

Location could help Monroe complex succeed

By Chelsey Levingston

Staff Writer

MONROE — A private developer's plan to build a new sports complex in Monroe is joining a crowded field, but the one thing in its favor is a location that is an already-established entertainment destination.

The developer, Indianapolis-based Creative Entertainment Concepts LLC, plans to build a multi-venue facility with a two-sheet ice rink, arcade, restaurants, indoor sports courts and more in Monroe in Warren County.

The Monroe complex joins several other proposals for sports centers in the region, including an 87-acre outdoor complex for field sports in nearby Turtlecreek Twp. and an indoor sports facility, outdoor baseball stadium and aquatic center in Hamilton. Last year, 22 natural grass fields opened at West Chester Twp.'s Voice of America Park.

Still early in development, David Beauregard, president and owner of Creative Entertainment Concepts, said he's working to put together an investment group to buy the Monroe property for the sports and entertainment complex, and fund the redevelopment of the more than 180,000-square-foot vacant industrial building. The project, roughly estimated to cost \$20 million, was first revealed Jan. 15.

Beauregard said he's showing the property, the former West Chester Protective Gear building on Corridor Park Drive, to potential tenants.

"In a lot of sporting venues, you might have a concession stand and that's all there is for the families between skating events, hockey games," Beauregard said.

"Rather than having to leave the premise to go do something or to eat, or to relax, they can do all that right there at the site," he said. "We think that combination is what will make us successful."

City officials say the proposed site builds on an already-established entertainment destination at the intersection of Interstate 75 and Ohio 63, and an area where the city wants to attract more investment.

“Our goal for the interchange is to create an environment where families and visitors want to come because there is something for everyone,” said Jennifer Patterson, assistant to the Monroe city manager.

Monroe approached Creative Entertainment Concepts after learning about the company’s plans to develop an entertainment center in Xenia, Patterson said.

“We felt that we had similar underutilized buildings that could be repurposed as entertainment facilities,” Patterson said.

Any deals have yet to be reached. At this point, Beauregard said the likelihood of the project being built and opened is 80 percent.

“Everything in today’s world in development depends on the funding of the project,” Beauregard said.

Creative Entertainment Concepts has a consulting agreement with the local city government and was asked to evaluate the need for an entertainment center.

If the sports and entertainment center is built in Monroe, it would be neighbors with other regional attractions such as Miami Valley Gaming, Traders World, Treasure Aisles Flea Market and Cincinnati Premium Outlets.

“I think what is one of the selling factors is it sits in the middle — within a 20 mile radius — of 2.1 million people,” said Martin Russell, economic development director for Warren County.

Additionally, Monroe City Council approved for staff to apply to the Ohio Division of Liquor Control, seeking the designation of a Community Entertainment District for the Ohio 63 area. If approved, it would allow for up to 15 new permits to be issued for sales of beer, wine and spirituous liquor.

Meanwhile, the Warren County Convention & Visitors Bureau is raising money to build a \$9.5 million sports complex along Ohio 741 in Turtlecreek Twp. The bureau’s plans call for an outdoor sports center consisting of 20-fields spread over approximately 87 acres of land.

Nonprofit Otterbein Senior Lifestyle Choices has agreed to donate the land, said Ben Huffman, director of sports marketing for the visitors bureau.

If both sports centers are built in Monroe and Turtlecreek Twp., the facilities will complement and not copy each other, Huffman said. The Monroe proposal is mainly an indoor site with a prime operating season during the winter months. The Turtlecreek Twp. site's key operating season will be from March 1 to Nov. 1, he said.

The planned Monroe center features an ice rink as one component of a larger family entertainment attraction, which could give visitors of the future Turtlecreek Twp. fields something to do in between games, he said.

"What we've noticed, and it's a national trend, is that folks are canceling their family vacations to go to these sporting tournaments with their kids," Huffman said.

Warren County will host almost 100 sporting events this year, including soccer and baseball tournaments, the NCAA Division III tennis championships and the annual professional tennis tournament Western & Southern Open.

Butler and Warren counties are ideally located to attract sports-related tourism, Huffman said.

"The economic impact that comes out of that is all the people who travel to the area from out of town, stay at our hotels, eat at our restaurants and shop while they're here," he said. "A lot of folks can get here by car and that helps our selling point."

Other regional proposals for sporting centers include one in Hamilton. The owners of the former Champion Paper property on North B Street are studying the feasibility of building an indoor sports facility, outdoor baseball stadium and aquatic center.

MetroParks of Butler County opened last year the first phase of the Voice of America Park Athletic Complex featuring 22 natural grass fields in West Chester Twp.

In 2012, a 600-acre, \$110 million entertainment district was proposed in West Carrollton. The development, called Miami Bend, was originally envisioned as a 4,000-seat arena-event center and a 3,000-seat soccer arena.

The project is moving forward, but plans have changed to a 5,200-seat event center and no soccer arena at this time, said Tom Ross, economic development director for West Carrollton. Last year, the city received state approval for a Community Entertainment District for the area and a market study evaluating the impact of the event center was completed, Ross said.

Next steps are to find a private developer to work with and raise the funds to build, he said.

“What we’ve proposed is a multi-purpose event center so it wouldn’t be specifically geared for hockey but it could be a use there,” he said. “I think like any project now of this size, the challenge is always going to be funding.”