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Glendale close to \$80.7 mil ballpark deal

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Glendale officials, in the final stretch, hope to knock home deals to make spring training with the Los Angeles Dodgers and Chicago White Sox a reality.

The City Council tonight, in its last meeting before summer recess, is expected to finalize details to open an \$80.7 million spring-training site in 2009. Dodgers owner Frank McCourt, who is in town as the Dodgers play the Diamondbacks, is expected to attend tonight's council meeting.

The agreements include a tax-revenue sharing plan with Phoenix because the ballpark is planned on 151 acres of Glendale-owned land in Phoenix at 107th Avenue and Camelback Road.

They also detail leases with the two storied ball clubs with stiff fines for the White Sox if the team is unable to get out of its contract with Pima County, leaving the Glendale facility underused.

City dealmakers, who earned tentative approval for the stadium in 2006, have worked for six months on agreements with the teams and other major players.

Glendale City Manager Ed Beasley, as he and staffers continued to tie up loose ends on Monday, told *The Republic* that the negotiations are worth it because professional sports add amenities for residents and spur job development for the city. Glendale also is home to professional football, hockey and lacrosse.

David Krietor, a deputy city manager in Phoenix, said the deals were one of the most complex he had seen pulled together because of the number of players.

"Glendale is really making it happen," he said.

Once the Glendale council votes tonight, players from Phoenix, the Arizona Sports and Tourism Authority and a private developer will get a swing at the agreements. Once complete and the two teams sign off, the state's Cactus League would expand to 14 teams.

Sports authority's role

"We've been waiting for something," said Brad Wright, who chairs the sports authority's Cactus League committee.

The sports authority board will review the agreements to ensure the project is financially secure, as they have tentatively agreed to fund up to three-fourths of the project.

Wright said that probably would happen in July if schedules cooperate.

Phoenix action expected

The Phoenix City Council is expected to take action Monday to rezone the area with a special-use permit that would allow construction to begin.

The Phoenix council probably would act later on agreements that detail sharing of tax revenues with Glendale, Krietor said.

Glendale officials said that, that agreement is expected to call for all tax revenue from the stadium and surrounding development to initially go to pay off Glendale's portion of the stadium debt. After that, Phoenix would keep all of the tax revenue generated within its city limits.

Rightpath in the mix

Glendale intends to use a funding mechanism of paying off bonds with tax revenues generated in and around the stadium.

That brings in another partner, Rightpath Limited Development Group.

The agreements call for Glendale to sell the Phoenix-based company 85 acres around the stadium for baseball-related commercial development.

Rightpath developers also have purchased 166 acres just north of the ballpark within Glendale city limits. The company plans to develop "Main Street" as a two-city, multiuse project, which includes a 1,000-room resort and golf course.

Glendale officials say they will wait four years to start paying on the stadium debt to give that development a chance to fatten city tax coffers. If development were delayed and the revenue not in place, Rightpath would be responsible for the payment, city officials said. The company has secured a \$20 million line of credit with Bank of America to assure the city of payment.

Dodgers and White Sox

Another feature of the agreements is that the teams, with lease agreements for nearly 20 years, would operate and maintain the ballpark. Glendale officials say they pressed this point because other cities with Cactus League teams usually run a deficit in operating the facilities.

In return, the teams will keep all the revenue generated from tickets, parking and merchandise sold at the stadium, which typically is split with the city.

Cactus League President J.P. de la Montaigne, who runs Peoria's spring-training complex, said that portion of the deal is a trade-off.

Glendale won't have the expense, but it also won't have full run of the facility. Growing cities such as Peoria and Surprise, which are still developing park systems, open the spring training facilities for community use, he said.

Glendale's agreements call for five city events at the stadium a year.

The agreements also touch on the White Sox's contract to train in Tucson that runs through 2012.

The agreements outline that 20 games between the two teams should be played at the stadium. If the White Sox cannot find a replacement team for Tucson and must wait until 2013 to move to the Valley, the team will have to pay \$250,000 for each game short of the 20.

Still, team representatives say they are pleased the deals are moving forward.

The council meeting starts at 7 p.m. in the City Council Chambers, 5850 W. Glendale Ave.

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