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Riverfront stadium plan gives Snappers new life

By AUSTIN MONTGOMERY Staff Writer
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New details of the proposed downtown Beloit Snappers baseball stadium continue to be released. The plans were originally announced in September. The \$32 million project is estimated to break ground on April 30.

Rendering provided by HCP

BELOIT—The Beloit Snappers were down to their final out.

But after a major swing in momentum due to a new ownership agreement and downtown stadium plan in 2019, the baseball team is expected to stay in Beloit for years to come.

Construction on the \$32 million stadium, set to be located at 217 Shirland Ave., is expected to start in April.

The team is expected to come under the ownership of Janesville native Quint Studer, founder of Studer Entertainment and Retail that's based in Pensacola, Florida.

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."

Beloit entrepreneur Diane Hendricks, who provided a majority of the private investment for the project, said the project will bring a great new amenity to downtown Beloit.

"This shared community space will create a strong connection to downtown Beloit and provide a beautiful, family-friendly amenity," Hendricks said.

The main concourse will wrap 360-degrees around the field and features a main entry gate at center field. Outdoor group areas could be located in left field and right field with a kid's playground and inflatable area planned for the outfield concourse. Additionally, the stadium is expected to include an artificial turf field along with new surface parking lots to the north and south of the stadium, according to the announcement.

The stadium is expected to be used not only for the home of the Snappers, but also for hosting non-baseball events like soccer matches, football games, concerts and community gatherings.

When the stadium plan was announced last fall, some residents voiced concerns over lack of parking in the area and possible environmental impacts at the site.

Construction at the site is expected to include two parking lots, one south of Shirland Avenue across from the stadium and one immediately north of the stadium, consisting of 226 available parking spaces.

A parking analysis provided in the planning documents shows stakeholders estimate a total parking need of 875 spaces based on the assumption that one parking space per four fans at full capacity (3,500) are used. The analysis claims there are 777 available public parking spaces within a 10 minute walk of the stadium.

The site itself is a former brownfield area that had past uses as a manufacturing gas plant in the 1950s and a sewer treatment facility in the 1990s. In 2007, the city closed out the site by adding a soil cap to the property to contain any contaminant that still remains in the area. Project plans for the downtown stadium would include adding two feet of additional soil cap on the property, with all footing and foundation construction to require special removal of dirt to be taken to a site capable of properly disposing of contaminated soil.

Designs for the project do not show any alteration to the Rock River bank. Of the stretch of the Rock River that runs past the proposed stadium, the Wisconsin Department of Natural Resources said the area was home to a “decent fishery” and a number of game and non-game species in the immediate area. In the last two years, the WDNR said the area near the Shirland Avenue bridge at the state line has picked up a higher number of Canadian Geese and various species of ducks, but there’s no recorded spring breeding survey route through the area. In terms of bald eagles, the WDNR has reported multiple eagles in the area. Just south of the

border at the confluence of the Turtle Creek and Rock River, an active eagles nest is plotted by the department. A federal requirement states no development can take place within 300 feet from a bald eagle nesting site.

Construction on the stadium is expected to wrap up by April 1, 2021.

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