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City can build on success of Arena District, expert says

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Franklin County hit a home run when it opted to move its baseball park Downtown, but the game's not over, Ohio State University sociologist Tim Curry said.

The county and the city should invest in Neil Avenue—perhaps by adding trolleys—to link Downtown, Victorian Village and OSU.

Curry, co-author of *High Stakes: Big Time Sport and Downtown Redevelopment*, studies how sports contribute to community loyalty and stimulate redevelopment. He spoke yesterday at a "Food for Thought" policy forum sponsored by the John Glenn School of Public Affairs.

Curry said Columbus voters got it right when they defeated a sales tax in 1997 to build a government-funded arena and stadium.

As a result, he said, the privately developed Nationwide Arena was planned as part of a broader entertainment district. Central Ohio got a better arena by allowing the

private sector to control the project, Curry said, and now it will get a better stadium.

Nationwide Realty Investors is also overseeing the building of Huntington Park, the county's new Arena District stadium for its Clippers baseball team. It is expected to open in spring 2009.



Commissioners have pledged to pay for the stadium without county money, using proceeds from the sale of the old Cooper Stadium, corporate sponsorships and stadium profits.

The arena and stadium will feed each other's success, Curry said.

"What really matters isn't the arena, but the Arena

District," he said. "Many stadiums and arenas tend to be islands in run-down neighborhoods. Our ArenaDistrict is well-known throughout the country."

The mix of sports with restaurants, offices, condos and bars energizes the atmosphere and creates

have won letters for sports in high school.

The new home of the Clippers will also expand the Arena District across Neil Avenue, creating a corridor from Downtown, through Victorian Village and to the university.

A trolley system that functions as practical transportation could connect the Downtown with the medical school, which Curry called a "sleeping giant" for economic and community development.

This will re-energize Neil Avenue, he said, "if the public supports some type of rapid transit there."

"The ballpark is Phase 2 of the Arena District," Curry said. "But you don't want to stop and celebrate this achievement, as tempting as that might be. We need to keep working. If we get it right, we win the arena game." ■

fond memories, he said. And those emotions stamp our Downtown as a desirable place and make people want to return.

"These sports centers are important to generate emotional ties to the city," and will help keep young professionals from moving away, he said. He said 60 percent of incoming OSU students

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