

The Macomb Daily (<http://www.macombdaily.com>)

Utica to break ground June 22 on new ballpark

Ground breaking for ballpark set for July 22

By Sean Delaney, For The Macomb Daily

Saturday, May 23, 2015



Utica officials recently confirmed plans to break ground next month on the city's long-awaited and much-anticipated minor league baseball park.

"That's excellent news," said Utica Mayor Jacqueline Noonan.

The public-private venture involves the developer, Rochester-based General Sports and Entertainment, as well as the Utica Downtown Development Authority, which donated the stadium property, valued at \$600,000. General Sports will lease the site for a \$1 per year.

Preliminary plans called for a local three-team league to play at the multi-million dollar stadium, which will be constructed at Moscone Drive and Auburn Road, just west of Utica's downtown.

Zain Masters, director of research and strategy for General Sports, said the goal is to attract quality ex-high school and college players -- an anticipated average age of 22 to 24 -- who fell short of landing a spot on a minor league team affiliated with a Major League Baseball club.

Officials say the stadium could also have other entertainment uses such as concerts, fireworks, soccer games, high school sports, graduation ceremonies and possibly an ice skating rink for winter use. In addition, a pedestrian bridge would link the stadium to a 500-spot parking lot across the Clinton River along with a small mixed-use retail-condominium development.

Noonan has called the project a "game-changer" for the city, with Utica attracting families, shoppers and more tax dollars, while parcels that have remained empty for many years will be put to use.

"We're excited about it," Noonan said.

According to Utica-Events.com, the groundbreaking is scheduled for June 22.

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