

THE OKLAHOMAN

A BETTER LOUD CITY

MAPS 4 proposal for Chesapeake would prolong life of arena, backers say

BY: Randy Ellis & Chris Casteel The Oklahoman



Aerial image of Chesapeake Energy Arena in downtown Oklahoma City. Dave Morris | The Oklahoman

The MAPS 4 proposal on the ballot next month includes more than \$100 million to update Chesapeake Energy Arena to keep it competitive as an NBA host and concert site, according to those who developed a wish list for the building.

Oklahoma City, which owns the building, and the Thunder, the primary tenant, have proposed replacing all the seats, enlarging entrances, adding restaurants at the top and bottom levels, installing a new scoreboard, building necessary storage space and other improvements.

The arena, which was funded under the first MAPS question in 1993 and opened in 2002, meets the current NBA specifications and attracts major touring acts and other events. None of the proposed improvements were sought by the NBA or have been promoted as necessary to keep the Thunder in Oklahoma City.

Dan Mahoney, the chief spokesman for the Thunder, said all the proposals presented to Oklahoma City council members would contribute to Chesapeake Energy Arena's "long-term viability, long-term success, both from the team's standpoint as well as the community's standpoint."

"We think this building is an asset to Oklahoma City, especially the downtown area.

Through MAPS money, as we're building around it, it has to keep up.

“Sports is a competitive, it's a competitive business. And we're competing for our fans' dollars and their time. In an era of Netflix and Postmates, we have to make this a really special experience for our fans.”

Oklahoma City voters will decide on Dec. 10 whether to extend the MAPS penny sales tax for eight years to fund nearly \$1 billion in projects. An estimated \$115 million would go toward Chesapeake and the Thunder's practice facility in northwest Oklahoma City. If sales tax revenue meets projections, the arena would receive about \$104 million, with the rest going to the practice facility.

The arena was built for \$89.5 million. When the Thunder moved to Oklahoma City in 2008, voters approved a sales tax increase that provided about \$93 million to upgrade the arena to NBA specifications. Should the MAPS 4 proposal pass and the proposed improvements be made, the arena's total cost would approach \$300 million.

Direct comparisons to arenas in other cities are difficult because of wide variations in land, labor and other costs.

Tom Anderson, special projects manager for Oklahoma City, said the typical life span of arenas like Chesapeake is 30 to 40 years.

“We're almost two-thirds of the way to the 30-year mark,” he said. “By the time MAPS 4 is completed, we'll be at the precipice of that.”

Chesapeake should be viable beyond the age of 30, though there is no way to know now how much longer, he said.

In addition to the Chesapeake money, MAPS 4 proposes a \$37 million soccer stadium on a site to be determined. Much of the rest of the money in MAPS 4 would be directed to social services, including mental health and homelessness, and to parks and recreation centers.

Sundra Flansburg, a board member of **Voices Organized in Civic Engagement (VOICE)**, which pushed for the social components to be included, said the group is backing the MAPS 4 package and accepts the sports facility funding as necessary to attract broader support.

She said the sports facilities are “not our favorite part of it, but we are very excited about the rest of it. ... Politics is politics. And we got a much, much better package.”