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Community Members Voice Concerns Over Buffalo Bills Stadium Deal.

- **Public hearing held Thursday in Orchard Park, New York**
- **Several residents were skeptical of the stadium proposal**

Community members expressed skepticism at a public hearing Thursday evening about a proposed deal to build a new National Football League stadium near Buffalo, New York, with \$850 million in municipal subsidies.

The concerns raised at the Orchard Park meeting included the potential use of eminent domain, pollution stemming from construction, the lack of a dome in the Buffalo Bills arena's design and whether this is an appropriate use of public funds.

Since there was "substantive negative comment" at Thursday's meeting, the Erie County Stadium Corporation will hold another public hearing on the stadium plan at the end of February, Stephen Gawlik, senior counsel for the corporation who ran the session, said in an interview during a hearing recess.

"I love the Bills. I have my Bills mafia hat," said Jay Knavel, a 20-year veteran of the Orchard Park Fire District. "At the same time, a lot of respect needs to be paid to the homeowners who have been around longer than the Bills. And since they're not paying as much taxes as the residents, that respect needs to be paid."

Proposals for new professional sports stadiums have long touched off debates over whether the benefits justify the costs, as well as the question of public funds helping teams that are private businesses.

Patrick Dell is also a Bills fan but had mixed emotions about the new stadium.

"I'm happy that this new stadium will keep the team in Buffalo, but I'm not happy with the amount of money they're spending," added Dell, 34. "Buffalo is not a wealthy area. It's the definition of a middle class city."

The Bills and the National Football League will contribute \$550 million to the \$1.4 billion 60,000-seat stadium, with Erie County and New York State providing the rest.

Buffalo native Erik Ortiz, 27, thought the stadium being built in Orchard Park, an affluent suburb about 15 miles (24 kilometers) southeast of Buffalo, wasn't ideal.

"I wish it was more inner city," Ortiz said. "I think building the stadium closer to the waterfront would bring the city together and bring in a lot of revenue."

The new home of the Bills would rise across the street from Highmark Stadium, where the team has played since 1973.

In the coming days, the legal team of New York's principal economic development public-benefit corporation, will review all oral and written remarks from the hearing and determine if there was "substantive negative comment," in which state officials will publicly review the comments, according to Laura Magee, a spokesperson for Empire State Development.

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By Maxwell Adler

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