

## Nationwide Realty to oversee stadium project

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Franklin County commissioners didn't venture far from the Arena District to select a company to help them build a \$65 million minor league baseball park in that neighborhood.

The commissioners said Tuesday they are beginning contract negotiations with Nationwide Realty Investors for the company to serve as owners representative for the ballpark project.

Nationwide Realty is the developer of the adjacent Arena District, having worked on \$616 million in projects there, including Nationwide Arena, home of the National Hockey League's Columbus Blue Jackets. The firm is the development arm of Columbus-based Nationwide.

The stadium will be called Huntington Park as part of a \$12 million naming rights deal the county signed this year with Huntington Bancshares Inc. (NASDAQ:HBAN).

The stadium will be built at the northwest corner of Nationwide Boulevard and Neil Avenue. The commissioners want the stadium, which carries an estimated price tag of \$65 million, to open in 2008.

Until then, the ballpark's principal tenant, the county-owned Columbus Clippers, will continue to play at Cooper Stadium, also owned by the county.

Nationwide Realty was one of eight companies that pursued the owners rep contract. Once on the job, it will supervise construction and be responsible for seeing the project completed on time and within budget.

Commissioners said they will seek certain assurances in negotiations with Nationwide, including that the ballpark be accommodating for families and affordable. They also want final responsibilities for cost overruns clearly spelled out.

Nationwide Realty will waive its fees for its owners representative services as a contribution to the project, said Michelle Chippas, spokeswoman for the Columbus-based company.

"It's what we wanted to do for the good of the community, the good of the team and good of the fans," she said.

Nationwide executives have said they see ballpark games and events as another amenity for the neighboring Arena District, boosting business for restaurants and providing entertainment for those who reside or work in the area.

The Clippers' slate of Triple A games from April through August will bring fans to the district at a time when the Blue Jackets' season is mostly on hiatus.

"The timing with the Blue Jackets (schedule) is perfect," Chippas said.