

Cubs to continue talks with Mesa

Club likely to remain in Arizona rather than move to Naples

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By Carrie Muskat / MLB.com

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CHICAGO -- The Cubs' Spring Training facility will apparently stay in Mesa, Ariz.

Team officials have notified the Naples, Fla., group trying to lure the Cubs to the Sunshine State that they will continue exclusive negotiations with Mesa beyond Monday's deadline. The Cubs and Mesa had established a July 12 deadline in a Memorandum of Understanding (MOU) to have financing in place for the new facility.

On Sunday, Cubs chairman Tom Ricketts told Chicago reporters in Los Angeles that he anticipated the team would continue working with Mesa. Chairman Crane Kenney echoed that sentiment Tuesday in a statement.

"The Cubs are appreciative of the efforts from the Naples team to provide the club with a first-rate Spring Training facility," Kenney said. "Naples is a world-class city and could undoubtedly provide our organization and fans an exceptional facility and experience."

"Despite the opportunity that exists in Naples, for the time being we will continue our work in Mesa to build a new Spring Training facility there," Kenney said.

Mesa recently announced a financing plan for an \$84 million complex, with the money coming from the city, not the state. Initial funds to pay for a new stadium would come from the city's enterprise fund, according to Mesa Mayor Scott Smith. Those funds would be replenished over a 15- to 20-year period from sales of Mesa's surplus land holdings in Pinal County.

"The people who negotiate for the Cubs are spending a lot of time with us," Mesa city manager Chris Brady told reporters in Arizona. "Certainly in the last three weeks, it's been very intense."

The Cubs have a board meeting scheduled for Thursday in Chicago.

Mesa voters will be asked in November to approve two measures that could affect the new Spring Training project. One is to raise the city's bed tax from 3 percent to 5 percent. Mesa voters also must agree if the city is to spend more than \$1.5 million on an entertainment or sports venue.

Naples made a strong push for the team, led by Craig Bouchard, an executive with Chicago-based Esmark, Inc.

"In our discussions with the Cubs, we asked for them to provide our group with an exclusive negotiating period," Bouchard said in a statement released Tuesday night. "The Cubs politely declined and will continue to negotiate with Mesa for the time being. We understand the importance of loyalty and wish them well. We also respect 57 years of support from Mesa. Therefore, we have respectfully withdrawn our offer."

There were three potential sites being considered in the Naples area. Bouchard said the bulk of the \$85 million project would come from private equity with help from the hotel bed tax money.

The Cubs' current facility in Mesa is outdated, and the team was looking for 120 acres of land to accommodate a 15,000-seat stadium, six practice fields and an upgraded training facility as well as space for hotels and restaurants to create a Wrigley-like village.

If the Cubs moved to Florida, they would be reversing a trend. Since 2003, five teams have relocated their spring base from Florida to Arizona, the latest being the Cincinnati Reds, who joined the Cleveland Indians in Goodyear, Ariz., this year.

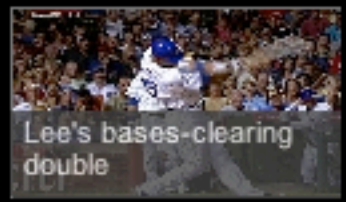
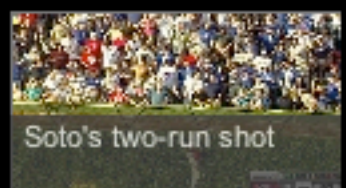
The Cubs first trained in Mesa in 1952, and have been at the current site since 1979.

Carrie Muskat is a reporter for MLB.com. This story was not subject to the approval of Major League Baseball or its clubs.



The Cubs have been at their current location in Mesa, Ariz., since 1979. (Christian Petersen/Getty Images)

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