

# Development of Pawtucket soccer stadium underway

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The redevelopment of Pawtucket's Seekonk riverfront into a \$284-million stadium-centered mixed-use complex has been quietly picking up pace.

While Italian soccer fans were cheering their national team's European Championship win, stadium developer Fortuitous Partners was working through some of the finer details of what it will take to bring a professional soccer team to Rhode Island.

They hope their new team in the second-tier of American soccer will kick off in the spring of 2023 and to make that deadline are building the stadium before the other elements of the development.

In June, Fortuitous hired Dimeo Construction to build the 11,000-seat stadium and, according to a project timeline submitted to Pawtucket planning

officials this month, intend to begin construction shortly after Labor Day. Site preparation is already under way.

The 14-acre "Tidewater" properties off of Taft Street were once home to a manufactured gas plant and utility National Grid, which is responsible for cleaning up historic contamination at the site, is preparing to begin work on its part of the project.

National Grid is going to be building a large chunk of the public riverwalk next to the stadium. Environmental remediation and the riverwalk are expected to cost around \$20 million to \$25 million, National Grid spokesman Ted Kresse said Wednesday.

Work on a mixed-use shopping and apartment development on the east bank of the river is slated to start next spring and take around two years to complete.

The east bank development includes its own riverwalk and a planned pedestrian bridge connecting shops, restaurants, office space and 200 apartments to the stadium site.

The soccer stadium itself will be aligned north-south along the Seekonk with its main, two-tiered stand facing east, to the water and away from the glare of the evening sun. The structure is designed so that the team can expand it to 15,000 seats if there is demand.

The field will be artificial turf and capable of hosting other sports such as lacrosse, rugby and American football.

At the north end of the stadium closest to downtown Pawtucket, the plans show a public plaza with grass where fans will gather on game days and farmers markets or art fairs can be held at other times.

On the other side of the plaza Fortuitous plans a mixed-use building with 235 apartments, shops and restaurants looking toward the stadium, plus a 750-space parking garage.

The parking garage is not expected to be built when the stadium opens, so Fortuitous is working on a parking plan for game days that will see most fans park in lots away from the stadium. The only on-site parking will be in a 128-space surface lot meant mostly for the team, staff and select VIPs.

Fortuitous is working with the Rhode Island Public Transit Authority to run a shuttle bus through downtown Pawtucket on game days to lots by the under-construction Pawtucket-Central Falls MBTA commuter rail station and City Hall.

Another shuttle may be deployed to pick fans up at parking lots around McCoy Stadium, which is now mostly empty with professional baseball no longer being played there.

To help fans navigate the different satellite lots, Fortuitous intends to use an app that allows them to buy parking when they get their tickets and provides GPS directions to the correct lot.

The past year has seen shortages and price increases for many building materials, but Fortuitous Project Manager Dan Kroeber said Wednesday that they don't believe it will drive the project over budget.

This past winter, Pawtucket approved zoning changes for the soccer stadium and "Tidewater Landing" project, so Fortuitous only needs site plan review and approval of details such as storm water to move ahead.

The project is being paid for in part with a \$50-million incentive package. That package includes a \$36-million loan to be repaid with new city and state tax revenue collected in and around downtown Pawtucket. And it includes \$14 million in state construction tax credits.

With construction set to begin, Fortuitous is now beginning to hire staff to put the soccer team together.

Kroeber said the team hopes to come up with branding and a name by the end of the year.