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## Sports complex plan to get national boost

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Plans for a new Springfield athletic complex received a boost recently when a letter of intent was signed between organizers of the facility and an as-yet-unidentified national sports group.

Mike Thiessen, who has been coordinating efforts to build the Springfield Training and Athletic Recreation Center, said the group is "one of the premier youth and tournament organizations in the country."

He said it was premature to divulge the name before the partnership is formalized, but an announcement will be made in the near future.

The baseball and softball diamonds, soccer fields and 3,000-seat baseball stadium are proposed for 123 acres owned by Calvary Temple near Interstate 72 and Second Street. Both the Springfield Sliders and University of Illinois Springfield baseball teams have expressed preliminary interest in playing at the complex.

Sliders owner Jesse Bolder said the team is happy with its current home at Robin Roberts Stadium, but would have to look seriously at moving if the STAR stadium becomes reality.

Calvary Temple, 1730 W. Jefferson St., has agreed to donate the land as a way to provide more recreational activities for young people. The church plans to build a new church and school on property it owns just east of Second Street.

Some infrastructure on the property designated for the sports complex has already been installed. It was to be the site of a sports project named Xanadu that fell apart in the late 1990s. But organizers are confident the current effort will succeed.

"We are still going forward. We still do intend to develop our property out there," said Dan Shryock, Calvary's director of worship arts. "We still believe we can do something very positive for the community with the former Xanadu property. There's so much potential there."

Backers of the sports complex hope construction will begin in the spring.

Over a year ago, Calvary hired Thiessen of The Madison Group, a Chicago-area company that specializes in developing sports complexes and baseball stadiums. That includes the recently named Corn Crib stadium in Bloomington where the Frontier League CornBelters baseball team will begin play next spring.

Thiessen has been lining up local support and funding for the STAR complex, which could cost as much as \$60 million. Efforts to have the city of Springfield or Springfield Park District assume ownership of the land and provide maintenance did not materialize.

"I think people that we tried to give the land to, such as the park district, they weren't able to do that. They already had a lot going on, and we understand that," Shryock said. "That doesn't mean there aren't other ways to move forward. That's what we're pursuing."

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