

Fan club: Ticket revenue could pay for renovation

By Wayne Peal
staff writer

They've gotten good press. They have solid backing. They even have a detailed plan for saving Tiger Stadium.

But the Tiger Stadium Fan Club hasn't been able to get the ear of Tiger management.

That, they admit, is frustrating. "It's difficult for us to say what the issue is," said fan club founder Frank Rashid. "Because they've been silent, we often find ourselves speaking for the Tigers, trying to read their minds, and we really shouldn't be in that position."

Best known for stadium "bug-ins," the fan club is hardly a lightweight organization.

Club legal representatives, including Charles Moon of Dickman, Wright, Moon, Van Dusen & Free-

man, are drawn from some of the area's most prestigious law firms.

ITS NEWSLETTER, "Unobstructed Views" is a professional-looking, four-page mailer, complete with in-depth articles and columns about stadium issues.

Its plan, dubbed the Cochrane Plan, is contained in an attractive 53-page booklet, complete with architectural diagrams and a brief stadium history.

Created "as a labor of love" by Royal Oak architect John Lee Davis, the Cochrane Plan, like other fan club activities, is strictly a volunteer effort.

And if Wayne County Executive Edward McNamara's plan is the leading contender, the Cochrane Plan is the sentimental favorite.

Unlike the McNamara plan, which includes public financing, the Co-

chrane Plan is designed to be self-sufficient.

It could pay for itself through ticket revenue, fan club members said.

The secret — the plan is less extensive than the Birkerts-O'Neal renovation plan backed by McNamara. It would cost \$26.1 million. Fan Club members said, compared with an estimated \$70-95 million for Birkerts-O'Neal.

While that plan requires construction of a new outside wall and abutment support for a new upper deck, the Cochrane Plan involves renovation of existing stadium features. Office, club house, concession and lavatory space would increase dramatically.

Seventy-three luxury boxes would be added in the auxiliary press box atop the stadium.

The auxiliary press box, added for the 1940 World Series, has long stood vacant.

Skeptics, including deputy county executive Mike Duggan, scoff that the plan isn't practical.

"IT'S TOO far from the field," Duggan said. "Plus, the site lines aren't good."

Fan club members say that isn't true.

"These seats are two feet closer than the second level luxury suites at the Palace," said attorney William Dow of Birmingham, a fan club member.

It's McNamara's plan that is impractical, fan club members said.

"What they're talking about is an

enterprise zone around the stadium, but with large scale parking areas and it's just not compatible," said Davis. "Ask yourself, do you see an enterprise zone around the (Auburn Hills) Palace or (Pontiac) Silverdome?"

Rather than putting their faith in the county executive, club members have rallied behind a plan initially proposed by state Sen. John Kelly, D-Detroit.

That plan would limit public financing to \$76 million and prohibit public bonds for a baseball stadium larger than 25,000 seats — virtually assuring bonds couldn't be used to


build a replacement stadium. Supporters, including state Rep. Gerald Law, R-Plymouth, say the plan is both generous and workable.

McNamara has blasted it as destructive to efforts to keep the Tigers downtown.

But Cochrane and Kelly plans aside, fan club members worry whether outside revenue is really the underlying issue.

The Auburn Hills Palace, with its self-contained parking and concession revenue — not to mention bustling turnstiles for Detroit Pistons basketball games — is the Tigers' new model, fan club members said.

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