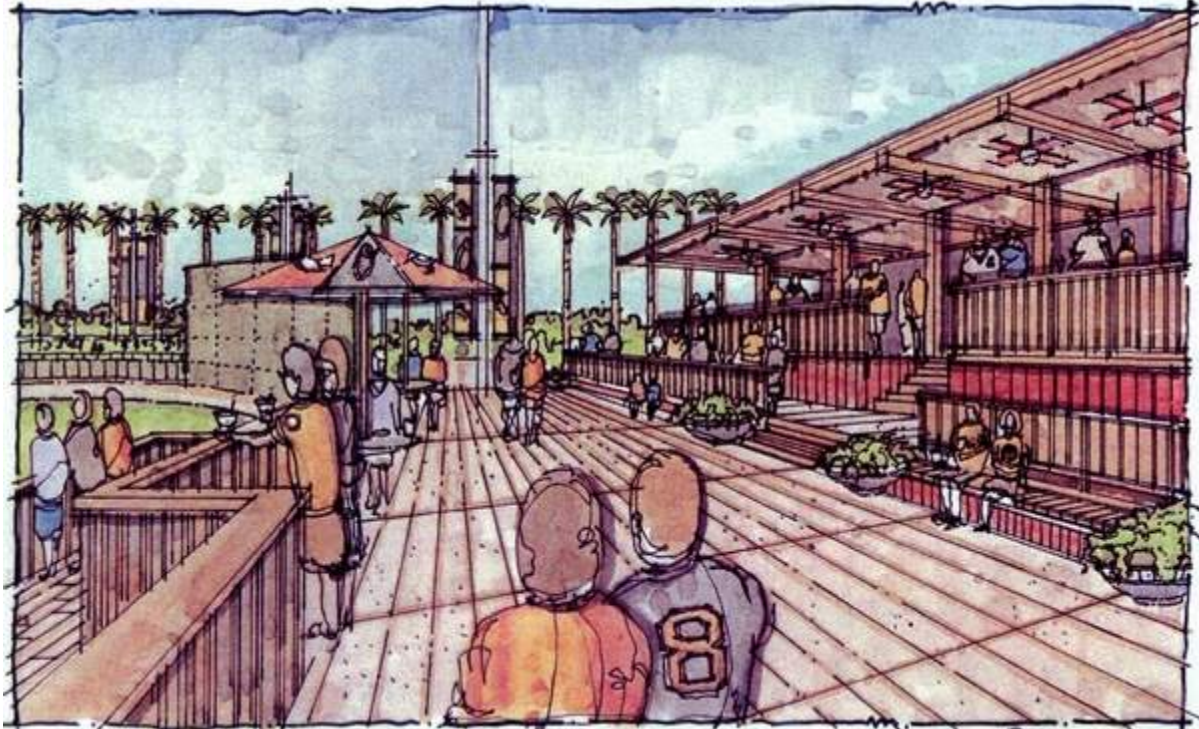


# First proposals sought for stadium rebuild



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Sarasota County wants a company to be its eyes and ears during the rebuilding of Ed Smith Stadium, shown in a concept above.

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*SARASOTA* - Hiring is about to start for the first of a series of contracts for the \$31.2 million rebuilding of Ed Smith Stadium, a project estimated to bring more than 1,000 jobs here. The county has issued the first of three requests for proposals that will be published over the next month related to the project. The winner will be the county's "owners representative" and its eyes and ears on the construction site. Bids are due Sept. 4. By early next week, the county will solicit proposals from architects with the winner designing the new stadium. That will be followed by the search for a contractor to build the ballpark.

The owners representative will likely not be local, since the county is seeking a company that has experience in the construction of a major league or spring-training ballpark. But the winning firm likely will hire local engineers and other experts since the scoring system for awarding the contract favors those promising to hire locally.

"We're going to try to do that fairly quick because we need them on board when we pick the

architect," said Deputy County Administrator Dave Bullock. The owners rep will also be tasked with helping to evaluate construction bids.

The county estimates 430 jobs will be generated during the 14-month construction project. An economic impact study claims the team's full-time presence will create another 700 full-time and part-time jobs.

The deal has its critics, who questioned the county spending \$24 million, mainly in tourism dollars, with \$7 million in state funding completing the financing. But backers point out that the project will bring much-needed jobs to the area in the midst of a recession. When county commissioners approved the deal last month, Orioles' attorney Alan Rifkin described the project as demolishing Ed Smith "down to the foundation" and completely rebuilding the stadium.

"It will look better than Ed Smith does today, you have that assurance," Rifkin said. But Bullock expects the design firm picked for the project may find some salvageable aspects of Ed Smith that can be incorporated into the design of the new stadium. On the Orioles' side, the team is focused more on planning than hiring at the moment, even though it has been contacted by potential vendors and employees, said Virginia Haley, president of the Sarasota County Convention & Visitors Bureau. "They're not ready for those kinds of calls yet," she said.

Of more immediate concern is that the move of the Orioles -- one of 15 teams that spend their springs in Florida -- from Fort Lauderdale to Sarasota creates scheduling problems. "Major League Baseball had to totally redo the spring schedule," Haley said.

Among the nuggets in the 24-page request for proposals for the owners rep job are: Although the new stadium reportedly would have 9,000 seats, the breakdown is 7,500, but not less than 6,500, fixed seats. Other seating, mainly along an outfield berm, will bring total capacity to 8,500-9,000.

Construction includes a 35,000-square-foot state-of-the-art clubhouse at Ed Smith, plus a 25,000-square-foot minor league clubhouse at Twin Lakes Park.

The owners rep is to maintain all documents related to the project, including electronic copies of everything, and to create an Internet download site where design documents are kept.

The owners rep will conduct daily site visits and provide weekly and monthly tracking of the project, including whether it is within budget, to county officials.