

## **Transportation/HUD Appropriations, Fiscal Year 2008**

**Amendment XXXX: Strikes \$500,000 in funding for construction of a new baseball stadium in Billings, Montana.**

### Background

The Transportation-HUD appropriations bill funds the Department of Housing and Urban Development, whose core mission is to combat homelessness, increase homeownership, and provide access to affordable housing.<sup>1</sup> Housing and Urban Development, as its name suggests, also cites urban development as one of its responsibilities.

Unfortunately, Congress has greatly abused this ambiguous term and under the guise of “economic development”, has used this function of HUD to fund thousands of projects that are neither for Housing or Urban Development.

### Current Community and Economic Development policies are flawed

The Community Development Block Grant (CDBG) program, where Economic Development Initiatives funding derives from, was established in 1974 to provide flexible annual assistance to States and local governments to fund a wide range of community and economic development activities that principally benefit low- to moderate-income persons, eliminate slums and blight, and address urgent needs.<sup>2</sup>

The Office of Management & Budget (OMB) recently conducted a review of the CDBG and determined the current program is not well-targeted and the results of its assistance have not been adequately demonstrated or reported. This review found that many of these programs had unclear objectives, did not coordinate effectively, were

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<sup>1</sup> <http://www.hud.gov/library/bookshelf12/hudmission.cfm>

<sup>2</sup> <http://www.whitehouse.gov/omb/budget/fy2008/pdf/savings.pdf>

duplicative, and were unable to demonstrate measurable and sustained economic gains for communities.<sup>3</sup>

A HUD and Office of Management and Budget analysis also found that CDBG is ineffective and that its major problems include the lack of a clear purpose and annual and long-term outcome measures; weak targeting of funds to areas of greatest need; and the inability to produce transparent information on results.<sup>4</sup> The Administration recommends consolidating 17 Federal economic and community development programs within HUD and the Economic Development Administration.<sup>5</sup>

In June of 2006, for a Federal Financial Management oversight hearing on CDBG, the subcommittee discovered the following:

- Since CDBG formulas have not been updated since the late 1970's, many wealthy communities receive 3-4 times more CDBG funds per capita than many poor communities.

- As one example of unfair targeting, Temple, TX has an average \$20,000 per capita income and receives \$15 per capita in CDBG funds. Meanwhile, wealthy Oak Park, IL averages \$36,000 per capita income and receives \$39 per capita from the program.

- Once a community becomes a CDBG "entitlement community," no matter how wealthy the community becomes over time, it is guaranteed CDBG funding every year. There is no mechanism for graduating out of the program, resulting in real per capita CDBG funding to all communities declining from \$48 in 1978 to \$13 in 2006.

- During the past 2.5 years, the Inspector General has audited a small number of grantees (only 35 audits for 1,180 grantees)

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<sup>3</sup> <http://www.whitehouse.gov/omb/budget/fy2008/pdf/savings.pdf>

<sup>4</sup> <http://www.whitehouse.gov/omb/budget/fy2008/pdf/savings.pdf>

<sup>5</sup> <http://www.whitehouse.gov/omb/budget/fy2008/pdf/savings.pdf>

and yet found more than \$100 million in waste, fraud and abuse of CDBG funds.<sup>6</sup>

### Homeless Rates have remained consistent the past 20 years

Consequently, due to failed federal policies such as the Community Development Block Grant, homeless rates have remained consistent for decades. In 1984, HUD conducted a homeless study and the report estimated that there were between 250,000 –350,000 homeless people at a point in time.<sup>7</sup> Another study reported that anywhere between 2.2 million and 3.5 million were homeless during that year.<sup>8</sup>

A decade later, in 1996 a national count of homeless people found that 842,000 people in the United States were homeless during a week in February.<sup>9</sup> In an estimate of annual homelessness based on that studies data, another study concluded that the number of persons experiencing homelessness during a one-year time period was between 2.5 and 3.5 million.<sup>10</sup>

In 2005, a survey identified 804,212 homeless people in during the month of January.<sup>11</sup> The study also estimated that between 2.3 and 3.5 million people were homeless during the year.<sup>12</sup>

While these studies over the previous two decades are anything but definitive, they do, however, demonstrate the fact that our countries homeless issues are not being remedied.

Misguided funding and policies such as the Community Development Block Grant and Economic Development Initiatives within HUD waste efforts that could effectively combat our nation's monumental homeless problems.

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<sup>6</sup> [http://coburn.senate.gov/ffm/index.cfm?FuseAction=Hearings.Home&ContentRecord\\_id=b92c9b57-802a-23ad-4003-7cef267cdfa6&Issue\\_id=](http://coburn.senate.gov/ffm/index.cfm?FuseAction=Hearings.Home&ContentRecord_id=b92c9b57-802a-23ad-4003-7cef267cdfa6&Issue_id=)

<sup>7</sup> <http://www.endhomelessness.org/content/article/detail/1440>

<sup>8</sup> <http://www.endhomelessness.org/content/article/detail/1440>

<sup>9</sup> <http://www.endhomelessness.org/content/article/detail/1440>

<sup>10</sup> <http://www.wsws.org/articles/2007/mar2007/home-m19.shtml>

<sup>11</sup> <http://www.endhomelessness.org/content/article/detail/1440>

<sup>12</sup> <http://www.endhomelessness.org/content/article/detail/1440>

## Billing's new baseball stadium does not align with HUD's mission

In S. 1789, the Economic Development Initiatives program is an earmark slush fund that sends over \$140 million towards projects of this body's choosing.<sup>13</sup> While some of the 304 earmarks in this section go towards meeting the core goals of HUD, most do not.

One example of such waste is a \$500,000 earmark to aid in the construction of a new minor league baseball stadium in Montana for the Billings Mustangs, a team in the Pioneer Rookie League that is the lowest level of minor league baseball and only plays a 3 month schedule in the summer.

The new 3,500 seat stadium broke ground this past March with a price-tag of \$12.5 million, and will replace in 2008 the 4,200 seat historic Cobb Field, the original facility built in 1932.<sup>14</sup>

While the new modern facility will be a welcome upgrade over the aging stadium for the city of Billings, nowhere in the stadium will it provide shelter for the 2,000 homeless citizens in Montana.<sup>15</sup> If HUD spent the \$500,000 on feeding Montana's homeless, you could feed all the homeless in the state dinner for 4 months.<sup>16</sup>

## The new stadium already has sufficient funding sources

Not only does this project not qualify as a worthy project for HUD, the stadium already has numerous funding sources to fulfill its financial obligations. Last November, the city of Billings voted in favor of a \$12.5 million bond issue to finance the new Billings stadium in its entirety.<sup>17</sup>

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<sup>13</sup> [http://frwebgate.access.gpo.gov/cgi-bin/getdoc.cgi?dbname=110\\_cong\\_reports&docid=f:sr131.110.pdf](http://frwebgate.access.gpo.gov/cgi-bin/getdoc.cgi?dbname=110_cong_reports&docid=f:sr131.110.pdf)

<sup>14</sup> [http://web.minorleaguebaseball.com/news/article.jsp?ymd=20070322&content\\_id=194759&vkey=news\\_t513&fext=.jsp&sid=t513](http://web.minorleaguebaseball.com/news/article.jsp?ymd=20070322&content_id=194759&vkey=news_t513&fext=.jsp&sid=t513)

<sup>15</sup> <http://nth-degree.com/mthomeless/hud/svg07.html>

<sup>16</sup> <http://dcpages.com/cgi-bin/dcpdir/jump.cgi?ID=17957>

<sup>17</sup> [http://web.minorleaguebaseball.com/news/article.jsp?ymd=20070321&content\\_id=194297&vkey=news\\_t513&fext=.jsp&sid=t513](http://web.minorleaguebaseball.com/news/article.jsp?ymd=20070321&content_id=194297&vkey=news_t513&fext=.jsp&sid=t513)

The citizens viewed the project as an important priority for Billings as an owner of house worth \$135,000 will have to pay \$34 a year for the next 15 years to fully cover the project costs.<sup>18</sup> In addition to the public funding from Billings taxpayers, the new stadium has also received over \$2 million in private fundraising donations.<sup>19</sup>

Even if project proponents view the available funds as insufficient, there are other entities that have more resources available with a much larger vested interest in this project. The Cincinnati Reds, the owner of the Billings Mustangs, accrued over \$147 million in revenues during 2006, bringing the team's net value to \$307 million.<sup>20</sup>

Additionally, the state of Montana should fund the stadium long before the other 49 states chip in to subsidize a local Montana project. In 2006, the state of Montana possessed a state budget surplus of a half billion dollars. Additionally, the state estimated the projected ending fund balance by 2009 would rise to \$900 million.<sup>21</sup>

Conversely, the United States national debt is nearing \$9 trillion with a \$500 billion annual spending deficit. Common sense should prevail that Montana, with free cash to spend, should foot any extra funding, not the deficit and debt ridden U.S. federal government.

### The Billings Stadium is too exorbitant for a Pioneer League facility

It would be one thing to ask for extra funding for necessary renovation expenses or to build a comparable ballpark relative to other teams in your league. However, the new \$12 million Billings facility will be by far the most expensive and premier stadium in the Pioneer League.<sup>22</sup>

The new ballpark will have 4,070 seats, 3,050 of them armchair seats in the main grandstand, as well as 650 bleacher seats, 250 terraced

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<sup>18</sup> <http://www.billingsgazette.com/newdex.php?display=rednews/2004/02/18/build/local/25-cobb.inc>

<sup>19</sup> <http://www.ballparkwatch.com/stadiums/new/billings.htm>

<sup>20</sup> [http://www.forbes.com/lists/2007/33/07mlb\\_Cincinnati-Reds\\_332528.html](http://www.forbes.com/lists/2007/33/07mlb_Cincinnati-Reds_332528.html)

<sup>21</sup> [http://montanamainstreetblog.typepad.com/montana\\_main\\_street\\_blog/2006/10/cash\\_money.html](http://montanamainstreetblog.typepad.com/montana_main_street_blog/2006/10/cash_money.html)

<sup>22</sup> <http://www.billingsgazette.com/newdex.php?display=rednews/2004/02/18/build/local/25-cobb.inc>

"picnic seats" on the left-field line and 120 armchair seats in sky boxes.<sup>23</sup>

The amenities that the new stadium would enjoy that separates itself from others is an expanded clubhouses for home and visiting teams, a year-round underground batting cage, a team store, 10 skyboxes, expanded concession areas and a children's playground behind the center field wall.<sup>24</sup>

Most other stadiums do not possess these extra bonuses that are considered a little pricey for a rookie league venue. One manager noted "You get what you pay for. For \$12 million, you're going to get what is probably the best ballpark in the Pioneer League."<sup>25</sup>

### The stadium is becoming too expensive for Billings

Recently, the overly ambitious project has caught up with Billings as the project has faced challenges with a recent deficit as high as \$500,000.<sup>26</sup> Unfortunately, in the last week of August the city of Billings decided not to show prudence in the way they are managing the project. On August 29<sup>th</sup>, members of the Billings City Council chose quality over cost on an over budget Cobb Field Project in Downtown Billings by restoring nearly \$200,000 in cuts to the design plans.<sup>27</sup>

Billings Parks and Recreation Director Mike Whitaker says city councilors decided to stick with the game plan on the future of Cobb Field. "They didn't want to do anything that would hurt the aesthetics of the facility. They wanted to ensure that what the voters voted on, they would receive."<sup>28</sup>

Members voted to keep items like cup holders, ornamental fencing, canopies and landscaping in the plans which will put the project

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<sup>23</sup> <http://www.billingsgazette.com/newdex.php?display=rednews/2004/02/18/build/local/25-cobb.inc>

<sup>24</sup> <http://www.billingsgazette.com/newdex.php?display=rednews/2004/02/18/build/local/25-cobb.inc>

<sup>25</sup> <http://www.billingsgazette.com/newdex.php?display=rednews/2004/02/18/build/local/25-cobb.inc>

<sup>26</sup> <http://www.montanastation.com/Global/story.asp?S=6992304>

<sup>27</sup> <http://www.montanastation.com/Global/story.asp?S=6992304>

<sup>28</sup> <http://www.montanastation.com/Global/story.asp?S=6992304>

\$190,000 over budget.<sup>29</sup> As the stadiums construction moves forward, the cash strapped federal government has no role to bail out a project that is running over budget by nearly \$200,000 in order to pay for beer holders and bushes.

### Other Pioneer League Stadiums demonstrate "more with less"

With the rising financial difficulties of the project, Billings should not look to the federal government for help, but rather to other cities and teams in the Rookie League as many have renovated old stadiums or built new stadiums for a much lower price:

-Orem, Utah: The Orem Owlz built a new 5,000 seat stadium in 2005 for \$3 million, a quarter of the price of Billings's stadium with more seats.<sup>30</sup>

-Ogden, Utah: The Ogden Raptors built a 5,600 seat stadium for its baseball team in 1997 for \$5 million.<sup>31</sup> Joe Mock, creator and Web master of [baseballparks.com](http://www.baseballparks.com) and the author of "Joe Mock's Ballpark Guide," called the field in Ogden the "queen of the Pioneer League," with amenities befitting a "much higher level of minor league baseball."<sup>32</sup>

-Great Falls, Montana: The Great Falls White Sox completed a \$2 million first-phase renovation of Legion Park, which was built in 1940. The renovation gave Great Falls a "top-notch" clubhouse, a weight room, a new concession area, and new bullpens and a batting cage.<sup>33</sup> By renovating they have also kept the essence of the old ballpark.<sup>34</sup>

Billings should look at these examples to be innovative in how they manage their project and funds, as there are clearly plenty of ways to do more with less.

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<sup>29</sup> <http://www.montanastation.com/Global/story.asp?S=6992304>

<sup>30</sup> <http://www.baseballparks.com/Orem.asp>

<sup>31</sup> <http://www.billingsgazette.com/newdex.php?display=rednews/2004/02/18/build/local/25-cobb.inc>

<sup>32</sup> <http://www.billingsgazette.com/newdex.php?display=rednews/2004/02/18/build/local/25-cobb.inc>

<sup>33</sup> <http://www.billingsgazette.com/newdex.php?display=rednews/2004/02/18/build/local/25-cobb.inc>

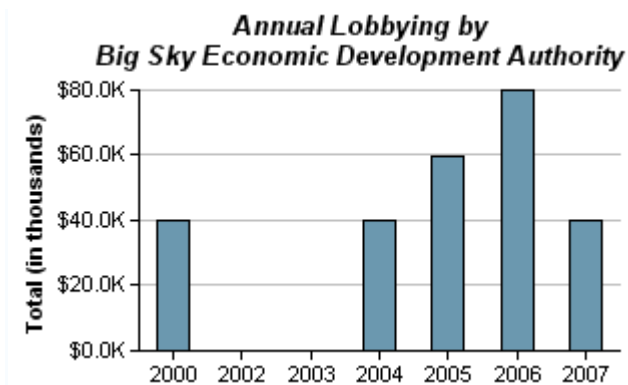
<sup>34</sup> <http://www.ballparkreviews.com/greatfalls/gf.htm>

HUD should not provide federal funds for the construction of an overpriced and unneeded baseball stadium, especially when it is funneling money and resources away from fulfilling the primary mission HUD. The fact is this earmark just funds “a want” for the city of Billings, Montana, not “a need”, and more importantly does absolutely nothing to accomplish the goals of HUD.

## BIG SKY ECONOMIC DEVELOPMENT AUTHORITY Client Summary, 2007

### Lobbying Expenses Reported by Subsidiaries

Firms Hired	Contract Income	Subsidiary (Lobbied For)
<a href="#">Jamison &amp; Sullivan</a>	\$40,000	-



[http://montanastreetblog.typepad.com/montana\\_main\\_street\\_blog/2006/10/cash\\_money.html](http://montanastreetblog.typepad.com/montana_main_street_blog/2006/10/cash_money.html)

## Cash Money: Montana's Budget Surplus

The Legislative Fiscal Division released new numbers this month regarding the projected budget surplus. The ending fund balance at the end of the current fiscal year is estimated to reach over \$500 million. Additionally, the Division also estimated the projected ending fund balance for 2009 would be \$900 million (which includes the \$500 million surplus at the end of fiscal year 2007).



The better-than-expected budgetary picture comes from one identifiable source: a healthy and growing business community. Corporation Tax revenues are up 68% this biennium. Individual Income Tax revenues, which are paid largely by businesses and include sole proprietorships, are up 13%. None of this additional revenue would have materialized without strong businesses, both large and small.

The projected surplus has a lot of people salivating. But don't let everyone up to the trough all at once. Although the surplus reaches record levels, it is still not enough to allow everyone to go home happy. New spending proposals and outstanding liabilities top \$2 billion. As we look towards both the near and distant future, we should remember how we got the surplus and reinvest appropriately.

## Cobb Field

**Cobb Field**



<b>Location</b>	901 N. 27th St. <a href="#">Billings, Montana</a> 59101
<b>Opened</b>	<a href="#">1932</a>
<b>Demolished</b>	Fall, 2007 (planned)
<b>Owner</b>	City of Billings
<b>Operator</b>	Billings Parks & Recreation
<b>Surface</b>	<a href="#">Grass</a>
<b>Architect</b>	N/A

### Tenants

[Billings Mustangs](#) ([Minor League Baseball](#)) ([1948-1963](#), [1969-2007](#))

[Montana State University - Billings](#) ([NCAA Baseball](#)) ([2006-2007](#))

Billings American Legion Baseball ([American](#)

## [Legion Baseball](#)) (1948-2007)

### Capacity

4,200

### Dimensions

Left Field - 335 ft (102 m)

Center Field - 405 ft (123 m)

Right Field - 327 ft (99 m)

1.

**Cobb Field** (built [1932](#)) is a [baseball stadium](#) located in [Billings, Montana](#). It was originally named Athletic Park. It opened as Cobb Field on May 4, 1948 after many renovations. It has been the home of the [Billings Mustangs](#), the [Pioneer League](#) Rookie Affiliate of the [Cincinnati Reds](#), since 1948. Cobb Field was named after Bob Cobb, who was responsible for bringing the [Mustangs](#) to [Billings](#). It also hosts home games for local [American Legion baseball](#) teams.

Cobb Field seats 4,200, though crowds have been known to eclipse 5,000, particularly on promotional free ticket nights such as "Kwik Way Night," in which local [Billings Kwik Way gas stations](#) give out [tickets](#) to customers.

Ticket prices are reasonably affordable. Box seats (first four rows in the stadium) are priced at \$6.50. The rest of the stadium is composed of long rows of benches assigned as general admission. Sold at \$5.00 a ticket, a fan with a general admission ticket can sit anywhere they desire within the designated general area. Students and Seniors can get a general admission pass for \$4. In the 90's the [Mustangs](#) had a "Knothole Gang" promotion for children to get a t-shirt, a 10 game pass, and an autograph day with the [Mustangs](#) for a set price. The "[Knothole Gang](#)" has since been revived and children between 6 and 12 years of age can get a season general admission pass (all 38 home games) for \$12.

Cobb Field's concessions have overgone a drastic overhaul in the past few years. In addition to the basic [hot dog](#), [pizza](#), [candy](#), and [pop](#) products offered by the main [concession](#), the [Mustangs](#) added the "Cobb Grill" and "Betisse's Bullpen", a patio on the left field line where [Mustangs](#) fans can enjoy a beer and roam about freely. "Betisse's Bullpen" also hosts pre-game [tailgate parties](#).

Cobb Field has a natural [grass](#) surface which is attended to by head [groundskeeper](#) John Barta. Barta had been on the grounds crew for many years before taking the head position in 2005. Its dimensions are 335 [feet](#) to left, 405 feet to center, and 325 feet to right.

In 2006, the stadium welcomed the re-formed [NCAA](#) baseball team from nearby [Montana State University - Billings](#). The Yellowjackets play in the Division II [Great Northwest Athletic Conference](#). From March to May, home games are played at the Field (the college season starts in February, but due to the weather in Montana, the Jackets are forced to start the season on long road trips).

The stadium is primarily made up of the same wood used 70 years ago and is showing substantial wear. The handrail on the exit on the 3rd base side shows considerable splinting of the wood and many areas of the stadium have needed wooden boards to be installed over holes in the floor.

On [November 8](#) a \$12.5 million stadium levy passed (with a 53% majority 'for' vote) allowing construction of a [new stadium](#) at the Cobb Field location. Construction will begin in Spring 2007 and the original stadium will be torn down after the 2007 season. It is not known

whether the stadium will keep the name Cobb Field. Most likely it will be named after the highest paying donor.

2.

[http://www.forbes.com/lists/2007/33/07mlb\\_Cincinnati-Reds\\_332528.html](http://www.forbes.com/lists/2007/33/07mlb_Cincinnati-Reds_332528.html)

Cincinnati Reds: Team Value <sup>1</sup> **\$307 mil**

**Cincinnati Reds 2007 revenues: \$146 mil**

2.

[http://www.kreichard.com/baseballtravel/cobb\\_field.html](http://www.kreichard.com/baseballtravel/cobb_field.html)

This is a baseball stadium without pretension, providing one of the purer baseball experiences in the minor leagues. If you don't have an interest in baseball, you're not going to like Cobb Field. But if you like baseball, you'll love Cobb Field. Home to minor-league baseball since 1948, Cobb Field offers the same basic baseball experience that you would have enjoyed at almost any time in the past.

And the folks in Billings sure love their baseball. The reserved box seats -- folding chairs expensively priced at \$6 per game -- are sold out for season-ticket holders. The rest of us must do with \$4 general-admission seats (\$3 for seniors and students, free for children 5-years-old or younger). This is a great deal: we sat in the third row of general-admissions seats directly behind home plate and had a great view of the game. Seats under the canopy have backs, while outfield bleacher seats do not. There really isn't a bad seat in the house, and the main advantage to sitting under the canopy is to stay out of the sun, which can be quite severe in the midst of summer.

With a steady stream of customers, the Mustangs management hasn't yet been forced to take a bread-and-circuses promotional approach to games. While there are the usual game-day promotions like you'd find at any ballpark -- cup, schedule magnet, and cap giveaways -- there's no between-innings shenanigans, no bat races, no sumo-wrestling matches sponsored by liquor companies. Indeed, the only diversions to the actual game come when the boosters sell 50-50 tickets, a raffle where the winner keeps half of the proceeds and the Mustangs Boosters Club keeps the other half, and a beer batter (if the designated Mustangs beer batter gets a hit, you can buy four beers for \$5 during the remainder of the inning).

Cobb Field has a rather interesting history. It's named for Robert Cobb, the owner of the Pacific Coast League's Hollywood Stars, in recognition of his efforts to bring organized professional baseball to Billings. Today, Cobb is better known as the founder and owner of the legendary Brown Derby restaurant in Hollywood.

3.

## Cobb Field project stays on track

Aug 29, 2007 01:46 PM EDT

Members of the Billings City Council have chosen quality over cost on an over budget Cobb Field Project in Downtown Billings by restoring nearly \$200,000 in cuts to the design plans.

Billings Parks and Recreation Director Mike Whitaker says city councilors decided to stick with the game plan on the future of Cobb Field.

"They didn't want to do anything that would hurt the aesthetics of the facility. They wanted to ensure that what the voters voted on, they would receive."

Members voted to keep items like cup holders, ornamental fencing, canopies and landscaping in the plans which will take \$190,000 out of the city's pocket book.

Billings Mustangs General Manager Gary Roller says the decision is a home run for the city.

"I think what its going to say is that we are ready to press on, we are ready to move forward into the future and we're looking ahead to the future in a progressive manner. We're not going to stand idly by and let our facility crumble right in front of our community."

The demolition date for Cobb Field depends on the play of the Mustangs and Roller says it should start in September.

"If we don't make the playoffs demolition will start on the 10<sup>th</sup> of September, on Monday. And if we do make the playoffs it will be pushed back to the 17<sup>th</sup> of September, a week later. Obviously they are not going to bring the wrecking balls in right away and we're not going to see it crumble to the ground right away."

Magnum construction is on deck to bulldoze Cobb Field to the ground which is a site that's sure to create mixed emotions for fans.

The city plans to cover extra costs through fund raising and officials are set to make a final decision on the Cobb Field demolition later this week.



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(from August 28, 2007)

Members of the Billings City Council have voted to restore nearly \$200,000 in cuts which were proposed for the new Cobb Field in downtown Billings.

Billings City Administrator Tina Volek says the five project proposals were added back into the baseball stadium design plans. The move comes after initial plans on the \$12.5 million project came in over budget which forced city officials to work with the architects to cut costs by over \$500,000. However Monday night's move by the council now puts the project over by budget by \$180,000 to \$190,000.

Before passing a key amendment that restored the cuts on a 6 -5 vote Billings City Councilman Vince Ruegamer reassured the council that they would not have to dip into reserve funds to cover the cost of the project. This came after Woody Hahn told the committee of his group's efforts to begin raising funds to cover the \$500,000 deficit. Hahn along with Chamber of Commerce President John Brewer, City Administrator Volek, and others helped raise the funds to get the Cobb Field issue on the ballot.

Footings in the skybox suites may one day be built as well as funding for columns, colored concrete and a canopy over the ballpark's main entrance on 27th Street.

Woody Hahn says his committee is willing to raise more money to give taxpayers the full project promised to them in the last election saying "We want the city to have the best that we can have, because we're a growing city".

**- Aaron Flint reporting from KTVQ in Billings**

## 4.

### Officials break ground on new Billings ballpark

03/22/2007 12:17 PM ET  
Billings Mustangs



BILLINGS, MT -- Representatives from the City of Billings, Minor League Baseball, the Billings Mustangs, American Legion Baseball and Montana State University-Billings have officially kicked off the construction of a new ballpark in Billings.

Pat O'Conner, VP of Minor League Baseball, and Pioneer League President Jim McCurdy came to Billings to participate in groundbreaking ceremonies at Cobb Field. They joined local officials as the first shovels of dirt were turned over just outside the ticket booth of Cobb Field.

This will be the final season for Cobb Field -- the home of the Mustangs since 1948. Voters in Billings have approved a \$12.5 million bond issue to replace aging Cobb Field

in time for the 2008 Pioneer League Season.

Wednesday's groundbreaking officially kicked off the construction of a new 3,500 seat stadium that is being designed by HNTB Architecture Inc. of Kansas City and CTA Architects and Engineers of Billings.

The first stage of the project is already underway and calls for the removal of Athletic Pool -- the city pool that sits just outside Cobb Field. A demolition crew is currently removing the concrete bowl of the pool.

The footprint of the new stadium will shift toward the intersection of North 27th Street and Ninth Avenue North, allowing construction crews to work in the area of the pool and the practice field without disturbing the Cobb Field grandstand or playing field.

The Mustangs will play the 2007 season in Cobb Field as work continues around the stadium. As soon as the Mustangs play the final game of this season, Cobb Field will be leveled and the project will continue in the former footprint of the ballpark.

Work is scheduled to be done in time for the Mustangs to play the 2008 season in the new ballpark.

*This story was not subject to the approval of the National Association of Professional Baseball Leagues or its clubs.*

**New Billings Ballpark** is a description for a proposed [stadium](#) in [Billings, Montana](#), that is currently in the planning stages. It will be primarily used for [baseball](#) and will be the home of the [Billings Mustangs](#) in the [Pioneer League](#). The ballpark will have a capacity of 3,500 people and open in 2008. It will replace [Cobb Field](#). The groundbreaking ceremony took place [March 22, 2007](#)<sup>[1]</sup>.

5.

## Baseball Stadium

[View Current Construction Pictures](#)

### Our new ballpark to be completed in time for 2008 season

On November 7th Billings's residents approved a \$12.5 million bond issue to build a new minor league baseball stadium at Athletic Park. Shortly after the passage of the bond issue City Council directed the design team of HNTB Montana, Inc. to move ahead with the project.



Existing Cobb Field

The new stadium will serve as the Billings Mustangs, MSU-Billings and American Legion's home facility as well as a multi-use public facility for many different types of community events.





Demolition of Athletic pool began in mid-March which will allow for construction to begin on the new stadium this summer. In September, once the baseball seasons conclude, the old stadium will be demolished to make way for the new playing field. This phasing of construction activity allows all of 2007 baseball activities to take place as scheduled. The new stadium will be completed in time for the 2008 baseball season.

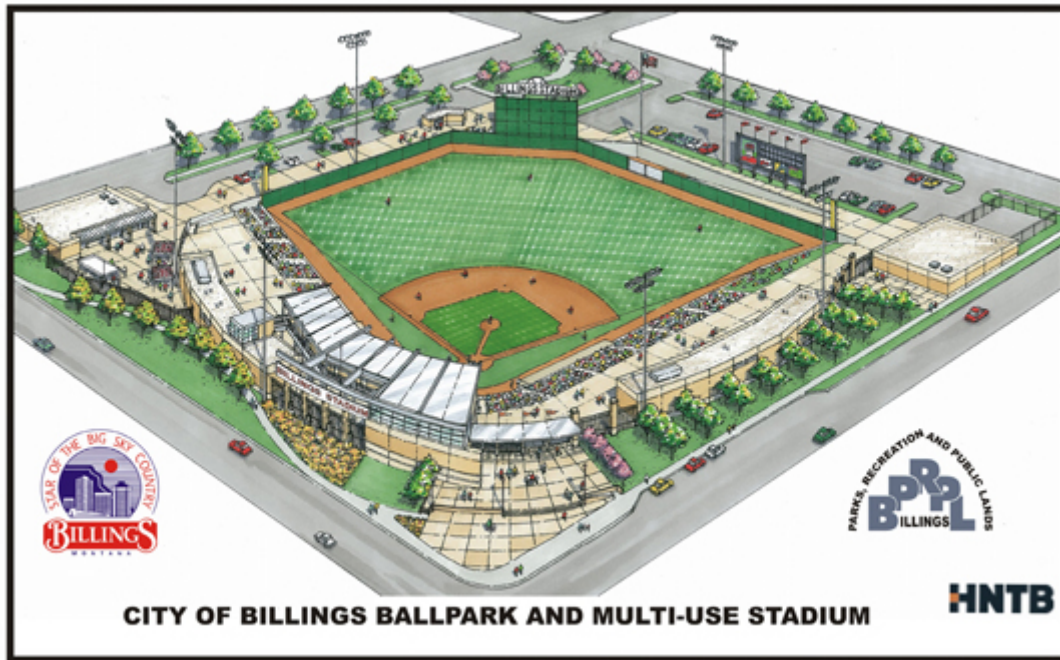


Billings' new ballpark will meet the National Collegiate Athletic Association and the National Association of Professional Baseball Leagues' standards for Collegiate and Minor League baseball. The facility will also be able to accommodate a wide variety of community programs including craft fairs, and other similar community events.



**CITY COUNCIL BREAKS GROUND FOR NEW STADIUM 3/21/2007**

For more information about this exciting quality of life project, contact Mike Whitaker, Parks, Recreation and Public Lands Director at 657-8371.



Conceptual drawing of the new stadium



6.

## Mustangs introduce Cobb Field logo for last season

03/21/2007 12:11 PM ET  
Billings Mustangs

BILLINGS, MT - The Billings Mustangs have unveiled a new logo that will commemorate the final season for venerable Cobb Field - the home of the Mustangs since 1948. In dedicating the 2007 season to Cobb Field, the Rookie Affiliate of



the Cincinnati Reds will wear the logo as a sleeve patch on its jerseys and it will adorn merchandise available in the Mustangs team store.

"There has never been an official logo for Cobb Field, and we felt that it was appropriate at this time to develop a unique identity to commemorate the stadium in its final season," said Mustangs General Manager Gary Roller. "We believe the image is representative of the storied history of the stadium and plan to feature it on as many applications as possible throughout the course of the season. We're pleased and excited about the design, and hope the community will be as well."

The new logo, created by Dan Simon of Studio Simon, shows the front entrance to the stadium and lists the first (1948) and last year (2007) that the Mustangs will call Cobb Field home. The Mustangs have played every season - with the exception of a five-year period Billings didn't field a Pioneer League team from 1964 to 1968 - at Cobb Field.

Originally known as Athletic Park, the 3,600 seat stadium was renamed Cobb Field prior to the start of the 1948 season in honor of Bob Cobb, the man responsible for bringing organized professional baseball to Billings. Cobb led a group of Hollywood investors who financed the original Billings Mustangs, which served as a farm club for the Hollywood Stars Professional Baseball team.

To prepare for the first season in 1948, the city expanded the grandstands of old Athletic Park, which was built in 1938. Although Cobb Field has undergone some minor changes and renovations, the wooden structure remains much the same as it was in 1948.

Last November, the voters of Billings passed a bond issue for a new \$12.5 million stadium to replace Cobb Field.

Work is already underway to remove Athletic Pool to make way for the new ballpark and construction will continue throughout the 2007. At the conclusion of the 2007 season, Cobb Field will be raised and the new park is scheduled to be ready when the Mustangs begin the 2008 campaign.

In honor of Cobb Field and the construction that will be taking place this year, the Mustangs will have two other Cobb Field promotional nights. On Friday, July 13, the first 1,000 fans through the gates will receive replica construction helmets compliments of Big Sky Airlines. On Saturday, July 14, the first 1,000 fans will receive a miniature bronze stadium replica of Cobb Field compliments of Yellowstone Surgery Center.

*This story was not subject to the approval of the National Association of Professional Baseball Leagues or its clubs.*

7.

**COBB FIELD**  
**BILLINGS, MONTANA**



1948

BILLING

CINCINN

PIONEER

4,200

STADIUM  
ATMOSP  
CONCES

*Photos:  
2006*



RAY WINDER FIELD

MEMORIAL STADIUM

VE

8.

The pitch for Cobb field: Spend \$12.5M on stadium or lose Mustangs, experts say

By ED KEMMICK  
Of The Gazette Staff

Supporters of building a new Cobb Field don't have much trouble persuading people that the existing baseball stadium is in bad shape.

The grandstand at Cobb Field was built in 1938, and the bleachers were added in 1948, the year the Mustangs came to Billings. The city-owned stadium required about \$1 million worth of repairs between 1981 and 2001, but the stands are still riddled with rotting timbers and patched flooring. The stadium does not meet requirements of the Professional Baseball Agreement of 1990, which established minimum standards for all minor league ballparks. Other cities that have failed to provide modern stadiums have lost their teams.

But pointing out the problem is one thing. It will be a lot more difficult to convince a majority of voters that the solution is building a new \$12.5 million ballpark on the Cobb Field site.

That's the price tag for a field designed by HOK Architects of St. Louis, Mo., which has drawn up plans for more than 70 baseball parks around the country. HOK was commissioned to create a preliminary design by the Blue Ribbon Committee, which was appointed last year by Mayor Chuck Tooley to develop plans for a new Cobb Field and an aquatic center in the Heights.

Jeff Ballard and Randy Bishop were members of the Blue Ribbon Committee and now serve on the Billings Family Recreation Committee, a private group that is hoping to raise \$125,000 to build voter support for the new ballpark and aquatic center. They acknowledge that \$12.5 million is substantially more than has been spent on any other stadium in the Pioneer League, in which the Billings Mustangs play, but they say Billings deserves such a ballpark, given its status as a regional center and a longtime baseball town.

Ballard, vice chairman of the Billings Family Recreation Committee, said the new stadium would be more than just a place to watch baseball. He said it would be a real destination,

would be open year-round for concerts, meetings and other community events and would help spur economic development.

"It's worth it to stretch and try to get something like this," he said.

### **Leadership role**

Bishop said that when Cobb Field was remodeled and expanded in 1948, it was touted as one of the best minor league ballparks in the Northwest.

"Billings was the leader then, and I don't understand why we shouldn't be the leader now. ... This sends a signal to people that we're a regional leader and we're interested in investing in ourselves," he said.

So, what would Billings get for \$12.5 million? A completely new stadium, for starters. It would be moved a little farther to the west so that the two entrances would be just off North 27th Street. The old stadium would be demolished and a new sunken field, 8 feet below what is now ground level, would be created.

The new ballpark would have 4,070 seats, 3,050 of them armchair seats in the main grandstand, as well as 650 bleacher seats, 250 terraced "picnic seats" on the left-field line and 120 armchair seats in sky boxes. In addition, grass berms ringing the outfield would be designed to accommodate another 2,000 fans, and 500 could squeeze onto the flat "party deck" above the terraced seating area. The existing stadium has a capacity of about 4,000, with 3,800 seats in benches, backless bleachers and folding chairs.

The new stadium would also have greatly expanded clubhouses for home and visiting teams, a year-round underground batting cage, a team store, 10 skyboxes, expanded concession areas and a children's playground behind the center field wall.

The new Cobb Field would not have new parking, and it would not include a roof over any of the seats, though there would be some shelter on the concourse areas beneath the overhangs projecting out from the skyboxes.

Ballard said a roof would have been a huge added cost. He also said the trend in ballpark construction these days is to have no roof. As for parking, Bishop said it would be counterproductive to build a new stadium partly to spur economic development and then take prime downtown land out of use and pave it for parking. He also pointed to a recent study conducted by students from Andrews University in Michigan, which showed that there is already more than enough parking available in the neighborhood around Cobb Field.

**onthenet**  
[Proposals for the  
Skyview Ridge Aquatic Center  
and a new Cobb Field stadium](#)

The sunken field would create an "acoustical bowl" that would keep sound in the stadium, making it less noticeable to neighbors and more attractive a location for outdoor concerts and other events, backers say.

Ballard and Bishop said the original design created by HOK had a price tag of \$14.3 million, which the Blue Ribbon Committee reduced to \$12.5 million by cutting some amenities, including a video board and party decks on either side of the skyboxes.

Pioneer League ballparks that have the most in common with the proposed new Cobb Field are Lindquist Field in Ogden, Utah, which opened in 1997, and Civic Stadium in Missoula, which may be ready by opening day this summer.

## **'Queen of the league'**

Joe Mock, creator and Web master of baseballparks.com and the author of "Joe Mock's Ballpark Guide," called the field in Ogden the "queen of the Pioneer League," with amenities befitting a "much higher level of minor league baseball." It cost \$5 million seven years ago, and Ogden Raptors General Manager Joe Stein said it would cost \$7 million to \$9 million today.

It also has a capacity of 5,000, close to that of the new Cobb Field. Why the lower cost?

A big difference is that instead of having clubhouses for teams and umpires near the dugouts as at most ballparks, Ogden's clubhouses are out behind the left-field wall, and teams and umpires walk down the warning track to reach them. There are no restrooms near the press box, which Stein called a big mistake. Also, there are only 2,015 chair-back seats and there are no year-round batting cages or other indoor winter uses.

Another, smaller factor was that the stadium was built without an adequate sound system, which quickly proved to be a problem that needed fixing. As a result, the owners of the team put up \$5,000 of their own money to install a new one.

And, like all other Pioneer League stadiums, Lindquist Field has no skyboxes, private suites leased by individuals or, more commonly, by corporations or businesses. Bishop said the Blue Ribbon Committee learned by looking around the country that skyboxes are considered indispensable in a modern ballpark because the revenue they generate makes it possible to keep ticket and concession prices low for regular fans.

Asked why the taxpayers should build suites for rich people, Bishop replied, "Why not let the rich guys underwrite the cost of the stadium?"

Bob Wagoner, general manager of MetraPark, said the 10 skyboxes in the MetraPark Arena are so successful that he wishes he had 20 of them. They range in capacity from 15 to 25 people and are leased for \$11,000 to \$14,000 a year. In addition to the money from leases, people using the private boxes have to buy tickets to whatever event they are attending, he said. All 10 skyboxes are leased out and have been for years, Wagoner said, and there is almost always a long waiting list for vacancies.

## **Delays in Missoula**

No ballpark in the league faced more obstacles than Civic Stadium in Missoula, which will be home to the Osprey when it opens this summer. Make that if it opens this summer; the Osprey were hoping to be in their new ballpark in each of the past two seasons.

After voters rejected a bond issue to fund construction of a ballpark in 1992, a group called Play Ball Missoula was formed in 1998 to raise private money for the project. Because the site of the proposed stadium was near downtown at what used to be a lumber mill, the Missoula Redevelopment Agency agreed to spend \$1 million on streets, utilities and other improvements to the land.

In 1998, Play Ball Missoula thought it could build the whole project for under \$5 million. Then it was sued by a group of citizens over use of MRA funds for the project. Play Ball Missoula prevailed in the lawsuit, but only after losing almost a year and a half and falling behind in its fund-raising efforts.

Last year, the MRA approved another \$1 million grant for the project, this one for actual construction costs but available only on a matching basis - \$1 for every \$2 in private

financing. Joe Easton, formerly the team's general manager and now CEO of Play Ball Missoula, said it has raised about \$6 million so far, including in-kind donations and a long-term lease with the Osprey, which will amount to \$2 million to \$2.5 million over 10 years.

The group is still \$3 million short of its \$9 million goal, but it is hoping that donations will pick up again after people start watching games in the new stadium.

"It's been very slow and inconsistent, but right now we're in our best position ever," Easton said. They are still rushing to open by the first home game, June 25. That means having the field playable and having an outfield fence and seating for 3,000. They will use portable toilets for players and fans, and trailers for clubhouses, until the fund-raising is complete and construction is finished.

As with the ballpark proposed for Billings, the one in Missoula will have a sunken playing field, this one 13 feet below ground level. Eventually, Easton said, plans call for using the ballpark for soccer camps, concerts, and other events, and all bathrooms and concessions will have outside entries so the parking lot could be used for car shows and other gatherings.

The capacity in Missoula will be 3,300. Bishop said that if Missoula had the capacity of the proposed Cobb Field, it would be one-third again as large and probably would cost at least \$12 million - but still wouldn't have skyboxes and underground batting cages.

### **New field in Provo**

Construction is supposed to start this year on the next-most-expensive ballpark in the Pioneer League, Parkway Crossing Field in Provo, Utah. The \$5 million stadium will seat 4,400 and is being built in partnership with Utah Valley State College.

The plan there is to convert an existing ballpark with bleacher seats into a field with 2,200 stadium seats, a roof, concessions and some berm seating. The Provo Angels will share the stadium, as well as clubhouses and concession areas, with the college, which has a Division 1 baseball team.

Dave Jacobsen, Angels general manager, said his team is happy to be moving into a permanent home after leasing space from Brigham Young University, and he said the best thing about the new park will be a doubling of capacity. He was impressed with what is planned for Billings.

"You've got some forward-thinking people in your city, because that can be a tremendous asset for any community," he said. "You get what you pay for. For \$12 million, you're going to get what is probably the best ballpark in the Pioneer League."

### **Small park in Casper**

Casper, Wyo., opened its Mike Lansing Field in 2002. It has a capacity of 2,500, the minimum allowed under Pioneer League rules, and cost \$4 million.

"We don't have a lot of bells and whistles," Rockies General Manager Mary Stanley said. There is only one concession stand, an uncovered concourse and a clubhouse detached from the stadium. But the clubhouse has locker rooms, offices, a laundry room and a large training facility, she said.

Stanley said the field has room for expansion, but it was kept small because Casper's population is only 50,000 and it is new to baseball. "We wanted to keep the stadium full and the demand high, so that's what we did," she said.

"You have to have what fits the community," she continued. "You guys have a much larger area than ours. Plus, you have a longstanding tradition and more of a fan base."

Bishop said Casper has a nice field as far as it goes, but all it has is a "ballpark that is one click above an American Legion park."

### **Great Falls renovates**

Last summer, Great Falls completed a \$2 million first-phase renovation of Legion Park, which was built in 1956, increasing the seating from 3,800 to 4,500. White Sox General Manager Jim Keough said \$500,000 of that \$2 million has yet to be raised.

But the renovation gave Great Falls a "top-notch" clubhouse, a weight room, laundry room, a new concession area, a large, raised picnic area and grass-berm seating on the third-base side, Keough said. There are also new bullpens and a batting cage. Only about 650 seats are stadium seats and the rest are backless bleachers.

Phases 2 and 3 call for building a new visitor clubhouse, umpire facilities, 700 new stadium seats and possibly two sky boxes. Keough said those wouldn't be built until Phase 1 is paid off, meaning construction probably won't start any earlier than the fall of 2005.

"I'm excited," he said. "It's nice to play in a first-class facility."

In the two other cities besides Billings that have Pioneer League baseball teams, comparisons wouldn't be very illustrative. In Helena, home to the Brewers, the 1,700-capacity ballpark was built in 1939, while in Idaho Falls, Idaho, home to the Padres, the 3,000-capacity ballpark was built in 1976.

### **A question of funding**

The new Cobb Field would not only be the most expensive ballpark in the Pioneer League; it would also be the only one built entirely with public funds.

Except for the \$2 million from the Missoula Redevelopment Agency, Missoula's ballpark will be paid for through private fund-raising. "It's been a true community effort," Ellis, the Osprey general manager, said. But he acknowledged that "it's really the tough way to do it." And Missoula remains \$3 million away from its \$9 million goal.

In Great Falls, the city put up \$400,000 of the \$2 million renovation. Less than a \$1 million was raised privately and \$500,000 still needs to be rounded up. In Casper, fund-raising was begun by the American Legion, which took in about \$1 million over many years. The Rockies' 20-year lease on the city-owned stadium is worth about \$2.5 million, and the city put up the rest of the money with revenues collected from the city's 1-cent sales tax, which is added onto the state sales tax.

In Provo, voters recently approved a \$3 million "conduit bond," which means the city provides the up-front money for construction, but the entire bond must be paid back by private investors. The stadium will be owned by Utah Valley State College, Angels General Manager Jacobsen said, and it had to demonstrate that it had a "very high percentage" of the \$3 million covered in pledges before the city would agree to the bond issue.

In Ogden, General Manager Stein said the state and city helped finance the \$5 million stadium. The state contributed about \$1 million and the city put up \$2.1 million from its general fund for the project, some of which it will recoup in the form of lease payments from

the Raptors. The rest of the money was put up by private individuals, including the businessman who won naming rights to the field by donating \$1 million, Stein said.

### **An outsider's view**

Joe Mock, the ballpark expert, said Billings stands a good chance of losing the Mustangs, who are affiliated with the Cincinnati Reds, if Cobb Field isn't replaced.

"It would be a crying shame to lose the franchise over this, but they will," he said. "The field there doesn't measure up to the rest of the Pioneer League. And that's how communities lose ball teams."

Minor league baseball has changed dramatically in recent years, Mock said. More than 80 minor league ballparks have been built around the country since 1995 and competition for teams is fierce. He said team and league officials are no longer attached to particular communities, no matter how long the association or how solid the fan base.

"They want their teams playing in the best, most modern facilities possible," he said.

Mock lives in Round Rock, Texas, near Austin, where the city just built a \$25 million stadium. Rome, Ga., population 34,000, opened a \$15 million ballpark last summer for a team that plays in a league one notch above the Pioneer League, Mock said.

Mock also said the \$12.5 million price tag in Billings sounds reasonable. Bishop wrote to Mock to ask if any teams were building 4,000-to-5,000-seat bowl stadiums for \$6 million and received this response: "Simply, the answer is no - especially not if it has bathrooms, concession stands, clubhouses, etc., etc. You could throw a bunch of seats around a ballfield for not much money, but you wouldn't have a 'ballpark.' "

Teams like the Mustangs are even more valuable because they're affiliated with a Major League team, Mock said. Independent teams and leagues come and go, but affiliated leagues like the Pioneer have been around for a long time and are stable. And since no one foresees any expansion of Major League Baseball for many years, the affiliated leagues aren't going to get any bigger, either, Mock said, making existing teams even more coveted.

"If you're in that part of the country, you don't want to lose it," he said of the Mustangs franchise. "You'll never get it back."

*Ed Kemmick can be reached at 657-1293 or [ekemmick@billingsgazette.com](mailto:ekemmick@billingsgazette.com).*

### **ABOUT THE BOND**

During the primary election on June 8, Billings residents will be asked to vote on a \$17 million bond issue that would be used to build a new Cobb Field stadium, for \$12.5 million, and an aquatic center in the Heights, for \$4.5 million.

The two projects will appear together on the ballot because they are closely related. If a new stadium is built, it would entail the removal of Athletic Park Pool at North 27th Street and Ninth Avenue North.

That's why Mayor Chuck Tooley appointed the Blue Ribbon Committee last year to look at building a new baseball stadium and an aquatic center in the Heights, which does not now have a pool.



The committee came up with preliminary designs and cost estimates for both projects, and the City Council voted in January to accept the recommendations and place the bond issue on the June 8 ballot. If approved, the bonds would cost the owner of a \$135,000 house \$34 a year for the next 15 years.

Plans call for completing the new stadium in time for the 2006 baseball season, and for opening the Skyview Ridge Aquatic Center by the summer of 2006.

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8.

## BALLPARK PREVIEWS

### Cobb Field Replacement / Billings Mustangs / 2008



*(click on the image for a larger version)*

<b>Opening</b>	June 2008
<b>Capacity</b>	3,500
<b>Cost</b>	\$12.5 million
<b>Owner</b>	City of Billings
<b>Architect</b>	HNTB Architecture (Kansas City) and CTA Architects Engineers (Billings)
<b>Dimensions</b>	335L, 410C, 356R
<b>Location</b>	Site of <a href="#">Cobb Field</a> : 901 N. 27th St., Billings



*(click on the image for a larger version)*

***A large concourse invites fans into the ballpark.***

Billings will have a new ballpark for the first time since 1948 -- the year [Cobb Field](#) opened -- next season when its replacement opens. Replacing the venerable [Cobb Field](#) was not an easy decision for team management or city residents (indeed, more than one attempt was made to see if the wooden facility could be saved; the answer was a unanimous no), and it took one attempt at public funding before voters approved a \$12.5 million bond issue in 2006. [Cobb Field](#) is truly a community resource -- besides housing the Billings Mustangs (rookie; Pioneer League) the ballpark also hosts two Legion teams and the Montana State University-Billings baseball team.

As it stands now, the [Cobb Field](#) replacement will be a utilitarian facility, lacking luxury boxes (the final budget didn't allow for them, although construction will include footings for their future installation) and some other amenities found in modern ballparks. Still, architects did manage to preserve one of the best things about [Cobb Field](#) -- the lovely view of the Rimrocks past the outfield fence -- but it would have been nice to see some other decorative echoes of [Cobb Field](#), whether it be a stucco exterior, some real box seats or an old-fashioned grandstand roof. (The color of the masonry in the buildings will be chosen to evoke the Rimrocks, however.) At one time architects discussed the reuse of some [Cobb Field](#) materials into the new ballpark; you can expect some other elements of sustainable design to pop up as we get closer to the beginning of construction.



*(click on the image for a larger version)*

***The street-level view as you approach the ballpark going north on 27th Street.***

However, many of the things wrong with [Cobb Field](#) will be addressed in its replacement. [Cobb Field](#) was built at ground level, and the infield angle makes fielding first base an adventure: much of the time the first baseman looks directly into the sun to catch a throw. The new ballpark's playing field will be skewed about 10 degrees from the current orientation; this will also result in an asymmetrical outfield fence; this gives the first basemen and right fielder a little better angle to avoid staring into the sun. It will also be built closer to 27th Street, a main thoroughfare in downtown Billings, with parking facilities moved to the backside of the ballpark. (Keeping the ballpark downtown was a major triumph in the whole process: some wanted to see the ballpark moved outside of downtown to an area where there is more parking, but the downtown location does add some life to a downtown that could use a shot of adrenaline.) The new ballpark will feature an infield sunk eight feet below street level; this lowers construction costs, helps the facility better meet ADA guidelines (accessible seats can be left at ground level in the back rows of the grandstand) and gives some more sun relief to the fielders.

The playing field will be ringed with a concrete concourse, featuring a press box, concession stands and team facilities. Currently [Cobb Field](#) can't handle groups easily, but the current plan calls for a picnic area in left field. Fans will be able to watch the game from beyond the outfield fence -- something they can't currently do at [Cobb Field](#) -- and a children's play area is planned for a center-field pavilion. Though there's no traditional grandstand roof, the seating area will be covered with polypropylene canopies mounted on steel frames, giving fans relief from sun and rain. Twelve rows of seating will extend all the way down the third-base line and partially up the first-base line, with a berm installed in the left-field corner. The back row of seating will be no more than 32 feet from the field.



As mentioned, the facility doesn't include any luxury boxes. Plans are to add six boxes and a community room after the ballpark opens if finances allow for it. It would be surprising if they weren't built: Mustangs officials say there's demand for the boxes.

The ballpark is budgeted at \$12.5 million -- the amount of the bond issue approved by voters -- but city officials will not end up selling that amount. Over \$2 million in private contributions have been pledged for the facility, including a naming-rights deal that will in all likelihood ensure the [Cobb Field](#) name will be retired when the old ballpark shuts down at the end of the summer.



*(click on the image for a larger version)*

9.

## Documentary filmmaker shooting at Cobb Field

Associated Press

Updated: July 12, 2007, 11:27 AM ET

- [Email](#)
- [Print](#)

BILLINGS, Mont. -- During a visit to his parents' house in Idaho last summer, Craig Lindvahl fell in love with Pioneer League baseball.

He went to a Chukars game in Idaho Falls, and he couldn't help noticing the intensity of the fans, the sense of connection so many of them felt for the team.

"For a lot of people," he said, "it was like, 'These are our boys, this is our team.' I looked around and I said, 'This is what baseball is supposed to be. This is why baseball was invented.'"

Lindvahl, a teacher and documentary filmmaker from Illinois, started thinking that night about his next project -- a film about a day in the life of a minor league ballpark. After doing some research and talking to minor league followers, Lindvahl decided Cobb Field would be the perfect subject for his documentary.

He liked everything he learned about Cobb Field. For one thing, it was built in 1948 and will be demolished this fall to make way for a new stadium. He was also impressed that the Billings Mustangs had been affiliated with the same club, the [Cincinnati Reds](#), for 34 years.

He loved the setting -- the old-fashioned stadium looking out on the sandstone Rims -- and he heard good stories about the many families and individuals who had been dedicated Mustangs fans for years and years. Most of all, he liked the lack of frills and the near-total focus on baseball that was part of the Cobb Field experience.

After spending much of the winter and spring laying the groundwork for the actual filming, Lindvahl and a crew of five arrived in Billings Monday and will stay until Saturday. They will have four cameras filming all facets of three home games against Orem, Utah, Wednesday, Thursday and Friday nights.

They will be filming and interviewing the players, coaches, umpires, the play-by-play announcer, fans, groundskeepers, clubhouse attendant, managers and anyone else they find interesting.

"The film is about 24 hours in the life of this place, but the story is about the people who populate it," Lindvahl said. They won't know which day to focus on until they look at footage from all three game days.

Lindvahl started out as a band teacher in Teutopolis, Ill., who turned into a documentarian after he and students from 10 high schools produced a pair of music videos in 1985. After that, Lindvahl taught himself the craft, producing, writing, filming and composing the music for six documentaries that have been shown on PBS, NBC, CNN and The Learning Channel.

He has won nine Mid America Emmy Awards (regional versions of TV's top prize, given to works that don't get nationwide exposure) and the Studs Terkel Award for contributions to the humanities. He is still an

educator, teaching high school band and a television and film production class in addition to elementary music.

Joe Fatheree, Lindvahl's partner on this and three earlier documentaries, is a high school film teacher in nearby Effingham, Ill., who was named Illinois Teacher of the Year this year. He couldn't be in Billings this week because he was at a conference in Philadelphia.

Mustangs General Manager Gary Roller said he started talking to Lindvahl last fall and was only too happy to open Cobb Field to him.

"It's a great thing for this community and a tremendous opportunity to showcase minor league baseball in Billings," he said.

Lindvahl said he is working with a PBS distributor who will shop the Cobb Field documentary to PBS stations around the country when it is finished, probably next summer. Individual stations choose what to air, he said, and they don't pay for the kinds of documentaries that Lindvahl creates. The only money he makes comes from the sale of videotapes and DVDs.

Not that he minds. Lindvahl said he does a lot of corporate and grant-funded work in order to be able to produce movies "for the love of doing it." He owns all his own equipment and does the editing, writing and composing on his own time.

He usually does the filming by himself, but this week he is being assisted by four former film students and by Tim Fish, a junior high principal in Effingham. Fish said the students, whose expenses are covered but who don't get paid, are getting invaluable experience in film production.

"This has just opened a whole new world to these guys," he said. "How do you put a price on that?"

Austin Brooks, 19, studied film and television for two years under Lindvahl. This fall he'll be entering Southeastern University in Lakeland, Fla., for his second year of communications studies. He said

the best thing about working with Lindvahl is that he operates on a low budget and uses his skills and creativity to compensate for the lack of resources.

"The way he teaches is all hands-on," Brooks said.

Lindvahl said he'd like his latest film to be a present to the city of Billings, a remembrance of a great ballpark in the last year of its life. He also hopes, of course, that it will appeal to people in other parts of the country.

"I like to do documentaries that are uplifting, heartwarming and optimistic, and that make people say, 'Huh. I didn't know that,'" he said.

Lindvahl said he was commissioned a few years ago by the Smithsonian Institution to make a documentary about old barns. He agreed to take on the project only after deciding to focus on the barns not so much as structures, but as "witnesses" to interesting events and human lives. That's the way he sees Cobb Field, as a witness to interesting stories and a window on the community.

He also looks forward to telling the stories of young baseball players, most of whom are playing professional ball for the first time in their lives.

"This is their first chance to say, 'What do I do? I play baseball,'" Lindvahl said.

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