

Lawmakers Punt Bears Property Tax Bill To April

Despite delay, Rep. Kam Buckner confident stadium bill will get across the finish line

by Brenden Moore

The Chicago Bears will have to wait until at least April for action on a property tax measure that would boost their efforts to build a domed stadium in Arlington Heights. State Rep. Kam Buckner, D-Chicago, the top House Democratic negotiator, confirmed to Capitol News Illinois that the bill won't move before the House adjourns Friday.

WHY IT MATTERS: The House won't be back until April 7, and the Bears have said the legislation is necessary for them to move forward with building a stadium on the 326-acre Arlington Park site. Indiana Gov. Mike Braun earlier this year signed legislation meant to lure the team over the state line with the promise of a publicly funded stadium. Arlington Heights Mayor Jim Tinaglia recently told multiple media outlets that the team wouldn't wait past March.

Gov. JB Pritzker earlier this week said the bill "needs to happen sooner rather than later, and it is in the hands of the legislature." He supports the measure, which would freeze property tax assessments on the sites of so-called "megaprojects" and instead allow developers to negotiate a payment-in-lieu-of-taxes with local governments.

NOT SO FAST: But the organization will have to wait if they want a deal in Illinois because, frankly, the legislation isn't ready for primetime. There are simply not enough votes for it to pass the House as of today.

"I'd say there's a few obstacles," state Sen. Bill Cunningham, D-Chicago, told Capitol News Illinois on Thursday. "I think they're all scalable, but work needs to be done." He said things had been "somewhat stagnant" since the PILOT bill passed out of a House committee last month.

CAUCUS CONCERNS: House Democrats aired their concerns in a private caucus meeting last week. Among them: the significant power the bill would give local governments — especially school districts — to make decisions with long-term revenue implications for communities.

There is worry that the PILOT tool, which could be used for large projects beyond the Bears, would siphon tax revenue from communities and place greater burden on surrounding residential and commercial taxpayers.

And then there's the lingering question about Chicago. The bill would make it easier for the Bears to bolt Soldier Field. Taxpayers are still footing the bill for renovations. City lawmakers would need to secure something from the Bears in return for their votes.

'WE'LL GET IT DONE: Buckner said the caucus meeting last week was "impactful" and "helped us kind of work through what needed to be addressed." And despite "a lot of talk around here about these artificial deadlines" calling for action by the end of March, Buckner said the team hasn't conveyed a hard deadline.

"This conversation started off as a mess," Buckner said. "We moved from a mess to movement. We moved from movement to mo-

mentum, and now we're right between momentum and maturity. Maturity means we're there, right? So we're almost there. We'll get it done."

ALL IN THE DETAILS: Buckner said he took it as a good sign that a lot of the concerns expressed by his colleagues were not Bears-related, instead centering on the PILOT structure.

Buckner said his top priority is getting the legislation right. His second? Getting it done as quickly as possible, and he thinks it can happen next month.

"I don't see this as a May 31 thing," Buckner said. "I think the governor was right when he said this needs to happen sooner than later. I would agree with that, and so we're trying to make that happen."

'WE'RE NOT INDIANA:' Buckner sent Capitol News Illinois an updated statement Friday morning just before the House adjourned, writing that there's been "consistent, productive communication between us and the Bears, and those conversations are yielding real progress."

"I've heard some suggest we should pass a bill just for the headline," he said. "That's not how we operate. We're not Indiana."

FIX IT IN THE SENATE? "I've also heard the idea that we can move an unamended bill out of the House and 'fix it' in the Senate. That won't be necessary," Buckner added. "The bill that comes out of the House will be strong, smart, and ready to stand on its own. We are going to get this done, more importantly, we are going to get it right."

The Senate comment refers to remarks state Sen. Laura Murphy, D-Des Plaines, made earlier this month about the House bill at a panel earlier this month.

SOMETHING TO WATCH: Beyond the megaprojects bill, the Bears will likely get help for public infrastructure. Cunningham said some of the Bears' requests, like about \$300 million in site preparation work, "go beyond what some people would consider traditional infrastructure expenditures."

There's been some discussion between the Bears and Arlington Heights about setting up a STAR Bond, or Sales Tax and Retail, district that would cover some of those costs with future sales tax revenue generated within the development.

While lawmakers approved an expansion of the state's STAR Bonds program earlier this year, they prohibited their use for developments involving professional sports stadiums. So it would require a change in state law.

"I think that's less of an obstacle than figuring out whether or not the STAR bonds project can help pay for these site improvements," Cunningham said.

ANOTHER THING: The Bears are expected to soon submit the results of a traffic study. This will likely help determine the final tab on state infrastructure spending, which could involve improvements to Route 53 and surrounding roadways needed to support the stadium project.

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- Mark Twain

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Oh most beautiful flower of Mount Carmel, fruitful vine, splendor of Heaven, Blessed Mother of the Son of God. Immaculate

Virgin, assist me in my necessity. Oh Star of the Sea, help me and show me herein you are my Mother. Oh Holy Mary Mother, Mother of God, Queen of Heaven and Earth, I humbly beseech you from the bottom of my heart to succor me in this necessity. There are none that can withstand your power. Oh Mary, conceived without sin pray for us who have recourse in thee (3X). Holy Mary, I place this cause in your hands (3X). Holy Spirit, you who solve all problems, light all roads so that I can attain my goal. You who gave me the divine gift to forgive and forget all evils against me and that in all instances in my life you are with me. I want in this short prayer to thank you for all things as you confirm once again that I never want to be separated from you in eternal glory. Thank you for your mercy towards me and mine. MML

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(ANSWERS ON PAGE 4)

King Crossword

ACROSS

- 1 Purse part
- 6 Tatter
- 9 Fr. holy woman
- 12 Borders on
- 13 In the past
- 14 Allow
- 15 Trattoria offering
- 16 Wild hurry, as on Black Friday
- 18 Divides in two
- 20 Greek mountain
- 21 Rule in India
- 23 Goat's plaint
- 24 City on the Yangtze River
- 25 Broadway failure
- 27 Zaps in a microwave
- 29 Argue
- 31 Portugal's place
- 35 Fix a lawn
- 37 Bath bubbles
- 38 Long-legged shorebird
- 41 Hwys.
- 43 Scale note
- 44 Spanish "but"
- 45 Rob Roy spirit
- 47 Pressed for time
- 49 Garlicky mayo
- 52 Dijon denial

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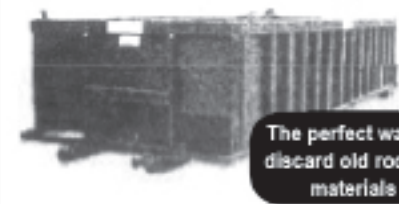
DOWN

- 1 Enervate
- 2 TV schedule abbr.
- 3 Work that's done ASAP
- 4 "— boy!"
- 5 Sacred song
- 6 French Baroque composer
- 7 Turkish officials
- 8 Dely
- 9 Melting snow
- 10 "Selma" actress
- 11 Patriot Allen Thompson
- 17 Awakens
- 19 Wind indicators
- 21 "Mayberry —"
- 22 Hearty brew
- 24 Spider's home
- 26 Sitting room
- 28 Youngster
- 30 Hanoi holiday
- 32 Exit in haste
- 33 Altar promise
- 34 Visual communication syst.
- 36 Corsage flower
- 38 Whirls
- 39 Choir member
- 40 Resident of Tabriz
- 42 Composed
- 45 Taxpayer IDs
- 46 Refer to
- 48 "Friendly skies" co.
- 50 Brit's restroom
- 51 Fury

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