

CONERTON: SNAPPERS OPTIMISTIC ABOUT STADIUM

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Staff photo Snappers president Dennis Conerton continues to work towards keeping the team in Beloit.

BELOIT - The Beloit Snappers are inching towards a proposed new downtown ballpark that has been in the works for several years.

Snappers president Dennis Conerton said Sunday that hopes were still high things would get done by the end of this baseball season.

"We are definitely still optimistic about getting this done," Conerton said. "We're as close as we ever hoped to be to the goal, and that's the positive of the situation. We're still trying to get together that last piece of funding. Right now, we are organizing a professionally run campaign in order to do that. In the past, we didn't have that professional of a process, but some of the big players wanted to see that the community was still behind it. It's like when the YMCA was built. They wanted to make sure that we had support so that the big donors felt as though they weren't doing it all alone, and that's what we're trying to piece together in this."

Though city manager Lori Luther has been emphatic that the city wouldn't be able to assist the club financially in any way, Conerton said the opportunity to receive funding from other public sources could still be available.

"We've been told that there is no government money, but we want to make sure, so we're going back and looking at options in that regard," Conerton said. "We want to make sure that the public understands the structure. There will be an operator of the club, but the stadium itself will be operated by a stadium authority, like they do in Appleton with the Timber Rattlers. That won't be the Snappers running it, or the new prospective majority owners. It'll be a third-party entity, a not-for-profit organization. That's another piece that we are working with consultants with. Miller Park is also operated like that, as well as several minor league clubs. That was important to some of the donors, to know that nobody's pockets were being padded once the stadium was built."

The Snappers have hired a consulting firm, McDonald Schaefer, to assist in the process.

"This is an intense project, and the clock is ticking on us," Conerton said. "They have put us on a fast track for the organized appeal that we are going to go out with. They are working full-time on it. The large players are all behind this idea, and we are talking to our elected representatives at the state level and trying to see if there are any opportunities for help on that front."

The Snappers are looking at a potential site along the river downtown, south of the Ironworks campus. The site was one of those proposed by Beloit 200 several years ago. The site would still have to be approved by the city, and discussions on that front have been preliminary in nature to this point.

While major efforts are being made to keep the team in Beloit, the Snappers are working on a parallel front with other communities should the local option fall through.

"When the Snappers board made the decision that we needed to privatize, we had our first priority to keep the club in Beloit," Conerton said. "If that couldn't happen for whatever reason, then we had to go to the alternative, which is selling the club to an owner to move it to another market."

"To satisfy the time constraints, we've been working on that as well, in order to make sure the new owners would have time to meet the standards of Minor League Baseball. We've have some discussions with other owners that aren't advanced by any means, but we are hoping we can conclude the Beloit option before we get too far along on the alternative. That will obviously happen in the next few months. The first one to the finish line wins, so to speak."