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# Baseball plan vastly better; Shifts more risk to Yankees, better ensures longevity

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The worst problem among many with Lackawanna County's original deal to sell its professional baseball franchise was that it had no reliable mechanism to ensure that the franchise would remain here.

Former Lackawanna County Commissioner Robert C. Cordaro gave away the store in 2006 in the deal that affiliated the county's International League franchise with the New York Yankees.

SWB Yankees LLC, a consortium of the New York Yankees and Mandalay Baseball Properties, could have bought the franchise at a bargain-basement price of \$13 million. And, because the deal did not include any meaningful impediments to relocating the franchise, that prospect loomed.

Monday, Lackawanna County majority Commissioners Corey O'Brien and Michael Washo unveiled a memorandum of agreement with SWB Yankees - not yet a binding contract - that is exponentially superior to the original. It not only makes more likely the long-term retention of the franchise, but provides for a \$40 million reconstruction of PNC Field that will create a state-of-the-art stadium for a fraction of the cost of new construction, and without any local tax impact.

### SWB Yankees plays ball

The changes validate SWB Yankees' assertions about its long-term intent to stay here. Under the new agreement, the Yankees made significant concessions relative to the original deal, assuming greater cost and more responsibility for the long-term viability of the franchise.

High-level professional baseball has become an important part of the life and character of Northeast Pennsylvania since it returned here in 1989.

The stadium has fulfilled its promise of serving as the foundation of other investment, as the hundreds of millions of dollars in new development around it now attest.

Because Northeast Pennsylvania is one of the smallest markets at the second-highest level of professional baseball, public ownership is the only rock-bottom guarantee that the franchise will remain here.

But a sale was rendered inevitable not only by Mr. Cordaro's wayward deal, but by economic factors that convinced the current commissioners that the county could not afford to finance a new or upgraded stadium while retaining ownership of the franchise. Their objective became a comprehensive deal that produced the new owner's more assured long-term commitment while covering the stadium costs.

Thanks to SWB Yankees' willingness to back its assurances of a long-term commitment with concessions to that effect, and a huge assist by Gov. Ed Rendell's commitment of \$20 million in state funding, just such a comprehensive resolution now is doable.

Details of the financial and stadium plans are reported today in The Times-Tribune by David Singleton. Architects' conceptual renderings and an animated video of the new stadium design are available on [www.thetimes-tribune.com](http://www.thetimes-tribune.com).

### Litigation uncertain

The original deal was so contrary to the public interest, and so suspect in terms of its concept and execution, that it might well have been subject to litigation.

For example, SWB Yankees unilaterally extended the franchise's player development agreement with the New York Yankees without approval by the stadium authority.

But the commissioners' view was that even a winning lawsuit could result in a Pyrrhic victory - continued ownership of the franchise, but without the means to upgrade PNC Field.

The new deal substantially reduces the risk of a franchise relocation while providing for an essentially new stadium, without uncertain litigation or the commitment of local general tax revenue. And, although the commissioners would not discuss pending litigation, they plan to hold in reserve half of the sale proceeds, \$7.3 million, as Luzerne County pursues its claim in federal court that it is owed that amount under the deal by which it participated in the original franchise purchase.

On balance, the new deal is far more in the public interest than its predecessor and, potentially, the catalyst for a successful new era of high-level professional baseball.

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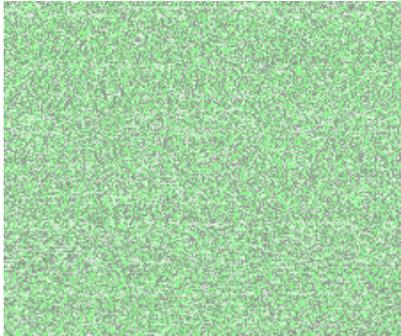
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