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WALK-THROUGH METAL DETECTORS IN FIRST BATCH OF CAPITAL IMPROVEMENTS TO ALLENTOWN'S PPL CENTER

ALLENTOWN — By the time the puck drops on the Lehigh Valley Phantoms' third season in Allentown in October, spectators will walk through metal detectors to enter PPL Center rather than being screened by workers using hand-held wands.

The new security devices, at a cost of \$130,000, are among nearly \$1.3 million in arena capital improvements approved Tuesday by the Allentown Neighborhood Improvement Zone Development Authority.

The expenditures include a variety of upgrades to the 2-year-old facility, some of which have already been made, such as new concourse flooring and a goal review system for hockey games that is required by the American Hockey League.

The walk-through metal detectors — which should be in use starting in September — will improve security and speed entrance to the arena, said Gunnar Fox, PPL Center's general manager.

"The way the entertainment industry is moving and the sports industry is moving, the way the world is moving, we are trying to be as proactive as possible," said Fox, who works for arena management firm Spectra by Comcast Spectacor.

Spectators will first pass through the standing metal detectors, he said. Only if they set off the detectors will they be subject to wand screening by security personnel. He stressed the move is not a reaction to any specific security issue.

The walk-through magnetometers are required by all the major sports leagues and will be key to attracting future big-league events such as the National Hockey League preseason game between the Philadelphia Flyers and New Jersey Devils in September.

Under its lease with the Allentown Neighborhood Improvement Zone Development Authority, BDH Development, which owns the Lehigh Valley Phantoms, is required to deposit \$500,000 a year into a fund designed to handle arena maintenance.

But it can't spend the money without the board's approval, which ANIZDA granted for the first time Tuesday, retroactively covering two years' worth of improvements and expenditures in the third year of the lease, which begins in September.

BDH's lease devotes several pages to how the money can be used. It specifies that the money can't be spent on fixes to equipment that is covered under warranty or damage that could have been prevented by prudent security or customary maintenance.

A good chunk of the first outlay was spent on equipment and other improvements that couldn't be shoehorned into the facility's construction budget or were nixed to keep the arena financially on track.

Nearly a third of the total is devoted to safety and security, including \$250,000 in security cameras.

Other expenditures include \$16,000 in additional speakers for the upper suites, \$20,000 in security staff radios, \$18,590 in improvements to the party deck and press level, and \$175,000 worth of signage.

Fox said BDH and its management company Spectra have come up with a 30-year plan designed to keep the arena current and well-maintained throughout its life.

The plan will help PPL Center "stay relevant, stay up to date in security requirements and trends that are coming up and to stay positioned as a first class facility of our size in a market of our size and within the American Hockey League," Fox said.

BDH officials negotiated the initial list over more than a year with ANIZDA staff and board members, but board members agreed future years' expenditures would be dealt with at subcommittee meetings in advance of the money being spent.

"It's our intention is to have a subcommittee meet once or twice a year, in advance, from now on to review this stuff before it comes to the board," board Chairman Sy Traub said.

Board member John Williams suggested setting up an expenditure review process to make sure the money is being spent as intended.

The board debated the issue without much of its support staff, because of a change to state law that was enacted during the state's budget process that requires the authority to sever all connections with the city of Allentown.

The law has wide-ranging implications for the city and ANIZDA. The city, for example receives \$350,000 a year from the authority to cover administrative costs, primarily a portion of the salaries of several city workers who oversee day-to-day operations.

They include Shannon Calluori, the city's interim director of Community and Economic Development, who has been serving as ANIZDA's interim executive director.

Sen. Pat Browne, R-Lehigh, who wrote the law that created the NIZ also authored the change, saying the authority was always intended to be an independent entity, not an arm of the city. He said the change had nothing to do with the federal investigation into alleged corruption at Allentown City Hall.

The board authorized Traub to begin the work of setting up an office for ANIZDA and signing documents necessary to execute a lease or handle other financial tasks needed to keep the authority operating until it hires a staff.

"You are going to have to rebuild your staff so we can continue to function," Jerry Frank, the authority's independent solicitor, told the board.