

FIRST PITCH MADE ON NEW ERA FOR SNAPPERS

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Rendering provided This conceptual rendering shows what the future downtown Beloit Snappers stadium could look like that would be located at 217 Shirland Avenue in Beloit.

BELOIT -Key stakeholders looking to build a downtown stadium for the Beloit Snappers baseball team made their first pitch to the Beloit City Council and city residents at a meeting Monday night.

Potential owner Quint Studer and Senior Vice President of Development and Hendricks Commercial Properties John Gackstetter presented conceptual plans and a tentative timeline for the process that could see the Snappers relocate to 217 Shirland Avenue, a 7-acre site west of Beloit City Hall on the bank of the Rock River, by Opening Day of April 2021.

The project is estimated to cost \$34.2 million and require no public financing, with the majority of private investment coming from ABC Supply Chair Diane Hendricks. Hendricks Commercial Properties will serve as developer on the stadium project going forward with architectural design by Jones Petrie Rafinski. Final steps include receiving capital commitments, city council approval of design plans, verifying construction costs and closure on the land sale.

The stadium is expected to have a capacity of around 5,000 seats, with a 200-300 person venue on-site for offseason events. Studer highlighted his company's, Studer Entertainment & Retail, success in co-ownership of the Pensacola (Fla) Blue Wahoos Minor League Baseball team.

In seven years, Studer said Pensacola's downtown tax base grew from \$675 million to \$918 million, while property values downtown continue to rise.

"It's not that there wasn't any development already happening, but this just seems to be the catalyst that pushed it over the top," Studer said. "There's never been a downtown stadium that hasn't done well at the minor league level."

Gackstetter said the stadium would be downtown Beloit's "next step" in offering a "flexible entertainment venue."

Key concerns residents voiced Monday included parking at the site and how the development would impact the riverfront's natural environment and future ecological impact.

Studer addressed the parking issue head on, saying the Blue Wahoos stadium has only 300 designated parking spaces at its facility and the team has seen consecutive Saturday night sellouts for the last eight years.

"That's another wild thing because you want people to park and walk to the stadium and you want them to enjoy themselves downtown," Studer said.

Gackstetter confirmed talks remain ongoing with the City of South Beloit to acquire land on the opposite side of Shirland Avenue in Illinois for parking facilities, comparing the scope similar to baseball stadiums in Appleton and Cedar Rapids. The development would also require the closure of Water Street, a process that would require further city council review and approval. The Beloit Transit System facility and the U.S. Postal Service office are expected to remain at their current locations near the future development.

All construction is contingent upon conducting an environmental impact statement for the site, which had past uses as a manufacturing gas plant and a sewer treatment facility. Gackstetter said the project plans to add two feet of soil cap to the site and all footing and foundation construction would require special removal of dirt to be taken to a site capable of properly disposing of contaminated dirt.

The project could also require a disturbance permit from the Wisconsin Department of Natural Resources if the project is found to significantly impact wildlife along the Rock River.

"This is a very strict and regimented process to go through and you aren't going to get building permits if you don't follow those regulations," Gackstetter said.

The stadium development would be controlled by the yet-to-be-formed Riverbend Stadium Authority, while Studer plans to sign a 20-year lease with RSA to ensure the team stays in Beloit. After the meeting, Studer and Snappers President Dennis Conerton signed the asset purchase agreement that's subject to the long-term lease.

According to Conerton, the stadium authority will seek nonprofit status and have a similar structure to the current Snappers board with a charter agreement and bylaws.

The sale of the team also hinges on approvals from Major League Baseball, Minor League Baseball and the Midwest League.

Beloit City Manager Lori Curtis Luther said future meetings are set to determine whether or not the land for the stadium would be included in a long-term lease, referencing an example of a 99-year-lease, or sold outright to the stadium authority. Luther added it was too early to comment on any future plans for Pohlman Field, the current and longtime home of the Snappers, but said the process would be public and transparent going forward.

Conerton said the goal is to have all aspects of the sale agreement finalized heading into the Baseball Winter Meetings that are set for Dec. 8-12 in San Diego.