

J. Fred Johnson Stadium makeover set for completion by football season

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Renovations are under way at J. Fred Johnson Stadium, and the project is on track to be completed by the first football game of the 2014 season.

Work is currently being done on the concrete foundation. The old press box has already been removed and the construction crews are working on accessibility upgrades to the stadium.

"We're adding handrails to the stairs," said David Mason, construction project manager for the city of Kingsport. "We're working on a handicap ramp."

Other work that has already taken place includes underground utility work, which is ongoing and shortening existing bleacher seats to widen the access stairways. The installation of the helical piles, or foundation supports, is scheduled to start this month.



Mason said the current work is focusing primarily on accessibility upgrades to the stadium. After the concrete foundation is finished, elevated grandstands will be added behind the existing grandstands.

The stadium project calls for the addition of 1,500 seats to the grandstand, a new two-story press box, new restrooms and areas for concessions, improved handicapped accessibility, wider aisles with handrails, an elevator and covered concourses.

The groundbreaking on the project took place in mid-December, but work started a few weeks before that. Renovations to the 70-year-old stadium had been talked about for a while, but nothing came to pass until 2013.

The Kingsport Board of Mayor and Aldermen discussed the project for a full year before giving the go-ahead to receive bids. Once the BMA started receiving bids, however, the board decided, due to the costs of the original project, to scale back the renovations. The BMA wanted to keep the project at about \$4 million, but the first wave of bids came in at the \$5 million range.

So members of the BMA began looking at cost-saving measures.

They found a different way to do the foundation that would save money. They also took out some steel, removed one of the stair towers and changed the handrails.

Two other changes made to save some money included the 1,200-square-foot dressing room being a bid alternate and extending the contract length to Aug. 1, 2014.

The reason the contract length was extended was to save money so the construction company did not have to rush to finish the job.

Initially, those pushing the project had wanted it completed before the fall football season, or at least partially completed by then, with the remaining work done after football season was over.

The BMA appropriated \$4.59 million toward the stadium project in early October 2013. The money came from a \$28.9 million bond issuance. , with the proceeds going to fund the city's 2014 capital improvement plan.

The bid was awarded to **GoinsRashCain**. The contract is for a guaranteed maximum price of \$4.59 million, though the original maximum price was \$4.4 million.

Another project taking place at J. Fred Johnson Stadium focuses on the lighting. The project is well under way. The \$560,000 lighting project calls for the replacement of the existing light poles around the stadium with new ones.

Even though the 1,200-square-foot dressing room had been removed from the city's portion of the project, a citizens' group hopes to come up with the money to fund the building of the new dressing room.

Local developer Danny Karst and Kingsport attorney Todd East, the public faces of the group, agreed to lead the group in finding funds for the dressing room. The two men have said, if the money is raised, their equipment would help build the field house.

Mason said renovations are running smoothly.

"We lost a little bit of time with the weather," he said. "We are making up for it by working extra hours."

He said right now there are about 20 people working on the site, whether they are helping to pour the concrete or running back and forth in trucks. The number of workers will vary depending on the work.

The project should be completed by August of this year.