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## Amarillo's development partner no stranger to stadiums

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The company with the contract to research the possibility of drawing a AA baseball team to a new stadium downtown is no stranger to looking at the merits of large community venues.

Brailsford & Dunlavey has a list of 64 recent accounts. The list is part of its application to work for Amarillo Local Government Corp. and includes facilities for universities, public schools and sports teams.

“Our portfolio breaks down to roughly 35 percent higher education, 35 percent K-12 and the other 30 percent community or professional sports venues,” said Chris Dunlavey, president of Brailsford & Dunlavey and an architect.

Last week, the LGC finalized a \$57,000 contract with the company to complete several preliminary studies looking at whether a AA baseball team affiliated with a Major League Baseball club might thrive here. The study should be completed in March.

City staff looked at proposals from the firm as well as Conventions Sports & Leisure, which did a 2010 baseball feasibility study for Downtown Amarillo Inc., and Johnson Consulting. Staff presented all three proposals briefly to LGC board members with the recommendation to go with B&D based on its experience, references and contacts with the owners of the San Antonio Missions AA team. The company is also studying the possible addition of a AAA stadium in that city.

David Elmore, D.G. Elmore Jr. and Doug Elmore head the Elmore Sports Group that owns the Missions, the AAA Colorado Springs (Colo.) Sky Sox and other sport teams.

B&D's stated guiding principles include helping communities find solutions of an appropriate size for a market.

“Our purpose is to empower communities to make wise investments to advance their own goals,” Dunlavey said.

B&D is a 23-year-old business with more than 160 venue projects completed. It has about 125 employees across the country in 10 offices, including its headquarters in Washington, D.C.

B&D's past projects show it doing everything from early feasibility studies to finding financing, negotiating to bring a team to a city or overseeing construction of public venues.

An online Globe-News search of the firm did not turn up the sorts of things that could mar a business' reputation, like lawsuits and bankruptcies.

That stands in contrast to the situation the city of Amarillo faced with Wallace Bajjali Development Partners, the company once hired as the master developer for the downtown catalyst projects before the firm collapsed.

As Wallace Bajjali dissolved, it left its work in Amarillo unfinished and abandoned a redevelopment project in Joplin, Mo., a city looking to rebuild after a massive 2011 tornado.

Amarillo did not pay Wallace Bajjali in advance for services; when the city chose to hire the firm, it put into place a protective contract. Joplin paid \$1.5 million for services not rendered, according to the Missouri state auditor.

Downtown Amarillo Inc. and an outside law firm vetted Wallace Bajjali, a process that cost the city \$45,000.

This time, city did not hire an outside firm to investigate Brailsford & Dunlavey. Deputy City Manager Bob Cowell, who was tasked with researching the firm's credentials, said he'd talked to officials in Columbia, S.C., and Howard Hughes Corp. in Nevada, which have used the firm's services.

"Both those groups were very complimentary of the firm," Cowell said.

Representatives of B&D prefer not to refer to their work as feasibility studies.

"We call our work planning to answer not just the yes-or-no question, but how — something that can be acted on," said Jason Thompson, a B&D vice president.

Accolades for the company in their application packet come from clients ranging from the District of Columbia Sports & Entertainment Commission for its work on the Major League Baseball Nationals Ballpark to the city of Virginia Beach, Va., for an independent league baseball and youth tournament facility.

Macon-Bibb County in Georgia hired B&D in October to complete a feasibility study on a new minor league baseball stadium, and county leaders said the process has gone well.

"It's been very positive so far," said Macon Mayor Robert Reichert. "The initial report was detailed, understandable and seemed well-founded. We're waiting for the final report."

Source: Brailsford & Dunlavey's website, [www.programmanagers.com](http://www.programmanagers.com)

#### **Ballpark experience**

Brailsford & Dunlavey lists 68 past clients for ballpark studies of various sorts, from financial to construction. Here is a sampling:

- "In 2014, the Howard Hughes Corporation selected B&D to serve as owner's representative to develop a new AAA ballpark for the Las Vegas 51s in Summerlin, Nev. In this capacity, we are responsible for market analyses, programming and budgeting through the engagement of public partners, negotiating project agreements, identifying funding strategies, design management, and construction oversight ... The project is currently anticipated to open in early spring 2018."
- "The City of Hartford, Connecticut selected B&D in the fall of 2013 ... We studied the market for a new ballpark through an analysis of demographic data and business activity within a 45-minute drive-time radius of the ballpark site, while also surveying current trends in minor league ballpark design to define a facility program ... The \$56 million ballpark broke ground in 2015 and is expected to open in 2016."
- "B&D served as the sports facility consultant to the Ohio Cultural Facilities Commission. In this role, we provided consulting on the market and financial feasibility, economic impact potential, design and construction of almost every major league and minor league professional sports facility developed in Ohio beginning in 1996. In 2007, we were retained to review Franklin County's application for state funding for the Huntington Park Minor League Ballpark Project ... The 10,000-seat, \$56 million Huntington Park opened in 2009."

#### **Downtown update**

There are four major building projects started or pending downtown — a convention hotel, parking garage, the events venue/ballpark and the headquarters for Southwestern Public Service, an Xcel Energy company.

#### **EMBASSY SUITES CONVENTION HOTEL**

Crews are laying the base for the six-story building, including pouring concrete piers underground.

"We're trying to get the foundation in, and we're doing well," said Project Manager KJ Jones, who works for developer NewcrestImage. "It is our hope to by the month of February have the slab poured."

**Next step:** "Then we go up with the steel," Jones said.

#### **DOWNTOWN PARKING GARAGE**

The city is collecting bids from companies interested in building the four-story garage. Bid packages were finalized last week, Deputy City Manager Bob Cowell said.

City Facilities Director Jerry Danforth said companies have picked up 27 bid packages, and he anticipates that to increase.

**Next step:** The city will open the bids Feb. 4, spend about two weeks evaluating them for the most responsive bid and award the contract on Feb. 17.

#### **MULTIPURPOSE EVENT VENUE**

Amarillo Local Government Corp. has hired consulting company Brailsford & Dunlavey to look at whether a team affiliated with a Major League Baseball franchise might thrive in Amarillo. The study will likely be completed in March.

LGC's goal is to have the stadium ready for play by spring 2018. Amarillo City Council told the LGC to proceed on a stadium costing about \$32 million after the Nov. 3 referendum showed voters favored that. A stadium for an MLB-affiliated minor league team could cost more, and the study should show what that cost might be — possibly closer to \$50 million.

**Next step:** City leaders will decide how to finance the structure based on how it will be used, but hotel/motel occupancy tax money is still available.

#### **XCEL HEADQUARTERS**

Construction will move into a new phase this month with the arrival of steel to construct the four-story office tower that will be on top of the three-story parking garage. So far, workers have focused on building the part of the parking garage that will be under the tower.

**Next step:** "Project teams at Xcel Energy will spend the next several weeks reviewing floor plans and determining final details such as the number of conference rooms, break rooms, restrooms and other common spaces," said Xcel spokesman Wes Reeves. More than 300 Xcel employees will relocate to the building from the company's offices in Chase Tower.