



Image provided by Allan Benavides

What's the Rush?

A series of MLB requirements and a tighter schedule are big drivers for the Ems' call for a new stadium.

In 2020, the Emeralds were invited to become a High-A affiliate of the San Francisco Giants. Since then, the number of games in their season almost doubled to 132 from late April to early August. The Emeralds rescheduled six home games last summer to out-of-town stadiums because PK Park was hosting the Ducks super regional games.

MLB regulations require stadiums to have locker rooms for home and away teams, and ones that accommodate women athletes, plus an additional locker room for coaches. PK Park's single locker room will no longer cut it.

When the Ducks baseball team is playing in their stadium, the Emeralds get pushed out. "For a third of our season, our team isn't in a locker room," Benavides says. "For a third of the season, the visiting team is in trailers."

The Ems Are Pitching a Stadium

THE MINOR LEAGUE BASEBALL TEAM SEEKS MILLIONS IN PUBLIC MONEY TO CONSTRUCT A NEW BASEBALL STADIUM AT THE LANE EVENTS CENTER. EUGENE'S PORTION IS ON THE BALLOT IN MAY.

By Bentley Freeman

The Eugene Emeralds, the city's minor league baseball team for the past 70 years, says it's going to leave town if it doesn't secure funding for a new stadium by June 1.

And the team wants taxpayers — in Eugene, Lane County and across Oregon — to pick up virtually all of the \$90.5 million cost.

In May, Eugene voters will decide if they will tax themselves to give the team what it wants, or if the Ems' ultimatum is too expensive for the promised rewards of keeping the team here.

The Ems currently play in the University of Oregon's PK Park, their home field since 2010, after leaving historic Civic Stadium, where they had played since 1969. But the team is being squeezed out of PK Park, both because

of the team's busier schedule and requirements from Major League Baseball (the Ems are an affiliate of the San Francisco Giants) that call for stadiums to have more features than PK Park now offers.

Since 2021, the Ems have put on a major PR campaign for a new stadium, telling their fans and city officials that the team needs an answer about a new stadium by June 1, or they need to start looking for a new home city.

Eugene Ems General Manager Allan Benavides desperately wants to keep the Emeralds in Eugene. "The Ems have been in Eugene longer than the Giants in San Francisco," he says. "Our goal is to stay here."

The proposal for the 4,500-seat multi-use stadium is complicated and is still missing key details. We've offered answers to some of the basic questions that face the Ems, local elected officials, and voters.

Who's Paying For It?

The plan cobbles together funding from a wide range of public sources — while only a small part of the investment comes from the Ems and their Chicago-based owner, Elmore Sports Group.

The stadium will be owned by the county on the current site of the Lane Events Center, aka the Fairgrounds. The Fairgrounds' Livestock Arena will be razed to make room for it.

Final construction costs may very well exceed the \$100 million projection made in March 2023. Lane County Operations Director Lorren Blythe says the \$90.5 million estimate may be out of date. The "reliability of the estimate is unknown due to the amount of time that has passed since the estimate was initially provided," Blythe said in a March 12 meeting.

So what accounts for the cost?

The land itself, to start with. Blythe says the county land represents \$9 million of the cost. And that's the first investment the public will make — donating the land.

State lawmakers have approved \$15 million. State Sen. James Manning, a Eugene Democrat, has been a major booster and says it's important for local officials to know that the state has what he calls "skin in the game." The state money will be delivered only if local officials and Eugene voters approve the plan.

"This is a once in a generation project," Manning says.

The Ems secured \$1.5 million from the Federal Immediate Occupancy program in exchange for the stadium's use as an emergency shelter when needed. (The stadium will keep emergency supplies and shelters on hand for use in the stadium at a moment's notice.) The Ems' Bena-

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