

Major facelift planned for Callaway Stadium

by By Joel Martin Senior writer

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This architect's drawing by Smith Design Group in LaGrange shows the west stands at Callaway Stadium with proposed renovations, including a press box. When the project is complete, this will be the home side of the 50-year-old stadium.

Callaway Stadium will get a major overhaul to make it worthy of hosting an NCAA championship football game within a few years.

The Callaway Foundation, which built the stadium in 1959, will provide \$2.6 million to finance the first two phases of renovations, plus half of the estimated \$3 million to \$4 million cost of the third and final phase. LaGrange College, the school board and local governments would have to come up with the other half.

Bids will be opened May 28 for phase one, which is expected to be accomplished before football season starts. The work includes a new concession stand and restrooms, and renovations that will enclose the press box, and add heating and air-conditioning, new electrical wiring and repainting.

Bids will go out in October for phase two work, which would be completed before football season in 2010. It will include a new locker room, training room and officials' suite on the visitors side, and converting the home side's two locker rooms into one large locker room.

Callaway Foundation President Speer Burdette called the current locker rooms "woeful and in dire need of improvement. Most people don't see them, so they're not aware of it."

The entire facade of the stadium will be spruced up as well.

Phase three work calls for about 1,200 new seats, raising the stadium's capacity to about 7,200, as well as a new two-story press box on the visitors side with an observation level for filming and entertaining VIPs. Aisles will be widened and handrails added, and accommodations will be better for the handicapped.

The two entranceways will be enhanced, wrought iron fencing added along Dallis Street and other new fencing around the stadium. Two restrooms will be added at the far end zone.

The home and visitor sides will be reversed so the home side gets the better press box and locker room, plus more parking space, and the sun will be shining in the visitors' eyes rather than the home crowd's.

"We want to treat them nice when they come in, but we don't want them to have an advantage," Assistant County Manager Tod Tentler told county commissioners while unveiling the plans at Tuesday's commission meeting.

LaGrange College and the three high schools play their home football games at the artificial-turfed stadium, which also gets a workout from other football and soccer teams, and band and football camps. It served as the venue for opening and closing ceremonies of the Special Olympics and opening ceremonies for the Dixie Youth Baseball World Series.

Tentler said the renovation project, which he called "a really, really nice face lift," will give LaGrange a shot at hosting the Amos Alonzo Stagg Bowl that determines the NCAA Division III football champion.

Tuskegee Institute and Fort Valley State used to play a football game each year at Callaway Stadium and perhaps they'll resume that tradition because of the renovations, Commissioner Richard English said.

"It's very exciting," added Commission Chairman Ricky Wolfe.

Burdette said there's no timetable for phase three, but "obviously we'd like to get it done as soon as possible."

"Perhaps it's long overdue, but it's good that it's being addressed at this time," he said. "... It's great for this community" because so many people have played or cheered at the stadium or just watched a game.

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