

Minnesota Vikings

Minnesota Vikings: New Stadium Bill Proposal Creatively Ties Team to Minnesota

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By
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The Minnesota Vikings' lease on the Metrodome expires after the coming season, and team officials have maintained they have no plans to renew it without a plan to build them a new home.

Noting the collapse of the stadium's inflatable roof in December during a snowstorm, DFL Sen. John Harrington of St. Paul insisted, "I think it's time to get serious."

Last Friday, the state took an important step toward plans for a new stadium. A bill providing a blueprint for a new replacement stadium was introduced to the Minnesota Legislature.

"I'm glad the Legislature's taken that step," said DFL Gov. Mark Dayton on Friday.

The proposal's formal introduction was praised by Dayton and other legislators on both sides, who believe that there is still enough time to approve a funding plan for a new stadium.

That said, the bill remains incomplete. It has plenty of blank spots on it—for one, no site has been selected for the new stadium.

However, Friday's bill contained an interesting provision. It stipulates that if the team leaves Minnesota at any point after the bill goes into effect, the Vikings would have to hand over the team's identity—name, colors, logo, history, playing records, and trophies—to the state.



Therefore, if the provision makes it into the final bill and the final bill earns Legislature approval and the governor's signature, the Vikings would, in essence, be tied to Minnesota forever.

In that case, the Minnesota football fans could then wait for an expansion team or a relocated franchise, dusting off the same horned helmets and purple uniforms.

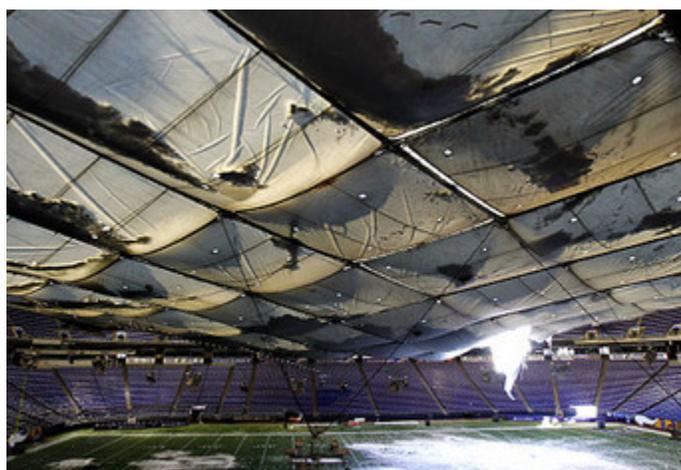
Unlike the now-Los Angeles Lakers, who departed Minnesota in 1960 and took its identity with it, the departing Vikings team would have to create a new team name and jerseys, as the Tennessee Titans did two seasons after leaving Houston.

Vikings V.P. of Public Affairs and Stadium Development Lester Bagley has expressed that the team does not endorse the provision, but that it will not try too hard to remove it from the bill.

"While we don't agree with it, we probably won't fight too hard on it, as there are other things on which we need to fight hard," Bagley wrote in an e-mail to ProFootballTalk. "Plus, it seems an odd principle to stand on—that the State could lose the team but keep the Vikings' name."

Even though this new language would ensure that the Vikings would forever belong to Minnesota, the bill was still met with little fanfare on Friday.

The primary issue remains the use of public funds to pay for a football stadium, especially in light of the ongoing state budget crisis.



Indeed, the bill took a big hit today when Sen. Dave Thompson, R-Lakeville, asserted, “It is inconceivable that we would fund a stadium to help multi-million dollar athletes pay their mortgages while many middle class Minnesotans are struggling to pay theirs.”

The bill proposes that roughly \$300 million each would come from the state, from the locality that would host the venue, and from the team.

The Republican assistant Senate majority leader also revealed that although understands the importance of retaining the Vikings, he recognizes that budget issues must take precedence.

“I acknowledge the Minnesota Vikings are a state asset. However, Republicans campaigned on the message of sensible government, low taxes, and decreased regulation. The voters sent us a clear message.

“The focus of the legislature should be on creating a business friendly environment that facilitates success for the Minnesota Vikings and every other job provider in our state.”

If the legislators’ position remains the same for six more weeks, the Vikings will enter the 2011 season—if there is one, that is—with an expiring lease on the Metrodome, making the team eligible for relocation early as 2012.

“I think time is clearly running out,” Rep. Frank Hornstein, DFL-Minneapolis, admitted.

At any rate, if a funding plan is not hammered out soon, Minnesota risks losing the franchise, including the team’s name, colors, logo, history, playing records, and trophies.



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