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## Lee County promised 30 years of Red Sox

New complex must be ready before 2013

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### • [View the lease agreement](#)

Lee County Commissioners narrowly agreed Tuesday to a 30-year lease with the Boston Red Sox to keep spring training in Lee County. It's the next step in the county's decision to build the franchise a complex in south Lee County.

The lease passed 3-2 with Commissioners Bob Janes, Ray Judah and Tammy Hall voting in favor. Commissioners Frank Mann and Brian Bigelow voted against.

The 44-page lease is largely based off current agreements between Lee County the Red Sox and Minnesota Twins, said John Yarbrough, the county's hired consultant on the deal. The Twins hold spring training at the Lee County Sports Complex.

The lease does not outline the project cost, which has been estimated around \$80 million.

The quest for a new stadium became public when Sarasota officials announced earlier this year they were making a play to pull the Red Sox out of Lee County. That pushed local officials into overdrive to get a new deal.

The project will be funded in part by Tourist Development Council money. The county will spend up to a cent of the 5-cent tourist bed tax on baseball projects.

The lease spells out details such as concessions and parking revenues which go to the Red Sox. It also discusses the insurance and advertising rights standard in lease agreements. Exactly which companies will have advertisements and handle concessions are not in the agreement.

Three terms are different from past leases:

- It's a 30-year lease, compared to 15 for the Twins. There is no clause allowing the team to buy its way out of the contract. The old lease for the Red Sox runs through 2019, but the club could have bought its way out as early as next year by paying a \$1 million fee.
- The Red Sox will pay \$500,000 per year in rent, compared with the \$300,000 it pays at City of Palms Park. The rent will increase 3 percent every five years. The current agreement has no escalation.
- Lee County will match the money the Red Sox agree to put into a capital improvement fund. On average, the team will contribute \$100,000 per year over the next 30 years to maintain and upgrade the facility. That totals \$6 million between the club and county, which will be put in an interest-bearing account. The Red Sox currently pay \$20,000 per year.

"We recognize this is a big commitment for the county," said Red Sox Chief Operating Officer Mike Dee. "From our point of view, we believe the steps have been taken to make this fair and balanced."

Dee said he and county officials will turn toward interviewing construction managers and hope to have one chosen by the January's end. The team and county will have a specific site identified by June.

That site will be south of Daniels Parkway and north of Bonita Beach Road. It will be at least 80 acres.

Mann said he wants the project to work and having the Red Sox train in Lee County is beneficial to the community. He couldn't, however, support the lease as presented.

"It's a huge imbalance here, it is not something I would vote for myself. I would never enter into a contract like this myself," Mann said.

Yarbrough said the agreement is not perfect, "but it is the best agreement Lee County has done with a baseball team since we have been doing them," Yarbrough said.

Hall said she is "not a kookie baseball fan," but it's not about baseball.

"The Red Sox are a huge economic boost to Lee County," Hall said. "This is a business decision for Lee County."

A state study showed a professional team's economic impact is about \$25 million per year. Sarasota officials hired a consultant who put the Red Sox potential impact on that area at \$46.5 million per year.

Bigelow said he too wants the agreement to work, but he could not vote for it with no third spring training team signed to occupy the the City of Palms Park in Fort Myers.

"I am really worried this field of dreams maybe become a field of nightmares for the City of Palms Park," Bigelow said.

Fort Myers City Councilman Randy Henderson wants to focus on the future of the City of Palms Park.

"Now we can say that deal is done. Good luck, hope you get the money, 30-year deal is good for the county, hope that works out," Henderson said. "Now let's turn our focus to the City of Palms and who's next."

In a news conference later in the day, Yarbrough addressed his talks with other franchises.

"I have not had direct contact with any teams," Yarbrough said. "I have talked to people who have talked to people."

Red Sox owner John Henry had planned to visit commissioners, but had a scheduling conflict and will visit in early January instead, Dee said.

About 50 people, including heads of county departments, showed up for the meeting. Only those representing a group, such as the Estero Chamber of Commerce, spoke about the project.

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