

MBA'S TOP PRIORITY: GETTING IT RIGHT



The project team has improved public spaces significantly from the original ballpark site plan, including the expansion of the pedestrian bridge along 7th Street.

The Minnesota Ballpark Authority (MBA) approved a revised ballpark budget and an updated infrastructure budget at its Board meeting on February 27th.

The ballpark budget has increased from \$390 million to \$412.4 million. The new figure reflects an additional \$22.4 million contribution from the Minnesota Twins to pay for higher construction costs and enhancements to the base ballpark design. The public's \$260 million contribution to the ballpark remains unchanged.

The Authority also approved a revised infrastructure budget of \$105 million. This represents an increase over the \$90 million infrastructure budget that was established in the 2006 Ballpark legislation, and this additional \$15 million is also being provided by the Twins. The total project cost now stands at just over \$517 million, compared to the original \$480 million project budget.

While design elements like pedestrian lighting, landscaping and public seating will still surround the ballpark, the revised budget no longer includes funds to extend these features outside the ballpark site plan.

"One of the early challenges the project faced was completing the infrastructure design before all of the site costs were known," said Dan Kenney, Executive Director of the Minnesota Ballpark Authority. "And because most of our infrastructure costs are non-discretionary—things like site acquisition, utility relocations, and pollution remediation—reducing off-site improvements was the only option we had when these other costs went up."

Kenney noted that even with the elimination of off-site enhancements, the public spaces in the ballpark site plan have been improved significantly from what was originally proposed in 2006.

For instance, the functionality of the ballpark was improved by shifting the Burlington Northern rail line and 5th Street Bridge abutment to the west. This new railroad alignment created a corridor for the much anticipated extension of the Cedar Lake Trail. Public access has also been improved through the addition of major pedestrian bridge improvements along 7th Street, a plaza area between 6th and 7th Street, and a direct stair connection from the new 6th Street pedestrian bridge to the existing skyway system.

These improvements were added based on more in-depth study of the site through the Environmental Impact Statement (EIS) process, additional analysis by the project design team and input from the Ballpark Implementation Committee.

"We got the fundamentals right," Kenney said. "But we know we're not done yet."

The MBA's top priority is making certain critical connections to and from the ballpark are in place by Opening Day, 2010.

First on that list will be to secure funding to build the extension of the 6th Street plaza along Target Center to 1st Avenue North. This will help make the ballpark's public plaza a more "dynamic and welcoming" space that people can enjoy year-round.

"The goal is to improve the flow of fans on game days and connect pedestrians to the neighborhood that will be created around the ballpark," Kenney said. "We're excited about working with others to identify potential funding partners and infrastructure priorities."

Hennepin County's Ballpark Project Coordinator, Rick Johnson, says funds for other district enhancements may be available later in the project, after earlier infrastructure bid packages are closed out. Johnson told

the Hennepin County Board of Commissioners on February 12th that if construction continues to go well, a portion of the \$5.5 million infrastructure contingency may be reallocated to pay for enhancements around the ballpark, including the extension of the pedestrian bridge.

While the MBA is focused primarily on getting the details of the ballpark right, it is also interested in participating in broader discussions regarding future transit lines and new development near the ballpark.

The North Loop Neighborhood Association is hosting a series of meetings to discuss the concept of creating "2010 Partners", a collaboration of interested parties that live, work and invest in this emerging area of downtown Minneapolis.

Representatives from the MBA, Twins, Northstar Project, Minneapolis City Council, Downtown Council and several North Loop property owners and residents have taken part in the discussions. Participants are generally enthused about the prospects for the neighborhood and the spirit of cooperation that is being conveyed.