

Mesa seeks financing for D-Backs facility

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Arizona Diamondbacks Miguel Montero, center, is congratulated by teammates after his two-run home run during a spring training baseball game against the San Diego Padres in Tucson, March 9, 2009.

The Associated Press

Around the time when baseball teams are making final cuts to their rosters, the Arizona Diamondbacks will be paring down their list of possible spring training sites.

Salt River community bids for D-Backs spring home
Mesa trying to lure D-Backs for spring training

Mesa should know by month's end whether it can put together a proposal to host a second Cactus League facility. All that stands in the city's way is the successful development, in a month's time, of a public-private partnership that can build a stadium and training complex.

"Is it doable? Yes," Mayor Scott Smith said. "Is it easy? No."

Currently, the Diamondbacks and Colorado Rockies are alone in basing their spring training activities in Tucson. Because of the long drive to the Valley, home to the league's other 12 participants, the teams have said that they want to move north.

Last week, the Diamondbacks formally asked a handful of communities whether they would be interested in building a two-team training complex, with the goal of opening by spring 2011. The deadline for responses is March 27.

Mesa, strapped for cash like almost every other American city, said yes - provisionally.

"We're not looking at a publicly financed arrangement," Smith said. "This will involve private funds and will have to be a unique arrangement, so we have to see if that works for the private market, and then we'll do what we can as a city to help facilitate that."

Whichever private entity steps forward will have to put up quite a bit of money; the typical cost of a two-team facility is about \$100 million.

Mesa already is home to the Chicago Cubs, the league's perennial attendance leaders. They train at Fitch Park and play their games at Hohokam Stadium.

While Mesa looks into its options, its neighbor to the north is charging ahead.

The Salt River Pima-Maricopa Indian Community announced Monday it will be bidding to build the complex.

"We think if this thing was to happen, it would provide jobs to our community," said Martin Harvier, vice president of the SRP-MIC. "Not only our community, but the surrounding communities."

The tribe even has proposed a possible site: adjacent to Scottsdale, within the corridor west of the Loop 101, north of Indian Bend Road and south of Via de Ventura. That property is near the Casino Arizona Resort and Spa, opening in early 2010, and Talking Stick Golf Club.

Other locations also are under consideration, the tribe said.

Of the other American Indian communities near the East Valley, a representative of Fort McDowell declined to speak on the issue and the Gila River's spokeswoman could not be reached for comment.

Mesa, too, has a general area where it would like to build: near Phoenix-Mesa Gateway Airport. Smith, without providing many specifics, said the city has been in touch with "a lot of different parties" there.

Developer DMB is one of those parties, Smith acknowledged. DMB, owner of 3,200 acres in the area, would like to build a master-planned community there.

Casa Grande, in Pinal County, will be another candidate to host the two teams if residents vote to give the go-ahead.

On May 19, voters will decide whether to enact a sales tax, nine-tenths of a cent, to fund the construction of a spring training complex. If Casa Grande's measure passes, that could give the city the big advantage of a dedicated funding source.

The Salt River tribe has yet to work out the specifics of funding.

Because the Diamondbacks' deadline is weeks sooner than the vote, Casa Grande officials have asked the team for an extension.