

MAYOR'S BASEBALL ADVISORY COMMITTEE

May 19, 1997

5:00 PM

Chairman Keegan called the meeting to order.

The Clerk called the roll.

Present: Chairman Keegan, Alderman Shea, Joan Bennett, Sean Thomas

Absent: Guild Hill

Messrs.: Ron Johnson, Ron Ludwig, Kevin St. Onge

Chairman Keegan stated maybe it's important and maybe it isn't, but I'm a Commissioner of Parks and Playgrounds, but I want everybody to know that I am not here because of that reason. I'm here because Ray Wiczorek is my next door neighbor and he asked me to Chair this Committee. I have no preconceived ideas whether a minor league ball club in town is good or bad, that is something for this Committee to address. I'd like to introduce the Committee. Bushy Hill is not here, but I guess everybody knows Bill Shea our Alderman from Ward 7 and Joan Bennett is here and you're representing the City, and so I'd like to make a few comments before we start. I'd like to say that what we are trying to do here is to develop a comprehensive mission statement that would, hopefully, be to the best interest of all parties in the City of Manchester. I don't think we can proceed without my addressing a little bit about the structure of the Parks & Recreation Department, but Gill Stadium as you may or may not know is under the enterprise section of Parks & Playgrounds and as a result of this, this department has very limited amount of capital and operating funds and if it's decided that a minor league team would be to the benefit of the City then in order for the Parks Department to support this there would have to be enough cash flow for the department to justify the necessary expenditures. On the other hand, if the City thinks a minor league team is economically and psychologically beneficial then, of course, they have the right to use taxpayer funds for the necessary capital and operating expenses. Unfortunately, the Committee hasn't had an opportunity to review the March 1997 feasibility report by Morris and Gary relative to the impact on the currently scheduled events at Gill Stadium; that report is this and the next time we have a meeting we can get into more detail with respect to the report and I think they've done an excellent job particularly on the impact it would have on

currently scheduled events at Gill Stadium. The events that any minor league team would have would have to be roughly 40 scheduled events in June, July and August and the study shows that it is possible to use other facilities for events that are there now and the Derryfield Field according to the survey and I agree would be the best one which has 1,800 seats, they have lighting and parking and dugouts and so on, however, assuming and I can't assume that, but just assume that the football games or some of them will be held at Gill Stadium is a problem in converting the field to football games because it would not be able to do that until the middle of September since the minor league team would have to use the field the first half of September. We need to schedule a meeting of the Committee before we are really able to reach any conclusion and I have no more to say if a member of the Committee would like to add anything, I'd be glad to hear from you. Sean would like to spend a few minutes to tell you about some of the people that would like to use Gill Stadium for a minor league team and I have met with two of the teams and I might say that John Toole has done an excellent job summarizing what other towns have done with respect to minor league teams and his articles I'm using as part of my study.

Mr. Thomas stated I guess to go back around October or even a little earlier of last year, we were first contact by Peter Wyso who had a group called the Ace of Diamonds and he was proposing to bring a team into the Northern League or the North Atlantic League which is an independent league in baseball and he met with the Mayor and met with Ron Ludwig at some point and he made a proposal and the Board sent it to the CIP Committee and the CIP Committee essentially asked the Mayor and his office to look further into baseball. probably, about two weeks following that we received a call from a Gary Jones, a gentleman who has a group called Hathaway Entertainment and already owns a team in Springfield, Illinois with a group of investors that are interested in establishing a franchise in the northeastern league, another independent league, and he said he would prefer to put it in Manchester or in New Hampshire. I think he had a very solid group of investors presented to us and has since kept in contact with us. The third contact we received which is in this report was from the Atlantic League which is another independent league which has not begun play yet, does not anticipate beginning playing until 1999, however, it is head up by some rather large names in minor league baseball and players in the major leagues and they're trying to set up a very professional organization and we were contacted as possibly being a site for an Atlantic League franchise. We were next contacted by Mr. Steven Dyer who is actually here tonight with his proposal to bring a double AA franchise in the Eastern League and it's an affiliated league with the major leagues to bring a double AA franchise here into Manchester and I think a lot of you have already seen the articles on that and we don't have to go into that at length at this point, but it brings in a different look into baseball to Manchester. The final proposal

that we have received to date was brought in by a Mr. Mark Sporthandio, a gentleman who has got quite a bit of experience in baseball, we had a very impressive meeting with him and he too is looking to bring a franchise into the Northeastern League the same league that Mr. Gary Jones is trying to bring a team Sporthandio into and he brought a new wrinkle into it was talking about what he would like to do to Gill Stadium, what he would like to bring in himself and he has since gone down with some engineers to take a look at that. That is all of the groups we have really dealt with to date and to update you, Peter Wyso lost the league that he was trying to bring a franchise into. He is now trying to get a franchise in the Atlantic League, the league that I was telling you about that won't form up until 1999. If you read the article on double AA baseball last Friday, you have a good idea where Mr. Dyer's group is heading at this point and I'm sure he is, at some point, going to want to address this group to give you a better explanation of what they would like to do. I have talked to both Mr. and Mr. Jones on Friday and they're still both very interested, they've said that their Northeastern League has room for one more expansion team and they would prefer it to be Manchester, New Hampshire and that is from their League President Mr. Tom Sullivan has said that to them. I guess we kind of work out logistically in a lot of people's minds and where they have their teams at present. That's it for the teams and the people that we have dealt with, I think what I have let everyone know and I think it's going to become very apparent that we are going to try to go through a very fair process and go through an RFP process so that everyone has a chance to put in a proposal to the City and I think what we are going to get into next is what we want to do with that.

Chairman Keegan stated I think our next objective in this Committee is to get together as soon as possible to draw up a mission or an RFP with a criteria in there that hopefully will be acceptable to the City as a whole and hopefully the Parks Department and once the Committee has agreed on a proper RFP and it would then obviously go out to the public and after that I think we need a formal public hearing, a real public hearing where we have something to say with respect to the criteria. From my background, of course, I am particularly interested in a very comprehensive business plan with all of the financial data and the basis for their projection of profit, I would assume that everybody wants to make a profit in business.

Alderman Shea asked are we going to consider just interviewing or getting responses from people that are affiliated with major league ball clubs, double AA ball or are we going to be thinking about different types of leagues, some of these leagues are here today and gone tomorrow, whereas some type of affiliation with double AA ball is a little more conducive to attracting a clientele. There are two leagues that are going to start-up and I'm not saying that those are the ones, but

from past experiences I would say that people can identify with...like in Portland it's the Seadogs, they're affiliated with the Florida Marlins. You see a Catcher out there Johnson and then you see him in the major leagues and if you can get a double ball here, if in fact we were leaning toward any at all and that would depend upon like you said a lot of different factors. It's feasible to do it from a hundred different angles, my own thinking is should we and I don't really want to use this term, but should we waste our time on leagues that are not really going to do much, maybe are not going to be in existence too long that are kind of in the embryonic stage or are we going to kind of focus on double AA kind of situations, that is something that we may talk about later.

Chairman Keegan stated there is no question and John Toole's done a good job on that and you're going to attract a lot more interest and a lot more spectators with a double AA, but his report talked about \$4.5 million, you need 6,000 people in attendance, and I would think that if the figure is right they need millions and millions of dollars for Gill Stadium to attract, you read the reports there, that they expect the City to put up all of the money because they are going to be a great benefit to the City and Portland says philosophically it's better, but not economically. I don't know that we could discount entirely the independent team, but don't you think this is something that we should all discuss together. I have no position one way or the other. I don't have the background of baseball like you do.

Mr. Thomas stated in talking to our City Solicitor, I don't think we can deny any one from bidding in terms of responding to this RFP. Out of hand, I think we have to at least give them a fair look in terms of their proposal, but I think we can legitimately look at that point at their league. We may ask in the RFP give us a better idea of understanding of how their league is set up, their history, what they perceive is their future and I think you're right, the general trend in independent league baseball was to be around for four or five years and then the leagues would fold. I don't believe that we have been told by these people that times have changed, that this is becoming more acceptable and profitable and they're going to stay around, we don't know that.

Alderman Shea stated the history of baseball has changed because at one time you had D ball, C ball, A ball, AA, AAA and, of course, as the leagues have expanded naturally more guys are up in the majors than they were previously and they've had to cut back on the farm systems, so that would explain why some of these independent leagues have come forth and some do make a profit, they are beneficial some places out in Michigan, the peninsula out there where there isn't too much other things to do and so forth.

Chairman Keegan stated the two individuals I have talked to have been involved in the so-called independent and they have been reasonably successful, but I think...I assume that everybody should know that Ron Ludwig is here as head of the Parks Department and Ron Johnson his close assistant and are here for any questions that anyone might ask and I'm certain the Committee will be interested in some of their comments. I would suggest that we schedule a working meeting so that we can really dig into setting up an RFP and then we'll open it up for a public hearing.

Alderman Shea asked do we have some sort of a time frame here.

Mr. Thomas replied I'd like to be able to go out to an RFP and I think conceivably we ought to be able to get some numbers back towards the end of June.

Alderman Shea asked were you thinking of having some sort of a meeting this week.

Chairman Keegan replied I was and happen to have some open dates this week.

Mr. Thomas stated we could probably hold a meeting this week and if Mr. Hill is not back by then he could be brought up-to-date later.

Those members present decided upon meeting on Wednesday morning at nine o'clock May 21st in the Executive Conference Room with staff.

Mr. Thomas asked, Kevin, what do you think we need to do at this point.

Attorney St. Onge replied from an RFP standpoint and my understanding of your conversation with Solicitor Clark that the first task that the Committee has is to put in place a philosophy as to what you are looking to do and you outlined the number of different groups that have expressed an interest and those groups really have varying demands and so it seems appropriate for this Committee to perhaps go over the feasibility study in significant detail before it can...in my personal view the Committee would have to go over the feasibility study in significant detail before it could really sit down and come up with an RFP and I'm not sure if you can do that between now and Wednesday.

Chairman Keegan stated digest this.

Attorney St. Onge stated I'm not sure how you come up with an RFP to make a commitment to go to a double AA or independent league or any other proposal

without having a good working knowledge of what this feasibility study provides. Now, that's just one person's view.

Chairman Keegan stated I've been looking at this since last March.

Attorney St. Onge stated I think the Committee is working at a little bit of a disadvantage in that regard; that's not to say not be aggressive and go forward, I'm just thinking that some of the members of the Committee may need time to look over this study.

Chairman Keegan stated I thought it would take more than one meeting to reach any kind of a conclusion, frankly. But, it's up to you guys.

Committee members present decided to meet on Wednesday, May 28th at 9:00 AM at 1000 Elm Street (2nd floor) in the offices of the City Clerk.

He says the end of June, I want to get it done certainly by the middle of July because we don't want to get into the campaign season and whatever, we want to decide certainly by the end of July one way or the other.

Alderman Shea asked is Tom Rath still trying to bring a baseball team up to Concord, he has a couple of exhibition games.

Mr. Thomas replied he is still trying to bring a team, his biggest problem is he has absolutely no stadium to go with though.

Chairman Keegan stated there have been some horror stories and they could probably tell you what has happened down in Nashua, he's done all of the research and summarized it.

Mr. Thomas stated I'm going to forward an addendum to this report which is what Mark Spirandio has offered to us at this point, it's not as detailed as the rest of the material in here and I also imagine that Mr. Dyer would want to submit something in writing to the Committee also and I'll forward it to the Committee, so that before we meet next Wednesday they will have a chance to brush through that too.

Chairman Keegan stated this is really a meeting to get to know each other and set an agenda and objectives to try to come up with an RFP in the best interests in the City and as I said if it's an enterprise we will have to make sure that it is financially responsible, if it's not then it's up to the Board to make the decision. As we go along you will find as I have already found out that whatever team is

going into Gill it's not adequate right now, I can tell you that right now and we'll get into that detail at that time

There being no further business to come before the Committee, on motion of Alderman Shea, duly seconded by Mr. Thomas, it was voted to adjourn.

A True Record. Attest.

Clerk of Committee