

Marion City Council supports Prospect Meadows

Written by Tom Fruehling

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Members of the Marion City Council liked what they saw Tuesday afternoon of the proposed \$9.4 million baseball and softball complex north of the city.

Developers of the Prospect Meadows Ball Fields are not asking the city for anything, but merely wanted to update Marion officials on their progress.

The 17-diamond facility, to be located near the Abbe Center at Highway 13 and County Home Road, is intended for local league play for all ages and as a site for major tournaments drawing teams from throughout the Midwest.

Last week, the local non-profit group planning the 120-acre development was cheered when the Linn County Board of Supervisors seemed prepared to donate the county-owned land.

"We should know for sure by the end of August," said longtime Marion businessman Dick Bice, one of the prime movers in the project. "If we get the land, then you'll really see us moving along. That's the next big step."

It is hoped that play can begin in 2013.

Tuesday's presentation at the council's work session was the first time Marion officials were given a broad overview, although there have been informal discussions since the facility was first proposed more than a year ago.

A scale model of the park in the lobby at Marion City Hall has drawn considerable interest, officials said.

"This is a very exciting project," Marion Mayor Paul Rehn told the Prospect Meadows group Tuesday. "I think the city is willing to assist you in any way we can."

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Bice noted that the complex would have its own septic system and well, so there is no need to have city utilities extended to the site.

Council member Steve Sprague said he is excited about the economic impact the development could generate for the area. He cited the equestrian center at Kirkwood Community College as an example of an attraction that draws visitors from all over the country.

"If you build a superior facility, the value in terms of economic development is just immense," he said.

Former Cedar Rapids Kernels General Manager Jack Roeder, who is serving as a volunteer point man for the project, said the location of the diamonds is close to other recreational sites such as Lowe Park, the Tuma soccer fields and the Third Base Sports Park.

It is also near the Linn-Mar school campus, as well as the 150-acre Neighborhood at Indian Creek residential and commercial development under way at 35th Street and Tower Terrace Road.

Roeder said estimates are that the complex would draw 120,000 players and visitors a year and generate a \$25 million boost to the local economy.

"This just has a lot of positives going for it," he told Marion officials. "And the response we've had has been very enthusiastic."