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Commentary

J. Thomas Sadowski: New arena will benefit the region's economy

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BALTIMORE -

Regional leaders recently unveiled plans to replace 1st Mariner Bank Arena with a new, larger arena on the same site. It will be designed to attract larger events and even a new sports team. While much debate centered on possible locations for the arena, one point cannot be argued: A new, world-class arena would provide a sustained and significant economic boost to the Greater Baltimore region.

The region need only look back to the example of [Oriole Park at Camden Yards](#) to see how a first-rate venue can change a city and region. According to the most recent data available from the [Maryland Stadium Authority](#), Oriole Park generated \$166.9 million in gross state product in 2006 — 14 years after the park opened. During that same year, the stadium supported 2,452 jobs and was associated with \$72.6 million in personal income.

These gains do not take into account the huge amount of national recognition and appeal the stadium sparked, ushering in a new era of classic-styled ballparks across the country. That kind of status is hard to put a number on, but the region clearly continues to reap the benefits of this project. One only needs to walk around downtown on a weekend when the Red Sox or Yankees are in town to see this economic power in action. Just think of the possibilities a new arena would bring to the region, encouraging a new boost of tourism for Greater Baltimore.

In addition to the immediate growth the stadium sparked, multiple projects have come as a result of the opening of the stadium, or have been tied into the complex in a direct way and have contributed to the economic health of the region in their own right. [M&T Bank Stadium](#) came along in 1998 and has played host to marquee events like the Army/Navy game and, in conjunction with Camden Yards, the AST Dew Tour. And, of course, the stadium is the home of the city's beloved [Ravens](#), who along with other stadium tenants pulled in \$216 million in business sales in 2006, according to the MSA.

A new arena holds the potential to dramatically add to the region's quality of life, and from an economic development standpoint, it is important not to underestimate the effect that a region's quality of life can have on attracting companies and residents. While the current arena does an admirable job of bringing in entertainment acts and events, there are many large recording artists touring nationally who never make it to Greater Baltimore because of the lack of an indoor venue with a high enough seating capacity. A bigger arena could make Baltimore a stop for every touring entertainer.

Harborplace is arguably the region's premier quality-of-life "anchor," and the area along the waterfront already pulls in millions of dollars a year from tourists hailing from all over the country, and internationally. While Harborplace is part of our region's cultural identity, it is also important to be able to rely on other attractions for tourist revenues. Imagine the boost that the harbor area would receive from an improved arena drawing top talent from all over the [United States](#).

Too often we think of or refer to our region as small-market, or somehow a step below so-called "top-tier" U.S. metro areas. The resurgence of our region over the past 15 years has moved us into a new category, and this growth will continue with BRAC moving forward. It is time for us to recognize that we are in the big leagues and move forward with important projects like this one.

After all, if [Oklahoma City](#) can attract an [NBA](#) team, why couldn't Greater Baltimore? And while an NBA team is not the only reason our region needs this arena, it certainly would be a nice complement to our [Orioles](#) and Ravens franchises and provide further evidence that we are a first-class sports town and a top-notch region to boot. Bottom line: The possibilities are only limited by what we're willing to imagine as a region.

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Examiner