

Dayton Daily News

Stadium Plan Full of Detail

Builders and Planners Need Every Hour of Every Day Until the First Pitch to Get Ready

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By Jim Bebbington, Dayton Daily News

They know what the pitcher's mound will be made of, they just don't know who will build it.

The company constructing a 7,500-seat minor league baseball stadium in Dayton received its last administrative go-ahead this week but now faces a hurried construction schedule to meet its goal of opening by April 2000.

The project has already been the source of some labor turmoil, and team officials need extremely cooperative weather and ample supplies of workers and materials to get it ready.

Will they make it?

"I guess it goes to the definition of ready," said Bob Murphy, general manager of Dayton's minor league franchise. "Our design people and construction people are confident we will finish in April 2000."

Major League Baseball granted approval this week to allow Mandalay Sports Entertainment to bring a Class-A minor league baseball team to Dayton.

Mandalay anticipated that approval would come in January. The delay has forced its architects, HNTB of Kansas City, Mo., to compress an already crammed construction schedule. Over the next 14 months, crews will be turning two city blocks into what one city official called "an office building with an outdoor amphitheater attached."

"I think it is an extremely tight schedule and you need a little bit of luck, but it is doable," said John Danis, chairman of Danis Building Construction, one of the local firms bidding on the construction work.

Hundreds of pages of detailed construction drawings and design specifications have been on file in City Hall since summer, when the city planned on building the stadium. The drawings specify everything from the kind of dirt required for the pitcher's mound (half clay and half sand) to the load-bearing requirements for the stadium foundation concrete (4,000 pounds per square inch).

Mandalay Sports Entertainment took over construction after bids came in too high last summer and the construction deadline was pushed back a year.

Most of the construction blueprints are still accurate, city inspectors say. But they have been told there is some last-minute "value engineering" - cost cutting - going on that will force HNTB to resubmit plans for approval next month.

"When we talked with the architect, he said it had changed a little," said Michael Cromartie, Dayton's chief building official.

The stadium is actually two buildings. The public portion is the one everyone will see - two levels of concourses, 7,500 seats, the playing field, the hot dog stands, the score board, the rest rooms.

The other is approximately 50,000 square feet of club offices, locker rooms, training rooms and a subterranean pitching and hitting cage.

Next week builders hope to get construction trailers on the site, a two-block area bordered by Monument Avenue, Patterson Boulevard, and First and Webster streets.

In their latest construction timeline, prepared in late January and already out of date, architects figured on needing 307 days for construction, not counting several weeks for the city to inspect plans and the general contractor, HNTB Design/Build, to seek construction bids.

City inspectors have been told site excavation will take six weeks, followed by the pouring and curing of concrete footers and the foundation.

Then the chief priority, before the seats or walkways, will be getting the playing field ready. Baseball field grass needs months to take root. For the outfield to be seamless grass next spring, workers need to lay the sod this fall.

The construction schedule called for the sod to be unrolled in mid-November.

Workers will be pouring foundation concrete throughout this spring and early summer. Sometime in July they are scheduled to start putting up the stadium's steel beam skeleton.

Walls and concourse walkways will go up in January.

The busiest time will start in late fall. Beginning in mid-November, work is supposed to begin on installing the roofing, electrical systems, plumbing, heating and cooling, sprinklers, interior walls, framing the suites and installing the elevators.

And so it is to continue, all the way up to April 5, 2000, when crews are supposed to finish by painting the ceilings of the 29 suites.

It is tight, but possible, according to people familiar with stadium construction.

"I've seen 6,500 seat stadiums go up in 12 months from groundbreaking," said Chris Dunlavey, executive vice president for Brailsford and Dunlavey, a Washington, D.C.-based sports project management firm.

The question now is who does all the work?

Local construction contractors are submitting bids to build the stadium, an always competitive situation made more tense by disgruntled feelings among the local construction unions.

Last summer, when the city planned to build and own the stadium, the city commission considered a project labor agreement that would require local construction union members to get first crack at all the work. At a heated commission meeting, though, local chamber of commerce officials and contractors angrily decried the move, which they said would hurt competition.

Mandalay's lead investor, Hank Stickney, wrote the city that if the agreement was passed the company would consider it a breach of contract. Mandalay would no longer be liable for stadium costs above the estimate of \$ 22.7 million, he wrote.

The measure failed, and Kenny DeLaney, executive director of the Dayton Building Trades Council, said local union workers are still angry.

The project labor agreement "can guarantee that local people will get to work on this project," DeLaney said. However, if the bidding process is fair, local workers should end up doing much of the construction because everyone has to pay the same prevailing wages, he said.

If the stadium were the only construction project going on in that area this year, traffic snarls would be inevitable.

But work is also scheduled on a \$ 500,000 public plaza that will be the front door to the stadium at Monument Avenue and Patterson Boulevard. And \$ 3 million in road and sidewalk work will also occur at the same time on the streets bordering the site, rebuilding a portion of Webster Street for two-way traffic and narrowing Monument.

City officials are already warning that traffic will be difficult around the stadium for the next year.

But Murphy said the traffic snarls will be nothing compared with the hurdles the team has already overcome.

"It would be easier to move the Dodgers back to Brooklyn than it was to get a team from Rockford to Dayton," he said.

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