Questions About Lincoln's Proposed Volleyball Complex

An Open Letter to Lincoln's Elected Officials, Community Leaders, and Taxpayers

As Lincoln voters prepare for the upcoming election, I believe our community needs the information to evaluate proposals involving substantial public tax revenue.

For twenty-eight years, I served as the coach and director of the Cornhusker Shooting Stars youth basketball club, helping numerous young men and women earn opportunities to play collegiate basketball. I've also served on the Lincoln Sports Foundation (LSF) Board of Directors for the past fourteen years and currently serve as board president.

Throughout my tenure in youth athletics, I've traveled across the country and visited some of the finest sports facilities in existence. This experience has shown me the opportunities quality athletic facilities provide young people, regardless of their sport of choice.

Nearly all such facilities have substantial financial backing from government entities, private investors, or major donors. Very few operate independently without government subsidies, as LSF has done for years. Financial sustainability, collaboration, and responsible stewardship of public resources are essential considerations when using taxpayer dollars.

With that perspective, I have several questions about the proposed N4VB volleyball complex and its request for nearly $13 million in public tax revenue. I also believe the proposed project's financing and ownership structure warrant comparison with the other turnback tax project approved by the governor in Omaha, which proposes a different operating model.

1. Have we fully explored opportunities within Lincoln's existing sports facilities?

For the past seven years, Lincoln has had substantial volleyball capacity among Speedway Village, Kinetic Sports Complex, and Lincoln Sports Foundation.

Before committing significant public resources to another facility, what effort was made to encourage collaboration among existing organizations to attract larger tournaments and generate additional economic activity?

Could greater cooperation have accomplish some of the same goals without the cost of constructing another complex?

2. How would the proposed complex expand opportunities for underserved youth?

The Malone Center has endorsed the proposal, in part because of its stated benefits for underserved youth.

For more than seven years, LSF has donated facility access to the Malone Center for football, flag football, and basketball. To my knowledge, LSF has never been approached about providing similar opportunities for volleyball programming.

LSF Lincoln Sports Foundation

Were existing facilities approached about expanding volleyball opportunities for underserved youth? If not, why weren't those possibilities explored before requesting public funding for a new complex?

What specific opportunities would this facility provide that could not be offered through partnerships with existing organizations?

3. How would the public investment benefit the broader volleyball community rather than primarily one club?

According to the N4VB application, VCNebraska would account for approximately 75% of projected operating revenue. The application also identifies $111,790 annually in scholarship funding earmarked for VCNebraska. The executive director of the nonprofit proposing to develop and own the facility also owns VCNebraska.

These arrangements raise several legitimate questions:

- How would the scholarships be funded, and what would happen if fundraising falls short?
- What safeguards would ensure that the promised scholarships are actually provided?
- Why are the scholarships designated for VCNebraska athletes rather than being available to young people participating in other volleyball organizations?
- What provisions would ensure fair and meaningful access for other volleyball clubs and community organizations?

Most importantly, how would taxpayers be assured that a facility supported by nearly $13 million in public tax revenue provides broad community benefits rather than primarily serving one privately owned volleyball club and its athletes?

4. Why wouldn't the City of Lincoln own the facility?

If public tax revenue would finance approximately 75% of construction, why wouldn't the City of Lincoln retain ownership and lease the facility to an operator, as proposed with the soccer stadium project in Omaha?

What happens if the nonprofit experiences financial difficulties down the road?

What legal protections would safeguard the public's investment and ensure the facility remains available for community use if the property is sold, transferred, or repurposed?

When taxpayers provide such a substantial portion of construction financing, shouldn't the ownership structure and long-term protections be clearly explained?

5. How much of the projected economic development would be genuinely new?

Many businesses already exist within the proposed turnback tax financing area.

North 27th Street is an established commercial corridor and a major route to Interstate 80. Much of the area's development and infrastructure predates the proposed volleyball facility.

How much of the projected tax revenue would actually result from new economic activity generated by the complex, rather than from existing businesses or development that would occur regardless?

What analysis has been conducted to distinguish new economic activity from revenue that would already be generated in this area?

I believe taxpayers deserve to understand how the project's economic impact has been calculated.

6. Is concentrating this level of public investment on one sport the most effective use of these resources?

Lincoln's taxpayers include families whose children participate in a variety of sports, theater, music, and countless other activities.

What could nearly $13 million accomplish if invested across existing nonprofit sports facilities, schools, roads, the arts, or other community priorities?

What criteria are being used to evaluate this project against other potential public investments, and how are the broader community's needs being considered?

Closing Thoughts

I support quality athletic facilities and opportunities for young people, including volleyball, across our city.

My concerns center on whether the proposed financing and operating structure will deliver broad community benefits, meaningful accountability, long-term financial sustainability, and responsible stewardship of public resources.

I believe these are reasonable questions that deserve clear answers. Without that information, taxpayers may struggle to fully evaluate the proposal before voting on Election Day.

Lincoln should absolutely continue investing in opportunities for young people. The question is how we can ensure those investments benefit the broader community, including young people participating in a wide variety of sports and activities.

Dan Lesoing



Board President, Lincoln Sports Foundation

Former Cornhusker Shooting Stars Basketball Director and Coach

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