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REAL ESTATE PROPERTY REPORT

## Cincinnati Soccer Team Plans \$250 Million Stadium

The 26,000-seat venue is the latest in a wave of new soccer-only stadiums sweeping U.S.

*By Tess Riski*



FC Cincinnati's new stadium will have a canopy roof protecting every seat from rain. Other soccer-only stadiums in the works are in Nashville, Tenn.; Columbus, Ohio; Austin, Texas; and Miami. PHOTO: POPULOUS

Cincinnati's Major League Soccer team unveiled Tuesday plans for a \$250 million stadium, the latest in a wave of more-intimate, soccer-only stadiums sweeping across the U.S.

The 26,000-seat stadium will include an enclosed canopy roof that wraps around the entire stadium and protects every seat from rain, sleet or snow. It will have a plaza for fans to enter the stadium and a standing section where thousands of people can stand behind the goal to cheer on the team.

“It’s really about capturing the fan attention and drawing it to the match,” said Jonathan Mallie, the director and senior principal at Populous, the architecture firm behind the design.

Other soccer-dedicated stadiums in the works are in Nashville, Tenn.; Columbus, Ohio; Austin, Texas; and Miami. The New England Revolution in Boston and New York City FC have been exploring soccer-only stadiums, according to MLS.

MLS soccer stadiums seat an average of 25,000 fans and are designed to cultivate a more intimate fan experience compared with traditional college and professional football stadiums, which can hold upwards of 100,000 seats.



Fans lined up in April 2018 for the inaugural match at Banc of California Stadium between Los Angeles FC and Seattle Sounders FC. PHOTO: RINGO H.W. CHIU/ASSOCIATED PRESS

The smaller venues allow teams more control over such factors as vendor services and game scheduling, said Dan Courtemanche, MLS executive vice president of communications.

FC Cincinnati’s stadium will join Los Angeles FC, Minnesota United FC and Orlando City SC in providing a standing section. In Cincinnati, it is known as The Bailey, where a wall of 3,100 fans will rally behind the goal to intimidate the opposing team or to support their own.

Some international leagues have banned standing sections after multiple deadly incidents such as at the FA Cup semifinal in 1989, when 96 standing Liverpool fans were trampled to death.

Cincinnati will make safety a priority, said Lizz Summers, vice president of communications at FC Cincinnati. The overall stadium experience will be amenable to fans of all ages, “Whether you’re a 5-year-old or an 85-year-old in the stands,” Ms. Summers said.

Fans won’t have to crane their necks to watch the action. The closest seat will be 15 feet from the field, and the farthest will be 150 feet away, Ms. Summers said.



Fans cheered on Los Angeles FC during the inaugural home match at Banc of California Stadium. PHOTO: HARRY HOW/GETTY IMAGES

The design includes a bowl-like canopy roof that wraps around the entire stadium. The developers say this enclosed-roof design funnels the cheering back onto the pitch, helping intensify the home-field advantage.

While the new soccer stadiums are funded by private and public money, MLS still wields influence over design and location. The league has encouraged expansion-team stadiums to be located near city centers and public transportation.

The Cincinnati stadium was initially set to be located in the suburban neighborhood of Oakley. But MLS told the developers it wanted the stadium to be in the historic West End neighborhood—a five-minute drive from downtown. The developers obliged, breaking ground in December.

“Our fans, who are young, diverse and digitally savvy, are moving downtown into urban environments,” Mr. Courtemanche said.