

July 21, 2009

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Sarasota County reaches tentative agreement with Baltimore Orioles

Sarasota County officials announced today that they are prepared to take a tentative memorandum of understanding to the Sarasota County Commission with the Baltimore Orioles. If accepted by the commission, the agreement would bring the team to Ed Smith Stadium in Sarasota for spring training in 2010.

“We’ve held many productive discussions with the Orioles representatives over the past several weeks,” said Deputy County Administrator Dave Bullock, the county’s principal negotiator with the team. “We’re pleased that we’ve reached an understanding with the team that will bring them to Sarasota and preserve the long history that Sarasota has had with major league baseball.”

The County and Orioles deal is contingent upon the City of Sarasota approving an environmental indemnity clause in its interlocal agreement which will transfer Ed Smith Stadium to the county. City officials will meet at 1 p.m. on Wednesday, July 22 at Sarasota City Hall to discuss the agreement.

Attorneys for the city and county are meeting Tuesday, July 21 to finalize details of the environmental indemnity.

Terms of the deal include the following:

- 30 year agreement for Baltimore Orioles to conduct spring training in Sarasota
- Renovation/expansion of Ed Smith Stadium and major league baseball areas at Twin Lakes Park
- Continuation of many historic uses at Ed Smith Stadium
- Promotion of Sarasota County in the Baltimore Washington metro area
- A proposed Orioles and Cal Ripken Baseball youth academy at Twin Lakes Park
- Major elements of funding:
 1. Cost to renovate and expand stadium and other facilities - \$31.2 million
 2. Orioles pay all operating and maintenance costs for the term of the lease
 3. County and Orioles contribute equally to a capital maintenance and repairs fund

One of the keys to reaching the agreement was the assistance of Gov. Charlie Crist, whose office worked hard over the past week to ensure that state grant money authorized to the city to retain spring training baseball in Sarasota would be available for the Orioles' deal Bullock said.

"This agreement aligns with our economic development strategy in terms of maintaining Sarasota County as a destination that folks will want to visit, preserve jobs in the service industry and create new ones through the renovation of Ed Smith Stadium as well as gain exposure to new markets through the Orioles television network," Bullock said.

In addition, the creation of a youth baseball academy as part of the agreement with the team will bring visitors to Sarasota County.