

Arcata Ball Park overhaul in the works

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ARCATA FIELD ENTRY PLAZA

CITY OF ARCATA
ARCATA, CALIFORNIA

A consultant's notion of possible improvements to the Arcata Ball Park entrance. Courtesy MIG

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ARCATA – It's the year 2020, and you and your family are headed to a Humboldt Crabs game. You pull up to the ball park, lift your kids out of their bicycle trailers and turn your bikes over to the valet. You stroll through the leafy plaza outside the Arcata Ball Park entrance and head in.

You don't walk down a concrete ramp to the new bleachers – they're on the upraised viewing area. Underneath them are various concessions, including a childcare room. Dropping off your toddler, you head for the beer garden and have Carl pour you a few tall, frosty ones.

You're early, so you take a stroll through the refurbished Judo Hut, which serves as a Humboldt Crabs Historical Museum, and, during the season, a dining facility operated by a different local restaurant every week.

The Crabs win (again), and as you head out to F Street, you notice that the field is being prepared for tomorrow's ball park functions. There'll be a Humboldt State ceremony on the infield, which is fully wired with electricity and sound system hookups. That night, there will be a concert.

Not all of these amenities may be in place by the time the Crabs' 76th season rolls around, but it's likely that the Arcata Ball Park will be a much-improved baseball mini-stadium by then. That's because the city is embarking on a major overhaul of the place, one which began in earnest last week.

The city has hired MIG planning consultants to scope out possible improvements to the park and create initial plans. At last Wednesday's Parks & Rec Committee meeting, landscape architect Matthew Gaber took suggestions about improvements and new features for the ball park. Committeemembers had a lot of ideas.

Gaber aims to make the most of the old ball park, maximizing its potential as a destination, an integral part of downtown and, not inconsiderably, its neglected economic potential.

Present at the meeting were Carl Pellatz and Larry Zerlang of the Humboldt Crabs, who pledged the organization's support. They noted that the team only uses the ball park 60 days out of the year, and that there's untapped potential for other uses and users during the off season. "What's good for the field is good for the Crabs," Zerlang said. "Our big concern is to make sure we can take care of the fans."

Pellatz didn't bristle at any of the many improvements suggested for the park – quite the opposite. "The Crabs don't object to any other uses," he said. "Anything the city can come up with is fine."



Landscape Architect Matthew Gaber discusses the Arcata Ball Park improvement project with Crabs representatives Carl Pellatz and Larry Zerlang. KLH | Union

He and Zerlang said the Crabs have added a ticket surcharge to help fund improvements, and will support the process financially. "We're going to be here for the money part, too," Pellatz assured the group.

Committeemembers and Crabbies alike weren't shy about listing the venerable park's shortcomings. The bleachers suck, for one, probably because they're a "temporary" installation from 35 years ago. The dugouts are crude, and ball players from home and visiting teams have but one bathroom to use.

Committeemembers said the entrance is depressing and "feels like a cage." Accessibility is poor, and there's nowhere to park your bike. The Judo Hut needs an overhaul and some kind of creative reprogramming.

Ideas for both physical improvements and expanded uses – some rather fanciful – flew freely.

Among them:

- a bike valet;
- better concession areas;
- a beer garden (and festival);
- child care;
- a restaurant in the Judo Hut – or a Crabs museum and office;
- better utilization of the grassy areas off left and right fields;
- added entrances;
- movies and plays in the park;
- folding bleachers on F Street to expand capacity;

- food trucks
- more use by Humboldt State and other community institutions, and more.

Zerlang suggested “luxury boxes” for Crabs fans, and said that “a Jumbotron would be nice,” earning some laughs. But, said Pellatz, “Our number one priority is fixing the bleachers, and fixing them yesterday.” The new bleachers are designed to prevent fans from dropping their litter underneath.

The city agrees, since better bleachers could improve attendance, which in turn creates the additional revenue needed for subsequent upgrades. That’s why a phased implementation process is planned.

The bleachers and entrance get redone first, because they’ll have to be done together. Next, the side-field play, special event areas and dugouts, and finally, the snack bars and finishing up the entrance.

But before that, Gaber and MIG have a lot more work to do. There will be a study of the ball park’s current infrastructure and discussions with stakeholders, developing programming ideas and eventually, a return to the Parks and Rec Committee with some conceptual plans. Once those are critiqued, Gaber will develop rough designs and bring them back yet again for more scoping. This process will continue into next year.

“It’s a very complex puzzle to weave all together,” Gaber said, plainly relishing the challenge.