

SPORTS

Maryland Stadium Authority chair talks upgrades to Camden Yards, M&T Bank Stadium





Craig A. Thompson, chairman of the Maryland Stadium Authority sits at the head of the table calls for a vote during a meeting by the MSA who vote on projects throughout the state from their offices at Oriole Park at Camden Yards. (Karl Merton Ferron/Staff)



By **TODD KARPOVICH**

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As chair of the [Maryland Stadium Authority](#), Craig A. Thompson has spent the past two years at the center of some of Maryland's most closely watched public works projects. Nominated by Gov. Wes Moore and confirmed in early 2023, he's overseeing major renovations across the state's sports and entertainment venues, including the \$400 million rebuild of [Pimlico Race Course](#) and ongoing multimillion-dollar upgrades at both [Oriole Park at Camden Yards](#) and [M&T Bank Stadium](#).

A Baltimore native and product of the city's public schools, Thompson was raised by a single mother and went on to earn two bachelor's degrees from the University of Maryland — in political science and African American studies — before graduating from the University of Maryland School of Law in 1995.

A veteran trial attorney and partner at Venable LLP, he serves on the law firm's board and has represented clients in state and federal courts nationwide.

He spoke with The Baltimore Sun about the future of the Maryland Stadium Authority, its role in reshaping state-owned facilities and the challenges ahead. This interview has been edited for brevity and clarity.

The Maryland Stadium Authority has taken on greater fiscal responsibility with the redevelopment of Pimlico Race Course. How has the agency approached that challenge?



The fiscal responsibility centers around the transformative renovations of the racetrack and potentially the areas surrounding the track. We are also committed to redeveloping the much-needed training facility. The [MSA] has approached this opportunity very seriously and fully appreciates the significance of these critical changes in the Park Heights community.

In terms of emerging lessons, we are witnessing the confirmation of the all-hands-on-deck theory: from MSA to [Maryland Economic Development Corporation] to elected officials to leaders in the city and community, the transparent communication and strategic planning by all has been critical to success.

How do you envision the new Pimlico helping to spur community revitalization in the Park Heights corridor?

The new Pimlico can and will spur economic development first and foremost with the immediate impact of the project itself: We have demolition contracts and architectural plans underway, which sparks an immediate increase in job creation and activity in the area. In addition, the opportunities for year-round activity in and around the track, development of out parcels adjacent to the track, job creation, business stimulation and local hiring will certainly be generated.

Renovations at M&T Bank Stadium and Camden Yards are designed to keep the venues competitive. How do you see those upgrades helping to attract more high-profile events such as soccer matches, lacrosse championships and major concerts?

When we raise the bar with the improvements to these amazing facilities, they will automatically become candidates to host more high-profile events — with tremendous flexibility of use between the facilities and coordination among leaders, the city and state have the potential to draw a large number of these quality events. Also, with excitement surrounding other venues like the Hippodrome and CFG Bank Arena, coupled with the long-awaited development of the Inner Harbor, these upgrades will play a major role in attracting the types of events that will make the city and state an even greater tourist destination!

What is the authority's long-term vision for those stadiums?

No vision would be complete without the full participation of MSA leadership, decision-makers at each respective team and leaders in the city/state and private sector. All parties must engage in discussing the excitement of what is possible and communicate to determine what the landscape can look like. MSA would love to facilitate these discussions and know that the commitment of many will lead to success for all.

You're balancing your role as MSA chairman with your full-time position at Venable LLP. How do you manage both responsibilities?

I don't sleep much. That said, I've become pretty adept at managing priorities and maintaining the quality of work for my Venable clients and civic leadership roles. I travel quite a bit and make sure to maximize every minute and use time wisely. It's also great to have wonderful colleagues, which I do at both Venable and on the MSA Board. Teamwork is the key!

What drew you to public service through the stadium authority?

I am biased, of course, but I strongly believe that the stadium authority is one of the more impactful agencies in the state. With our history of building and maintaining highly functional sports venues, to renovating schools throughout the state, to providing amazing opportunities for contractors and vendors to work on transformative projects, the MSA touches everything! Of course, with sports being such an important driver of both economic development and life-long friendships, we truly enjoy being part of one of the things that truly makes our country great: sports (and beating the Steelers!).

What have been the biggest challenges — and successes — in collaborating with the government?

The biggest challenges always involve financing. It's not lost on us that local and state budgets have limited resources to fund the important projects that draw people and trigger economic development. Finding creative ways to identify resources and select partners with a similar vision is important. We take our responsibility as stewards of state dollars very seriously and will maintain our commitment to on-time, on-budget projects.

The biggest successes — and most fun ribbon-cuttings — occur when years of planning, strategizing, arguing and working result in world-class buildings, sports facilities, government offices and parks. We feel like a little history is made every time these projects come to a close, and the public benefits from the journey.

With the Orioles' lease now finalized and the Ravens' long-term commitment secured, does MSA view its role in ensuring both franchises remain strong economic assets for Maryland?



They are both outstanding partners, and the communication between MSA and our team leaders is historic. MSA's role will continue to include serving as both a thought collaborator and strategic builder. With our very unique place in the country — two publicly-owned facilities for major sports teams within blocks of each other — opportunities for both joint impact and individual success exist.

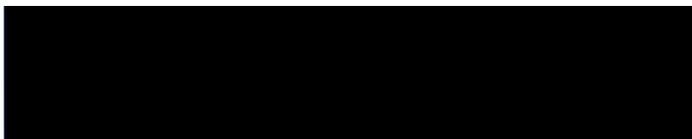
Looking ahead, what do you see as the most significant opportunities and challenges for the Stadium Authority over the next decade?

Expanding on our great work of close to 40 years will be a priority. We are excited that our greatest champions and biggest sports fans — local and state leadership — continue to trust us with ensuring that the vision for the city of Baltimore and entire state of Maryland can and will be fulfilled. We look forward to connecting and communicating with leaders and sports fans, both on the field and off, to make our collective communities grow and thrive as much as possible.

Have a news tip? Contact Todd Karpovich at tkarpovich@baltsun.com or on X as [@ToddKarpovich](https://twitter.com/ToddKarpovich).

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