

SPORTS

That's Right, \$63 Million for a Football Stadium ... for High Schoolers

By MIKE McPHATE MAY 11, 2016

The love of high school football in Texas is hard to quantify. But to get an idea, have a look at the price tag on one of its newest temples.

Voters in McKinney, Tex., have given the go-ahead to spend nearly \$63 million on building a high school football stadium after months of contentious debate in the suburb north of Dallas.

“Down South, football is a really big deal, and playoff football is a really big deal,” said Jennifer Gray, the chairwoman of Vote for McKinney’s Future, a pro-stadium group.

The 12,000-seat facility and an attached events center would be just the latest in a growing list of supersized high school stadiums in Texas.

The McKinney project has frequently been compared to the \$60 million high school stadium in nearby Allen. With seats for 18,000 people, the Allen stadium has nearly the same capacity as Madison Square Garden. Another school stadium under construction in Katy, outside Houston, will have 12,000 seats at a projected cost of more than \$62 million.

Opponents of the McKinney stadium, which would be used by the city’s three high schools, have accused district leaders of engaging in a sort of arms

race.

“We’re kind of like the poor boys on the block,” said Mike Giles, a leader of Grassroots McKinney, which has opposed the plan. “They look down and they see Allen. Allen has a really nice stadium.”

The McKinney school superintendent, Rick McDaniel, and his spokesman could not immediately be reached for comment.

Ms. Gray, who said she did not care “a thing in the world about football,” said she had been persuaded that the stadium would prove an economic boon by attracting regional tournaments and other events. “Thousands and thousands of people coming into our city and spending their money here in our city,” she said.

The plan polarized McKinney residents and led to the creation of rival political action committees. In debates and online comment threads, opponents argued that it represented a misplaced priority on sports over academics.

Supporters have acknowledged that the existing 7,000-seat Ron Poe Stadium, built in 1962, has provided more than enough room, even if the parking lot is too small.

But many residents felt that McKinney, with a population of about 160,000 and growing, needed a stadium to match its ambitions as destination city. In pushing the project, district officials projected that the number of high schools there could triple in the coming decades.

In a vote on May 7, nearly two-thirds of McKinney residents endorsed a \$220 million school bond measure that included plans for the stadium, along with a number of renovations and other projects.

“It’s something our community will look at with great pride when they come down Highway 121,” Mr. McDaniel, the superintendent, said in March,

according to The Dallas Morning News.

The district plans to have the stadium ready to host the first kickoff in 2017.

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