadium and other buildings on Northwestern’s Evanston campus. The Development’s ovular form will soften the visual impact of the stadium on passersby, and Northwestern’s decision to pivot the stadium’s angle to Central Street will expand the open space at the corner of Ashland and Central. Additionally, Northwestern designed the Development to limit the stadium’s impact on the neighborhood by sinking the playing field below ground level and adding a noise and light canopy to the top of the structure.

The landscape design prioritizes clear sightlines for both pedestrians and vehicles to enhance on-site pedestrian safety. Street trees will be included along the full length of the property on the east side of Ashland and north side of Central. These trees have been strategically chosen for their dramatic fall color, ecological compatibility with pollinators, butterflies and birds, and feasibility to maintain. Landscape and shade trees will screen the parking lots from adjacent streets and properties, and shade trees will be placed in the parking lots to provide canopy coverage and shade to the hardscape surface and vehicles. A 25- to 35-foot pedestrian and emergency circulation path will be located around the perimeter of the stadium to facilitate safety and circulation. Additionally, the required 35-foot landscape buffer between the residential properties and east parking lot will integrate bio-infiltration swales to advance the Development’s stormwater management goals.

The new Ryan Field will be a more accessible, sustainable, and attractive facility that is an asset to the entire Evanston community. With a smaller footprint of only approximately 35,000 spectators, the stadium will exceed Americans with Disabilities Act (ADA) requirements and be built for Leadership in Energy and Environmental Design (LEED) Gold certification. Among other sustainable elements, Ryan Field will feature an event day bicycle valet, electric vehicle supply equipment in the parking lots, exterior lighting engineered to reduce light pollution, drip irrigation engineered to reduce outdoor water use, low flush plumbing fixtures to reduce indoor water use, a dedicated recycling storage area, and low-emitting materials in the flooring, paints, coatings and insulation. Ryan Field will also utilize sustainable project material sourcing and waste management practices throughout construction and its location on an existing developed site and near public transit to maximize the sustainability of the Development. The University has also committed to develop a Sustainability Plan, which will detail plans for trash clean-up, recycling, composting, water management and greenspace, which will be submitted to the City prior to the first event at the new Ryan Field and updated annually.

The Sustainability Plan is among several ongoing obligations that Northwestern will establish in a future Memorandum of Understanding (“MOU”) between the University and the City of Evanston (“City”), which both parties expect will further facilitate the Development’s positive impact on the Evanston community.

Traffic and Parking

The Development will seat 12,000 fewer visitors than Ryan Field currently accommodates, without reducing the existing number of parking spaces. Additionally, Northwestern plans to work with Metra and CTA to encourage public transit ridership, similar to how Ravinia cooperates with those organizations.

Northwestern football game visitors currently use several different personal automobile transportation alternatives to access Ryan Field. The Central Street Metra Station is located approximately one-quarter of a mile west of the site, the Central Street Purple Line Station is located approximately one-quarter of a mile east of the field, and the route 201 bus line stops directly south of the stadium at the intersections of Central Street with Ashland Avenue and Jackson Avenue. Bicycle and pedestrian traffic to the stadium is facilitated by dedicated bicycle lanes along Sheridan Road and Central Street. Northwestern operates shuttles to and from Ryan Field before and after football games and expects to provide the same service for concert visitors.

As outlined in the enclosed Traffic Study, Northwestern can and does provide an adequate number of personal automobile transportation alternatives and accommodate visitor traffic with the current number of on-site parking spaces. Moreover, the Traffic Study shows that Northwestern will be able to coordinate concert traffic similarly to football traffic, provided similar resources. To the extent City personnel are utilized for traffic management, Northwestern will reimburse the City for those services, similar to its current practice. Additionally, the University agrees to prepare and submit a Traffic Management Plan following completion of the Development and update the plan annually to account for changes to the surrounding context. Please see the Traffic Study for further details. These commitments will be documented in the MOU between the City and University.

Addressing Other Community Feedback

The Ryan Field rebuild is an important, complex, multi-year project that will have many milestones, phases, and changes before it is completed. Northwestern University is committed to

ongoing communication and engagement with the community to share up-to-date information on design, construction, and project timelines. This will be facilitated by a newly created Community Advisory Council that will meet regularly to review updates on construction and Northwestern's M/WBE efforts. Following construction, the Community Advisory Council will meet to discuss stadium operations, review Traffic Management and Security Plan updates and disseminate information to the community. The council will include members appointed by the 7th Ward Councilmember, Northwestern staff and City staff, and its composition and charge will be detailed in the MOU with the City.

Furthermore, the University has been committed to engaging with the community openly over the last year. Those efforts have helped to identify other opportunities for the University to address questions related to the Development. In addition to the topics addressed above, the University is making further clarifications and commitments as part of this application:

- Northwestern currently reimburses the City for additional staff time associated with larger events at the stadium. The University's reimbursements will extend to similar services needed during concert events, and they will be further detailed in the MOU.
- The City and University partner closely in advance of football games and other large events at the stadium to facilitate well-organized event day operations. A detailed security and event planning process will be in place for all future concerts at the stadium.
- While tailgating is a community-embraced tradition associated with collegiate football games, the community has requested that a similar tailgate environment not be in place for concerts at the stadium. The University will commit to restricting such activity.
- Certain members of the community asked that Northwestern better communicate schedules for events in advance and investigate whether there may be an opportunity for concert ticket "pre-sale" windows for Evanston residents. The University is committed to improving communications about activity at the stadium and pursuing pre-sale opportunities for the community with its eventual partners.
- Last, the University received requests for additional detailed information related to the economic impact study. Included in this application is a set of supplemental information from Tripp Umbach, which provides the detailed inputs and outputs of its study.

Public Benefits

As outlined in the Tripp Umbach economic impact report, it is estimated that over 2,924 design, planning, construction, and related jobs will be created in the City during the approximately 39-month construction timeframe. Moreover, the aggregate economic impact to the City during the planning, design, and construction of the Development is estimated to be approximately \$659.9 million. Northwestern is committed to working with City residents and minority- and women-owned business enterprises (M/WBEs) as part of the construction. To that end, Northwestern will develop a local and M/WBE hiring and contracting program for design and construction jobs that will target at least 35% M/WBE participation in the design and construction of Ryan Field. Progress towards these M/WBE commitments will be tracked and made public by the University on a dedicated Ryan Field website. By 2026, the Development will support an estimated 792 jobs and generate an estimated \$3.8 million in additional annual tax revenue for the City. A plan to achieve these targets and transparently report on progress will be further outlined in the MOU.

As a multi-purpose venue broadly serving all members of Northwestern University and the City community, the new Ryan Field will function as a community hub for all residents to gather, connect, learn, play, and celebrate. A catalyst to spur economic development in Evanston, the project will also support the revitalization of Central Street and increase opportunities for minority

and women-owned businesses. Ryan Field will be designed and programmed to be financially sustainable and economically viable, ensuring the stadium's long-term success. The details of the aforementioned public benefits and additional direct public benefits proposals currently under consideration will be further outlined in a future MOU between Northwestern and the City.

Compliance with Comprehensive Plan

The 2000 Evanston Comprehensive Plan acknowledges that Northwestern and other institutions located in the City will change over time and that the City and University should maintain dialogue to anticipate such changes and balance them with the interests of the surrounding neighborhoods. Northwestern has taken the surrounding neighborhood into account with reduced overall building height, reduced spectator capacity and the addition of a light and noise-mitigating roof enclosure. In addition, Northwestern will reconstruct the East Parking Lot to include a landscaped buffer. The University remains committed to working with the City, surrounding neighbors and larger Evanston community to protect the character and desirability of the surrounding neighborhood, as contemplated by the Comprehensive Plan.

Requested Zoning Relief

The Property is approximately 1,628,423 square feet in area and currently zoned U2 University Athletic Facilities District. Due to the size of site and development, the Applicant is seeking approval of a planned development and the following development allowances:

- A 35-foot-wide landscaping strip is required along the east property line where it abuts residential zoning districts, but the development allowance would permit an encroachment in the subject area to facilitate an access drive between the proposed north and east parking lots.
- The required number of off-street parking spaces is 4,204 but the development allowance would permit 1,365 surface level parking spaces due to Ryan Field's transit-friendly location and the greater context that Northwestern is proposing to reduce the number of stadium seats by 12,000 without reducing the number of parking spaces.
- A 15-foot sideyard setback is required at the southeast corner of the property where it abuts an O1 district, but the development allowance would permit an encroachment in the subject area to facilitate an access drive from Central Street to the improved east parking lot.

The requested development allowances are consistent with those that are permitted in the U2 University Athletic Facilities District. No other bonuses or relief are required. The project is otherwise in substantial compliance with the Comprehensive General Plan, Design Guidelines for Planned Developments, Evanston Zoning Ordinance, and other pertinent city planning and development policies, as set forth in the enclosed application materials.

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Statement of Public Benefits

Statement addressing how the planned development's approval will further public benefits including:

- a) *Preservation and enhancement of desirable site characteristics, open space, topographic and geological features, and historic and natural resources;*

Answer: Ryan Field was originally designed to reflect the gothic style of Northwestern's lakefront academic campus, but the stadium's design has not kept pace with the lakefront campus's continued development. Today, Ryan Field is an outdated facility on an oversized footprint. The Development will preserve the connection between the campuses by utilizing limestone, silver-toned materials, glass, and open plazas, just as recent projects such as the Kellogg School of Management have done. Moreover, the stadium's reduced footprint would increase the area of publicly accessible open space on site.

- b) *Use of design, landscape, and architectural features to create a pleasing environment;*

Answer: The Development will utilize an ovular form and airy openings to soften the visual impact of the stadium on visitors, residents, pedestrians, and other passersby. The Development envisions pivoting the stadium's angle to Central Street to expand the open space at the corner of Ashland and Central. The Development will also increase the natural areas on site by adding a park and other green spaces. The aggregate effect of these choices would transform Ryan Field into an inviting center for community life.

- c) *Provide a variety of housing types in accordance with the City's housing goal;*

Answer: Not applicable; no housing will be provided.

- d) *Eliminate blighted structures or incompatible uses through redevelopment or rehabilitation;*

Answer: The existing Ryan Field first opened in 1926. As such, the structure predates modern accessibility and environmental standards. The Development will utilize the principles of universal design to become one of the most accessible stadiums in college football, far exceeding ADA requirements. Further, the University commits to environmental sustainability by pursuing LEED Gold-Certified design.

- e) *Business, commercial, and manufacturing development to enhance the local economy and strengthen the tax base;*

Answer: The Tripp Umbach economic impact study estimates the aggregate economic impact to the City during the planning, design, and construction of the Development will be approximately \$659.9 million. It estimates that over 2,924 jobs will be created in the City during the planning, design, and construction alone. Once constructed, the Development will support an estimated 792 jobs and generate an estimated additional \$3.8 million in annual tax revenue for the City by 2026.

Additional direct public benefits proposals are being considered and will be outlined in the MOU between Northwestern and the City.

- f) *Efficiently use land resulting in more economic networks of utilities, streets, schools, public grounds, and other facilities; and*

Answer: The Development is located on the same property currently occupied by Ryan Field, so the land use would remain consistent. Visitors would continue to utilize shuttles, Chicago Transit Authority Purple line, Metra Union Pacific-North line, and City bus routes to access the stadium. However, the Development would add significant public resources to the space, including three public plazas, and one public park. The Development would also create opportunities for additional programming and events. The aggregate effect of these changes would increase the public utility of the space.

- g) *Incorporate recognized sustainable design practices and building materials to promote energy conservation and improve environmental quality.*

Answer: The Development will promote environmental sustainability by pursuing LEED Gold-Certified design. Notable sustainable design practices include water retention features, the addition of public green spaces, and the promotion of public-transit and biking options for visitors.

- h) *Additional benefits related to transit alternatives, public art, public space improvements, etc.*

Answer: The existing Ryan Field lacks year-round publicly accessible spaces. The proposed project would create three public plazas and one public park. Due to its location in a Transit Oriented Development area, the proposed public improvements will be easily accessible without a car. Northwestern plans to work with CTA and Metra to encourage public transit ridership in a similar manner as Ravinia cooperates with those organizations. Additionally, Northwestern University is committed to utilizing bike valets and ride share services on event days, the details of which will be finalized and provided for in the Traffic Management Plan to be submitted prior to the first event. Once fully utilized, the Development will bring together City residents in a way no local venue can today.

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Response to Special Use Standards

- a) *Is the requested special use one of the special uses specifically listed in the Zoning Ordinance? What section of the Zoning Ordinance lists your proposed use as an allowed special use in the zoning district in which the subject property lies? (See Zoning Analysis Review Sheet)*

Answer: Planned developments are permitted special uses in the U2 District pursuant to Section 6-15-1-9 of the Zoning Ordinance.

- b) *Is the requested special use in keeping with purposes and policies of the adopted comprehensive general plan and the zoning ordinance as amended from time to time?*

Answer: Yes, one goal of the 2000 Evanston Comprehensive Plan (the "Plan") is to enhance neighborhood assets. The Plan notes that redevelopment can "replace deteriorating [or outdated] buildings . . . with ones more sensitive to the needs of adjacent residential neighborhoods." The Plan also acknowledges that Northwestern will change over time and that the City and University should maintain dialogue to anticipate such changes and balance them with the interests of the surrounding neighborhoods. The Development will address deficiencies in the current design of Ryan Field by creating public green spaces, adding a noise and light-mitigating canopy to the stadium, and incorporating principles of universal and sustainable design. These changes will enhance Ryan Field's value to the neighborhood and City while reflecting Northwestern's continued progress and development.

- c) *Will the requested special use cause negative cumulative effect, when its effect is considered in conjunction with the cumulative effect of various special uses of all types on the immediate neighborhood and the effect of the proposed type of special use upon the City as a whole?*

Answer: No, the requested special use is consistent with the existing use of the subject property and will cause no negative cumulative effect.

- d) *Will the requested special use interfere with or diminish the value of property in the neighborhood?*

Answer: No, the Development will enhance the value of property in the surrounding neighborhood by increasing the public utility of Ryan Field. Currently, Ryan Field is only a stadium for ticketed football games. The Development would add three public plazas and one public park, as well as additional stadium programming and events.

- e) *Will the requested special use be adequately served by public facilities and services?*

Answer: Yes, the Development will have minimal additional impact on public facilities and services. It will be adequately served by existing public resources.

- f) *Will the requested special use cause undue traffic congestion?*

Answer: As outlined in the enclosed Traffic Study, Northwestern can and does provide an adequate number of personal automobile transportation alternatives and accommodate visitor traffic with the current number of on-site parking spaces. Moreover, the Traffic Study shows that Northwestern will be able to coordinate concert traffic similarly to football traffic, provided similar resources. Additionally, the University agrees to prepare and submit a Traffic Management Plan following completion of the Development and update the plan annually to account for changes to the surrounding context.

g) *Will the requested special use preserve significant historical architectural resources?*

Answer: Ryan Field was originally designed to reflect the gothic style of Northwestern's lakefront academic campus, but the stadium's design has not kept pace with that of the lakefront campus. The Development will preserve the connection between the two campuses by incorporating similar design elements, including limestone, silver-toned materials, glass, and open plazas. The limestone façade composition features broad, gentle arch geometry that harkens back to that of the original stadium.

h) *Will the requested special use preserve significant natural and environmental features?*

Answer: Not applicable; the subject property does not contain any significant natural and environmental features. Nevertheless, the Development will create public green spaces, including one public park.

i) *Will the requested special use comply with all other applicable regulations of the district in which it is located and other applicable ordinances, excepts to the extent such regulations have been modified through the planned development process or the grant of a variation?*

Answer: Yes, the requested special use complies with all other applicable regulations, except to the extent that relief has been requested as set forth in this application.