

SNAPPERS STADIUM PLAN TAKES SHAPE

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Rendering provided by HCP This view shows the main ticket hub and grandstand area for the proposed downtown Beloit Snappers stadium plan. Visible at the right of the rendering is the Beloit Transit System center that is slated to remain.

BELOIT --



New details regarding the proposed downtown stadium for the Beloit Snappers baseball team have been released, while the sale of the team and project plans remain pending various approvals.

On Thursday, it was announced the stadium would feature a grandstand with administrative offices and player facilities, concessions and restrooms, along with a 300-plus capacity stadium club that can be used year-round for special events.

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 include an artificial turf field along with new surface parking lots to the north and south of the stadium, according to the announcement.

Beloit entrepreneur Diane Hendricks, who provided a majority of the private investment for the project, said the new renderings and stadium details "further bring to life an exciting future for community members in the Beloit region."

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

In September, stakeholders announced a \$32 million stadium project along the banks of the Rock River and Shirland Avenue adjacent to the Beloit Transit System building near Beloit City Hall, 100 State St.

With the roll-out Janesville native and Florida businessman Quint Studer, owner of Pensacola, Florida-based Studer Entertainment and Retail, announced plans to purchase the Snappers from the longtime local ownership group led by president Dennis Conerton. Studer previously indicated plans to sign a 20-year lease with the Riverbend Stadium Authority, the organization set to manage stadium operations going forward. The Florida businessman also co-owns the Pensacola Blue Wahoos, a AA-affiliate of the Minnesota Twins professional baseball team.

"With the leadership of Diane Hendricks and others who are stepping up to build a fabulous stadium in Beloit, this revitalization project brings the city one step closer to becoming America's renaissance city," Studer said. "We are so grateful to bring our experience and investment to such a noble project."

The acquisition by Studer is pending approval by the Midwest League, Minor League Baseball (MiLB) and Major League Baseball (MLB) and those efforts are directly linked to the stadium plan moving forward. Officials previously blamed the slowdown on tough negotiations regarding the MiLB and MLB professional baseball agreement.

"We are currently in process of waiting for league approval for a management agreement to operate the Snappers in 2020," Studer said in an email to the *Beloit Daily News*. "We should know very soon."

The Snappers are currently a Minor League Baseball affiliate of the Oakland Athletics professional baseball team. In 2018, the team signed an extension with Oakland for affiliation through 2020.

In December, the stadium authority met internally to determine whether or not to move forward with stadium design plans in the midst of the MiLB and MLB slowdown, with Thursday's announcement shedding more light on what the stadium could include.

The project includes no public financing.

The proposed stadium project and franchise sale seemingly came at the 11th hour for the Snappers, the team which has played at Pohlman Field since the 1980s as it continues to fall further behind league standards for player and fan amenities.

"From what we have heard from MiLB leadership and MLB great facilities are vital to having a team," Studer said. "With Beloit already having a team and with now getting a great stadium on fits what MiLB and MLB say they want."

Last year, a prospective plan to cut 42 minor league teams was announced by MLB, with teams being evaluated on the basis of ownership, location and baseball facility amenities. According to Baseball Digest, Beloit was named on the contraction list, but the New York Times does not list the Snappers as one of the teams to be cut from the Midwest League.

Construction on the stadium could start in the spring, according to Thursday's announcement.

Beloit Strategic Communications Director Sarah Millard confirmed no official stadium plans have been filed with the city as of Thursday afternoon.

Following the stadium announcement last fall, residents voiced concerns regarding potential environmental impacts to the natural wildlife along the river. The city is responsible for enforcing floodplain ordinances and development via the zoning approval process, while the Wisconsin Department of Natural Resources (WDNR) has jurisdiction of the river itself at or below normal water levels. The WDNR would require an additional permit outside of the already-required environmental review if plans to alter the riverfront were sought.