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Commissioners may support minor league baseball study

Local stadium project would advance to second phase only if team expresses interest

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— CUMBERLAND — A contract to study the feasibility of bringing a professional baseball team to Allegany County could be awarded at today's Allegany County Commission meeting.

The proposed cost of the contract would be no more than \$7,500 to be awarded to Brailsford and Dunlavy Inc., a Washington, D.C. consulting firm that has done baseball studies for communities including Fredericksburg, Va., and Morgantown, W.Va., said Jeffrey Barclay, an economic development specialist for the county.

The project would only move to a second phase if the county obtains a written statement of interest from a team after the Phase I study, Barclay said. A key part of the initial study will be for the company to gauge whether any team is potentially interested in moving to Allegany County.

"We're not saying there's any commitment to go further than the first stage of the study," Barclay said. "If there's no interest, there's no sense in going further."

The idea of attracting a team to the area isn't a new one, said Larry Hohing, a member of the group that's been looking into the idea of bringing a baseball team to the area.

"We're strictly interested in a study to find out if there's any interest ... before spending a lot of money," Hohing said. A baseball team could be an economic and cultural boon to the area. "The big thing is it would enhance tourism. Maybe instead of people riding the train and getting in their car and leaving, they would stay for a game," Hohing said. "We have a great sports town here."

If a stadium is built, it wouldn't be just for baseball, but could host events like concerts, church revivals or youth soccer tournaments. A minor league team and stadium would help people looking for relatively inexpensive family entertainment without a long drive or the cost of attending a major league game, Hohing said.

Hohing said John Wiseman originated the idea some years ago and that others involved in the past few years have included Howard Reynolds, former Mayor Lee Fiedler, Ryan Hohing and Ted Troxell. The group calls itself Tri-State Mountain Baseball.

"Minor league baseball is flourishing," Hohing said. A good example is the Altoona Curve, located in

Altoona, Pa. The team is an AA affiliate of the Pittsburgh Pirates.

Initially, the group had hoped to fund the study with private donations.

The baseball team could be a minor league affiliate of a major league team or a team in an independent league, Barclay said.

If a team is interested, then it might be possible to involve the Maryland Stadium Authority and see about the possibility of involving a private investor and other funding, Barclay said.

Barclay said the study is not the subject of a request for proposals or a bid process.

The county commission meeting is set for 5 p.m. at county offices on Kelly Road. The meeting will include a baseball theme, of sorts, with a tribute planned to late Lonaconing native Robert Moses "Lefty" Grove, a major leaguer and member of the National Baseball Hall of Fame.

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