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The 2016 Summer Games

Hurdles and hassles

How about a book of promises for Chicago and Illinois residents?

By Allen R. Sanderson

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Now that Chicago's 2016 candidate city "bid book" has been delivered to Lausanne, Switzerland, for members of the International Olympic Committee to digest and render a decision on Oct. 2, perhaps it is time for the Chicago 2016 committee and City Hall to produce a complementary bid book for citizens of the greater Chicago area and the state.

The official three-volume publication contains mouthwatering color photographs and sketches, specific information on the location of event venues and local services (such as transportation and accommodations), and an overall financial plan. It is gorgeous; it addresses seemingly every detail, and it makes a compelling case for Chicago.

But how about an unofficial bid book that lays out for local citizens what their potential financial exposures and "congestion exposures" truly are, including why Chicago2016.org doesn't think we should lose any sleep over these concerns?

In response to the now-famous line from a U.S. Olympic official that the U.S. Olympic Committee and the IOC wanted to see some "skin in the game," the city and state have offered to provide close to a billion dollars in backup funding. Of course, that guarantee is simply a euphemism. Should anything go wrong, then city and state taxpayers will be liable for the deficit.

Why don't lawmakers -- in Springfield, in City Hall, the 50 Chicago aldermen -- who voted to underwrite the worst-case scenario have some skin in the game too? That is, if each of these politicians were to be personally liable for, say, \$100,000 apiece, taxpayers could sleep more soundly. The same should hold for Chicago 2016 officials: What if each member signed a binding agreement to provide \$100,000 toward any cost overruns or revenue shortfalls?

To avoid Illinois' familiar pay-to-play disease, perhaps every person and group that donated time and services -- consulting, printing, etc. -- toward the bid thus far should be ineligible to compete for and hold any subsequent contract should Chicago be awarded the Games. And if any portion of the truly laughable commissioned economic-impact report is to be believed, then the billions of revenues the area will amass will be windfalls for some people. How about if they -- the hotels and restaurants, developers, construction firms and unions -- also put some skin in this game, or agree to have their largesse heavily taxed down the road?

Furthermore, while not an explicit expenditure, some revenue will have to be forgone, like Grant Park events that will have to be canceled and conventions that won't be held at McCormick Place because of

the Games.

Presumably, one way or another, taxpayers will have to make up for city, county, McPier and Chicago Park District budget deficits. What is the expected tab for these? And post-2016, what are the expected ongoing operational and maintenance expenses that will fall to the Park District, and where will that revenue come from? Athens, Sydney and Beijing offer stark warnings in this regard.

Then there are the virtually certain "hassle" factors: closed or truncated transportation arteries, security surveillance that will make pat-downs at O'Hare International Airport seem almost titillating and congestion the likes of which most of us have never experienced. We're a hardy group and can certainly put up with short-term disruptions for a month or two during the summer of 2016. After all, we subject ourselves willingly to the Chicago Air & Water Show, the Taste of Chicago and the Bank of America Chicago Marathon.

But it is the longer-term non-monetary costs of the Olympics that should give us pause.

What if the Chicago 2016 committee and Mayor Richard Daley were to lay out explicitly and publicly the various timelines? For example, at what point -- date and year -- will Lake Shore Drive and other arteries be seriously affected by dedicated lanes and closings? And when will it again be "business as usual"? What inconveniences -- with beginning and end dates -- will residents in Hyde Park, Woodlawn, Bronzeville, Lincoln Park and other localities experience? When will Washington Park be closed to traffic and for the panoply of recreational uses that contiguous communities enjoy seven months a year? 2013? 2014? And when will it reopen? 2017? 2018? The same holds for Northerly Island, Monroe Harbor, the lakefront paths and Lincoln Park areas.

And in addition to skin in the game, perhaps we can have more cards on the table: What exactly are the as-yet-unannounced plans for most of these areas after the Games -- a return to life as we knew it in 2009, or something entirely different? Let friendship, openness and transparency shine.

Allen R. Sanderson teaches at the University of Chicago and writes on the economics of sports.

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