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Feasibility Study Says Columbia Ready to Play Ball With Minor League Team

By Allen Wallace

Columbia City Council was presented with the results of an independent feasibility study on the topic of building a stadium and bringing a minor league professional team to the city.



Council members listen to the feasibility study presentation at Tuesday night's meeting. (photo by Allen Wallace)

The results of the study, which was commissioned by Columbia's City Council and conducted by the Brailsford and Dunlavey program management firm, were presented to council at Tuesday night's meeting. More than 100 people on hand to watch and listen.

Brailsford and Dunlavey representatives Rich Neumann and Jason Thompson said that Columbia, as the second-largest market in the United States with no professional sports team, is well-suited to support a minor league franchise.

The Columbia market would be best suited to an 8,000-seat stadium, which would serve as an anchor for development of the city's Bull Street property, according to the study. Such a stadium

would cost an estimated \$41.8 million. Most similar minor league stadiums are 83% publicly funded, according to the study.

Brailsford and Dunlavey found the proposed stadium would support 715 jobs and produce \$18.5 million each year in tax revenues, along with \$5 million in hotel spending and \$5.2 million in food and beverage spending. All numbers are estimates based on studies of other similar markets, including Greenville, Charleston and Winston-Salem, N.C.

The study found that minor league teams do not depend on on-field success for popularity and attendance but instead focus on providing family entertainment with activities for kids during the games as well as before and after. Ticket prices in similar markets range from \$5 to \$50. The stadium could be used for a wide variety of events, including concerts, when not in use for baseball.

One potential hurdle for the project would be finding a team. Major League Baseball, which governs the minor leagues, allows only a fixed number of teams. An existing team would have to move to Columbia, and Neumann and Thompson said any stadium building plan would have to include a commitment from a team owner.

Council members questioned Neumann and Thompson for nearly an hour after the presentation. Councilwoman Tameika Isaac Devine asked for more details on any possible conflict with the University of South Carolina baseball program. The study found that though the college and minor league seasons overlap by one month, the two teams would have very different target demographics. Mayor Steve Benjamin said he had spoken with USC Athletic Director and former head baseball coach Ray Tanner, who agreed with that assessment.

Questions also came up about the price tag for the recommended stadium. Neumann and Thompson said the price tag in the \$40 million range would bring a ballpark worthy of the capitol city.

Councilmen Sam Davis and Brian Newman asked about the potential impact of the stadium on residents who live near the proposed site. Neumann and Thompson said the study did not cover that question in detail and that any prospective owner would have to address it. Newman emphasized to all in attendance that the study was just that and that any decision on a possible stadium is still far from being made.

Benjamin said public hearings on the topic will be scheduled soon. The full presentation on the results of the study can be found [here](#).