

MIAMI-DADE COUNTY

Miami governments spending millions to make money and get exposure from Super Bowl 54

BY JOEY FLECHAS



Politicians and tourism boosters tout Super Bowls as major moneymakers for South Florida's economy. Plus, they point out, the NFL has committed to building playing fields and improving other public spaces in Miami-Dade County in connection with the 2020 event.

In the economics of hosting a Super Bowl, though, the thinking goes that you spend taxpayer money to realize an even bigger economic payoff: the dollars that visitors spend in hotels, restaurants, airports, and other local businesses.

Winning a bid to host a Super Bowl means communities are asked to subsidize expenses to the tune of millions — in the case of three of Miami-Dade's largest municipal governments, Super Bowl 54 will cost nearly \$20 million over time.

In advance of the game, to be played Feb. 2 at Hard Rock Stadium in Miami Gardens, local governments have spent or plan to commit more than \$15 million in cash contributions to the host committee, security bills, municipal fee waivers and partial payments for parks improvements — the costs of football fields and lighting improvements to Miami’s waterfront are being split between the NFL and government agencies.

Miami-Dade County will pay another \$4 million to the Miami Dolphins for attracting the game, the U.S.’s most-watched annual sporting event, but won’t have to start making payments until 2024.

Cities are preparing to pay their own police officers and firefighters for the extra work of securing the Super Bowl and satellite events. In some cases, city halls are waiving routine fees for satellite events. Administrators told the Miami Herald the costs are worth it.

“Supporting the Super Bowl is a great investment for the city of Miami,” said City Manager Emilio Gonzalez. “We’re going to get a huge economic impact.”

Miami commissioners already agreed to give the Super Bowl host committee \$500,000 earlier this year. In the proposed budget for the next fiscal year that begins Oct. 1, Gonzalez is proposing to absorb \$3.3 million in additional costs to pay police, firefighters, code inspectors, public works and solid waste workers to work Super Bowl-related events.

The host committee is planning a free weeklong event for fans along Miami’s downtown waterfront called “Super Bowl Live,” which will feature concerts and NFL exhibits. The city’s Downtown Development Authority, a semi-autonomous agency that collects and spends downtown tax dollars, plans to cover half of the \$600,000 price tag for permanent LED lighting on the Baywalk. The NFL has agreed to pay the other half under a resolution approved by Miami commissioners in July — money that has not yet been disbursed, pending a grant request from the host committee.

“Super Bowl Live in Bayfront Park will be the hub of free activities during Super Bowl week, and we have every indication that the host committee will deliver on its commitment to create a one-of-a-kind experience for visitors,” said Miami Commissioner Ken Russell, who also serves as chairman of the downtown authority.

In Miami Beach, the bulk of the city's Super Bowl costs are coming in the form of fee waivers totaling \$1.2 million. The tourism-driven city will forgo collecting fees for use of its newly renovated convention center and for municipal services and permits. The city is also giving the host committee \$400,000.

Matt Kenny, Miami Beach's director of tourism and culture, said the city expects to see a direct benefit in increased tourism taxes collected on hotel rooms and restaurant sales. Those dollars pay for certain municipal services, such as the city's free trolley system.

"The residents benefit directly from that resort tax, above and beyond the local economic impact in our restaurants and stores," Kenny said.

The Beach is also putting \$350,000 toward a new \$1 million football field for Miami Beach Senior High School, an expense to be split with the league and school district.

The local preparations are being shepherded by the host committee, chaired by Rodney Barreto, a county lobbyist whose firm represents the Dolphins. He cast the Super Bowl as a mammoth advertisement for South Florida to the rest of the world.

"You would be writing a very large check to get that kind of publicity," he said.

Barreto said there will be direct investments in local businesses through a program that specifically steers Super Bowl-related jobs to local proprietors. He said the host committee's fundraising continues, and that there might still be additional public benefits the NFL could contribute to in the future.

"There are certain things we still want to bring to them," he said. "There are certain things we're still evaluating."

Less is being done in Miami Gardens, home of Hard Rock Stadium and the county's third largest city by population. Miami Gardens' city government has not committed to subsidizing costs for the Super Bowl, though that could change before the city's new budget year begins Oct. 1.

"The city is currently going through the budgeting process and evaluating opportunities," said city spokeswoman Tamara Wadley. "No commitments have been made."

Miami Gardens Mayor Oliver Gilbert said the city is developing activities for residents and visitors that will showcase the city's culture and history.

"The city of Miami Gardens has not made a commitment to support the Super Bowl financially," he said. "However, we are always investing in the city's infrastructure that's necessary to host large scale, internationally recognized events."

With a worldwide audience, tourism chiefs hold up the Super Bowl as a mammoth public relations opportunity for the greater South Florida area. Gilbert said the event offers a platform for a young city to distinguish itself — Miami Gardens incorporated in 2003.

"Miami Gardens is the only place in South Florida that can host a Super Bowl, and the game being played here affords us the opportunity to introduce ourselves as a city to the greater global community," he said.

Miami-Dade County's \$10 million for the Super Bowl includes cash payments for event preparations, police and fire costs and the expense of upgraded football fields in public parks. The county is paying about \$2.15 million for new artificial turf at Gwen Cherry Park in Liberty City and at Goulds Park in South Miami-Dade. The NFL's contribution: two grants totaling \$850,000.

Super Bowl weekend is typically already a good period for South Florida's tourism industry. The Greater Miami Convention and Visitors Bureau points to hotel occupancy and room rate figures from 2010, the last time Miami Gardens hosted the Super Bowl, as indicators the region will see a measurable increase in tourism revenue worth millions.

Rolando Aedo, the bureau's chief operating officer, said the region has added 10,000 more hotel rooms since 2010, which with higher room rates during the four days around the Super Bowl will yield a bump compared to a non-Super Bowl year. Compared to the same four-day weekend in 2019, the bureau projected an \$11.4 million increase in hotel revenue alone. That comes with associated taxes and money spent in local businesses, Aedo said.

He added that there's great value to the media exposure, on television and online, linked to the Super Bowl — visibility that tourism chiefs believe could help draw other large-scale gatherings.

“It also helps us attract other events,” he said. “We’re going to be vying for the World Cup.”