

# Ballpark Update and State of Baseball in Edmonton

## Recommendation:

That the April 14, 2015, Community Services report CR\_1523rev, be received for information.

## Report Summary

**This report responds to a motion by Executive Committee for information about the Rossdale ballpark, leaseholder opportunities, and the state of high level baseball in Edmonton.**

## Previous Council/Committee Action

At the January 27, 2015, City Council meeting, the following motion was passed:

1. That a working session be held at the April 14/15, 2015, City Council meeting, to discuss potential options for the West Rossdale Redevelopment and the Rossdale Ballpark sites.
2. That the Community Service report CR\_1523rev - Ballpark Update and State of Baseball in Edmonton and the Sustainable Development report CR\_1521rev - West Rossdale Redevelopment - Update Rossdale Generating Station - Commercial Activity Potential, be brought to the April 14/15, 2015, City Council meeting to coincide with the working session.

At the January 20, 2015, Executive Committee meeting, the following motion was passed:

That the January 20, 2015, Community Services report CR\_1523, be referred back to Administration to provide options for Council to consider at a future Council meeting, on a date to be recommended by Administration in consultation with the Agenda Review Committee.

At the July 8, 2014, Special Executive Committee meeting, the following motion was passed:

That Administration report back to Executive Committee on the following:

Results of consultation with the ballpark leaseholder, on opportunities and costs related to the ballpark, including implications of bringing a minor league team back to Edmonton, and provide an additional report on the state of baseball in Edmonton.

Please retain this report for future meetings

### Report

- Information regarding the West Rossdale Urban Design Plan is provided in the January 20, 2015, Sustainable Development report CR\_1521. The plan proposes a high density residential / mixed use area in the Rossdale Community that could have long-term implications for the ballpark.

### Rossdale Ballpark – Background Information

- The City of Edmonton owns the Rossdale ballpark, originally known as Renfrew Park and subsequently John Ducey Park and Telus Field. Baseball has been part of Edmonton's social and sporting scene since the late 1880's. Throughout the early twentieth century, Edmonton teams competed in various Western Canadian leagues. The 6,500 seat Renfrew Park was built in 1935; in 1984 it was renamed for John Ducey, an Edmonton baseball player, umpire and administrator. The stadium was replaced in 1995 after 60 years of use with the current Telus Field.
- Modern professional baseball came to Edmonton with the arrival of the Major League Baseball affiliated Edmonton Trappers of the Triple-A Pacific Coast League. The Trappers played 24 seasons at John Ducey Park from 1981 to 1994 before moving into the new Telus Field in 1995.
- After the departure of the Trappers in 2004, the Rossdale ballpark has been home to various independent professional baseball teams.
  - The Edmonton Cracker Cats played in the Northern League from 2005 to 2007 and the Golden Baseball League in 2008. The franchise was then sold to the Edmonton Oilers in 2009 and renamed the Edmonton Capitals.
  - The Edmonton Capitals played two seasons in the Golden Baseball League followed by one season in the North American League in 2011, winning the Championship. The team withdrew from the league at the end of the 2011 season.
- The Edmonton Prospects played in the facility in 2013 and 2014 and are negotiating terms for the home game schedule for 2015. The Prospects play in the Western Major Baseball League, a collegiate summer league with teams located in Alberta and Saskatchewan, including Okotoks, Lethbridge, Medicine Hat, Regina, Moose Jaw, Yorkton, Swift Current, Melville, Weyburn, and Saskatoon. In 2014, the Prospects averaged 856 people per game, or nearly 18,000 spectators over the season, placing them in the top three of eleven teams in the league.
- The Rossdale ballpark has also hosted national and international baseball tournaments, with many events linked to the work of the volunteer-based Edmonton International Baseball Foundation.
- Parking at the ballpark is accommodated in the grass fields directly north of the ballpark across 96 Avenue, and west across Rossdale Road.

### Facility Lease and Condition

Sustainable Development's Corporate Properties Branch manages the lease for the Rossdale ballpark. The current lease is with the Oilers Entertainment Group which has

been using the building for its customer sales and service (ticketing) operations since the Edmonton Capitals became inactive. The long-term status of the lease is potentially pending resolution of the long-term plans for the Rosssdale ballpark.

- The Oilers Entertainment Group sub-leases the use of the baseball park to the Edmonton Prospects for their home games. The owner of the Edmonton Prospects is discussing use of the ballpark for the 2015 season with the Oilers Entertainment Group. City of Edmonton staff have been involved.
- Special events sponsored by the City of Edmonton, the Oilers Entertainment Group, or other community and business groups have also been accommodated at the facility. These events are scheduled and operated within the parameters of the City's lease agreement with the Oilers Entertainment Group.
- A facility condition assessment report was completed in 2013 by the Project Management and Maintenance Services Branch to assess lifecycle planning and building condition. An investment of \$1.3 million will be required over the next ten years which is within the normal range for a building of this type and age.

### Report on the State of Baseball in Edmonton

- The State of Baseball Report, provided as Attachment 1, was contracted to RC Strategies to assess the current state of professional and high-level amateur baseball in Edmonton. The assessment involved the following research elements:
  - Document Review - a review of existing strategic plans and initiatives that guide how the City delivers and makes decisions regarding recreation and sport opportunities, infrastructure and partnerships. The review also considered related sport plans and policies from other stakeholders such as the Edmonton Sport Council and Baseball Canada.
  - Trends and Issues in Baseball - a review of trends in baseball, including participation rates, programming, and facilities.
  - Baseball in the Edmonton Context - a chronological overview of baseball in Edmonton.
  - Baseball in Western Canada - a review of expected developments in the western Canada marketplace.
  - Comparative Analysis - an analysis of western Canadian municipalities that host baseball.
  - Stakeholder Interviews - 24 in-person or phone interviews with local baseball stakeholders, officials, and league and franchise operators in western North America. These interviews helped determine current and future intentions, required and available markets, expected ticket sales/gate admissions, and general perspectives about baseball now and in the future.
- As outlined in the State of Baseball Report, Edmonton has a strong baseball history and culture which was reflected through consultation with local baseball and sport stakeholders. The value of fostering baseball culture and preserving key infrastructure (such as the Rosssdale ballpark) was prominent in the

- discussions. The stakeholder consultation and secondary research also identified both opportunities and challenges that face competitive amateur and professional baseball organizations.
- The following are key findings that have the potential to affect the future of professional and competitive amateur baseball in Edmonton.
    - Edmonton's strengths as a professional baseball market include the perception of a strong baseball culture in the city, economy, and the existence of the Rossdale ballpark.
    - The future success and prosperity of professional and competitive amateur baseball in Edmonton will require strong leadership by a number of stakeholders, including the City of Edmonton.
    - Competitive amateur and collegiate baseball in Western Canada is considered important to the future development of the sport, and is currently in a state of evolution.
    - Stakeholder engagement revealed that there remains a strong desire for the return of Major League Baseball affiliated Triple-A baseball to Edmonton:
      - It was strongly suggested by many stakeholders that Triple-A baseball should remain the goal; however, it is likely necessary to demonstrate success over a period of time with independent professional baseball.
      - While a number of stakeholders believe that Triple-A baseball is a good fit for the Edmonton market (either on a transitional or long-term basis), other contrasting opinions exist.
  - Sustainability and success of professional baseball in Edmonton is dependent on a number of key factors:
    - Stability of ownership
    - Connection to a “grassroots” baseball community
    - Market clarity regarding the “level” of baseball
  - The State of Baseball Report identifies a number of challenges facing professional baseball. These include travel and geographic / logistical concerns, weather/length of season, suitable venues that can generate revenues to sustain franchise operations (e.g. gate admissions, parking fees, sponsorships, advertising), league and ownership stability, and market clarity.
  - The report’s review of the baseball landscape in other Canadian cities provides insight into how other municipalities have faced similar challenges. The Winnipeg Goldeyes of the American Association of Independent Professional Baseball drew over 250,000 fans during the 2014 season. The team plays out of Shaw Park which opened in 1999 and is located in downtown Winnipeg near the Forks redevelopment area. The ballpark is used on a regular basis for concerts and community events. Restaurants are in close proximity and the ballpark has modern amenities (e.g. corporate suites, group function areas, and a grass overflow seating area). Shaw Park is operated by the Goldeyes which books the facility and is responsible for concerts and non-baseball events.
  - Many stakeholders considered the Rossdale ballpark to be a highly-valued asset for the city and region. The State of Baseball Report noted that the facility is

regarded by many as one of the best baseball-specific venues in Canada. The future planning and management structure for the facility needs to consider trends in baseball infrastructure and the potential to incorporate secondary activities. A number of upgrades were suggested:

- Removal of metal bleachers to reduce capacity and create new space opportunities.
- Repurposing of spaces for barbecue pits, children's play areas, and corporate functions.
- Creation of lease spaces on the exterior of the building to serve the existing community and future development.

### Next Steps

- Administration could explore developing a Business Case to determine what would need to be done to create a viable ballpark within the development plans for West Rosedale and the potentially re-purposed Rosedale Generating Station site. This analysis could include the operating model and management plan for the facility (currently the operator is on a month to month lease), physical changes to the ballpark (i.e. removal of some seats to create opportunities for other developments), and confirmation of the minimum parking requirements as part of the overall development plans for the area. This analysis could also consider the implications of removal and/or replacement of the ballpark at an alternate location.

### **Attachment**

1. The State of Baseball: Professional and High-Level Amateur, January 2015

***\*\*Please bring your copy of Attachment 1, from the January 20, 2015, Executive Committee agenda – item 6.3, which you have been asked to retain.\*\****

### **Others Reviewing this Report**

- R. G. Klassen, General Manager, Sustainable Development
- T. Burge, Acting Chief Financial Officer and Treasurer