



Springdale : Ballpark luxuries cut to hit budget

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SPRINGDALE — Two party decks and five luxury suites have been cut from the baseball stadium to offset a shortfall in the project's construction budget, Mayor Jerre Van Hoose announced Friday.

Rich Baseball Operations, owner of the Northwest Arkansas Naturals, also agreed to buy \$ 1. 4 million in concession equipment and furnishings to help the city meet expenses related to the 6, 500-seat ballpark at 56 th Street and Watkins Avenue.

Van Hoose said certain steel certifications were not needed, further reducing the price by \$ 125, 000.

Van Hoose seemed relieved as he explained the budget adjustments to five aldermen during a finance committee meeting Friday.

"I like the way the team stepped up," he said.

The adjustments ensure that Springdale has enough money to build the ballpark for the Class AA Naturals, who will move from Wichita, Kan., in time for the 2008 season.

The new bill comes to \$ 32. 1 million.

The City Council is expected to approve the contract changes Tuesday night. The subtraction of the suites and party decks amount to a loss of about 250 seats, said Naturals General Manager Eric Edelstein.

"Certainly it was a disappointment [to lose the suites]," Edelstein said. "It's an important amenity, but more fans sit in the seats than the suites."

The stadium, designed by HOK Sport of Kansas City, Mo., still will have 25 suites, and Edelstein said it would be possible in the future to add the five that were taken out.

The overall size and shape of the stadium won't be affected.

"This was the best way for the building to be built to the standards that we wanted," Edelstein said. "The look of the facility has not been altered."

Two bids were opened May 30, and both came in above the architect's estimate of \$ 29. 3 million.

The low bid, by Kansas-based Crossland Construction, was \$ 33. 4 million, while the other bid, by Flintco of Tulsa, came in at \$ 42 million.

The City Council is expected to award the contract to Crossland on Tuesday.

Voters passed a \$ 50 million bond issue in July 2006 to build the minor-league stadium and related road and sewer improvements.

The stadium must be substantially completed by March 1 or the city will forfeit a year's rent, \$ 325, 000. The season will begin in early April.

The city deposited the proceeds from the \$ 50 million bond issue and made money on the investment. As a result, the city has \$ 50. 9 million for the project.

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