

ULI Chicago
Young Leaders Roundtable
Game On! The Wave of Esports

ULI Chicago's Young Leaders convened in November virtually to discuss Esports and its growing presence in US real estate. One of the main motivations behind this session is Surge, the 1,000-seat Esports venue currently underway in Bronzeville, in addition to a proposed Esports venue in Orland Park. On hand to discuss the Surge project and Esports venues more generally was Andrew Buck of KOO, the architecture firm behind the Surge project. The following topics were of particular interest during the discussion:

- **Facility Use and Operations:** Though Esports facilities are primarily designed for Esports activities, they can function as multi-purpose spaces suitable for events such as performances, talks and conferences. There is an integrated food and beverage element in the Surge facility that will help to bridge the gap of on- and off-hour uses for the venue. The Surge facility will be owned and operated by the developer. In other contexts, professional sports teams and colleges are starting to express interest in operating Esports venues.
- **Site Selection:** Esports operators generally like to locate near colleges with good transit access to optimize their position in the market. There is an idea of these venues serving as integrated parts of sports and entertainment districts, and there is precedent for colocation with coworking facilities. Because of the venues' significant power and internet needs, finding a site with existing utility capacity – which are generally located in urban areas – is important to the overall feasibility of the venue.
- **Building Design:** Esports venues were described as “stadium venues mixed with food and beverage mixed with data centers.” They typically start with a large industrial box and are built out with both the main arena area as well as various side gaming rooms, lounges, a green room, control offices and the food and beverage component. One of the key things to keep in mind with these venues is that spectators are not actively watching the main event all the time so there needs to be activated spaces to keep occupants interested throughout the building. Certain building-specific requirements are isolation from outside vibration and refining the acoustics to have a generally loud interior environment.

The Esports discussion was an interesting and novel one for most attendees. The industry appears to be growing nationwide, and hearing about the exciting Bronzeville project in further detail from one of the venue's architects allowed for an enlightening discussion on the specific elements and challenges of developing Esports venues that attendees can carry forward in their work.

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