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Ravens Add Architects to Stadium-Design Team

Included Is Planner Who Worked on Model Camden Yards Project

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By Marcia Myers, Sun Staff

In a move it hopes will add imaginative new elements to its much-maligned stadium, the Ravens football team has hired its own staff architects, including Janet Marie Smith, whose work on Camden Yards helped make it a national model for ballparks.

The architects also are charged with seeing that the \$ 200 million sports complex meets a tight construction deadline.

The Ravens said the hiring was not influenced by weeks of public criticism of the stadium design, nor did it reflect dissatisfaction with stadium architect HOK Sports Facilities Group of Kansas City, Mo.

"It was something we planned to do all along," said Jim Bailey, the Ravens' executive vice president. "We're really just making sure the stadium has the quality that it needs."

Smith, whose ideas produced many of the old-fashioned features at Camden Yards, will work part time as a consultant because she has already committed to work on the Atlanta Braves' new stadium.

Heading the team will be Heidi Edwards, 31, a Washington architect whom Smith recommended as a professional who could "hit the ground running."

Although Edwards' role is similar to the one Smith filled so successfully for the Orioles, it is likely to be far more limited. The Ravens' construction deadline is one year shorter, and many details already have been worked out.

Even so, the new group already has discussed ways to make a trip to the football field a traditional gridiron experience for fans.

They have contemplated space for old-fashioned tailgate parties and games that pit fans' athletic skills against those of their football heroes.

Among other ideas: installing relics of the stadium's dual heritage -- Memorial Stadium in Baltimore and Cleveland Stadium, where the team played as the Browns.

"There's a lot of interest in determining what the fans are looking for," said Edwards. "We have the chance to create opportunities for rituals to develop."

Also on the Ravens' architectural team are the facilities planning firm of Brailsford and Dunlavey, which employs Edwards; and the Baltimore architecture firm of Ayers Saint Gross, whose staff includes more than 50 architects.

The group's job is to "be a friend to the process, not upset the apple cart," Smith said.

As for her part-time role, she said: "My interest is just that this is home for me, and I'd like to help."

The HOK group, which also designed Oriole Park, said it is accustomed to working with team architects and welcomes the suggestions of its Ravens counterparts.

"It never hurts to get another set of eyes," said Joseph E. Spear, HOK senior vice president.

As they had in two previous meetings with the city's Architectural Review Board, the design team members said they had made decisions on certain aspects of the design, such as the number of seats and the east-west orientation of the playing field.

But they noted that they are still fine-tuning other features, such as the look of the facade facing Russell Street and configuration of the lighting poles.

And they said they will be making changes even after construction begins. The Maryland Stadium Authority yesterday said the groundbreaking had been moved from September to July 23, a step it expects will save \$ 500,000 in construction costs.

Because the stadium authority is building in a fast-track method, officials had to make decisions about excavating the site and building the foundation early on, said Bruce H. Hoffman, executive director of the stadium authority.

Still to be addressed in later phases of the project are the ratio of glass to brick on the exterior and the exact finishes and colors of interior spaces.

HOK's architects were buoyed by a favorable response yesterday at a meeting of the review board, whose members earlier had criticized the stadium plans. And they shouldered blame for some of the criticism, saying their original presentations could have been better prepared and more complete.

"But we feel very strong about our convictions on the design," said architect James A. Chibnall.

HOK presented drawings yesterday that were more detailed, but reflected no significant design change.

Besides showing numerous designs HOK had considered and rejected, Chibnall said the firm was still considering building towers at the stadium's corners -- an idea roundly rejected by the board.

After calls for more public input, HOK offered to make a separate presentation on the stadium to local architects, some of whom had criticized the design.

Glenn Birx, president of Baltimore chapter of the American Institute of Architects, vetoed the proposal, saying it was not his group's role to critique the work of other architects.