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TIM SULLIVAN

Developer sees Qualcomm site as an option for the Chargers

By Tim Sullivan, Union-Tribune Columnist
2:00 a.m. May 20, 2009

They said it couldn't be done and, frankly, they're still not convinced that it can. But the San Diego Chargers are again evaluating a stadium proposal for the Qualcomm site.

They're leery, but they're listening, still hopeful some bright idea can capture the imagination of the community and, in turn, ramp up their revenues. With their Chula Vista initiative short on traction, and a Los Angeles alternative still in its theoretical stage, Team Spanos has little incentive to reject Perry Dealy's plan as preposterous.

It promises, however, to be a mighty tough sell.

What Dealy and his River Waterfront Development Team envision is a construction project of epic scale, one that resembles the Chargers' original proposal in much the same way King Kong compares to Curious George.

It calls for some 5,000 residential units, 3.5 million square feet of office space, 500,000 square feet of specialty retail, 1,000 hotel rooms, 500 units of San Diego State student housing, 100,000 square feet of SDSU classroom and office space, 30 acres allotted to parkland and, conceivably, an eventual bullet train station.

Plus, one nifty new NFL stadium.

"It was a little frustrating for a lot of us that there wasn't a good location in the region that the city of San Diego could see as a (stadium) option," said Dealy, former president of Manchester Development. "If Chula Vista doesn't work, wouldn't it be a shame if we read in the papers that the Chargers left town because they didn't know where else to go?"

"We have a concept. That's all it is. We're still fine-tuning some of the assumptions, starting to get some feedback to see if it has the ability to go to the next level. . . . It's such a big concept that it's going to take some time to work with the stakeholders (but) if you get leadership behind it and you refine it, we think it could be a viable option for the region."

In the absence of tangible headway, and in the presence of mounting anxiety concerning the Chargers' future, even the most outlandish stadium proposal will find an ardent audience. With the economy in tatters, and taxpayers feeling unusually pinched, enriching professional sports franchises through any form of public subsidy is sure to rouse staunch resistance.

The trick will be to cobble together a constituency that can see a Greater Good beyond NFL greed. The trick Perry Dealy is attempting is to convince people that the Qualcomm site can be declared a redevelopment zone to help divert tax revenues toward a stadium and its infrastructure; that San Diego citizens will consent to adding 25 percent more office space to that site than is contained in the Empire State Building; and that the project will transform the Qualcomm property from a cash drain to a profit center that could net the city between \$200 million and \$300 million over a 20-year span.

Say this for Dealy: He aims high.

"I don't know about the details of the plan," County Supervisor Dianne Jacob said yesterday. "But I'm delighted that there's interest and activity. At least it's a concept that keeps alive that there's a possibility of a new stadium on the Qualcomm site. It will begin some discussions, some very important discussions, and we'll see where it goes."

The Chargers are naturally eager to stimulate those discussions, but experience tells them that the idea will likely lead



Chargers spokesman Mark Fabiani on Wednesday called a new proposal for the Qualcomm stadium site "a complete waste of time," citing numerous issues. - John R. McCutchen/Union-Tribune



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nowhere. Having abandoned their own Qualcomm site proposal as no longer viable because of increased construction costs and declining real estate values, they view Dealy's plans as politically unrealistic and potentially claustrophobic.

"The Chargers would not support such an enormously dense project," Chargers spokesman Mark Fabiani said. "We have worked hard to strengthen our ties with the community and we won't be doing anything to spoil those relationships."

Dealy responded to Fabiani's reservations by saying, "He hasn't seen the drawings," and says his project can be scaled back somewhat and still "pencil out." Still, the current blueprint calls for a cluster of 10 office buildings as tall as 25 stories. Assuming those offices get occupied, that's a lot of additional traffic along Friars Road. Some of it, presumably, would need to traverse Donna Frye's dead body.

"We're open to any and all ideas for keeping the team in San Diego," Fabiani said. "But because we spent more than four years and close to \$10 million studying the Qualcomm site, we understand how difficult this kind of project will be to pull off on that site."

Dealy, of course, is no novice at big deals. He was a party to the expansion of both Qualcomm Stadium and the Convention Center, and to the Manchester Pacific Gateway project and the Grand Del Mar resort. He has broadened his base in this project by partnering with such prominent players as former Padres President Charles Black and David Watson, who chaired former Mayor Dick Murphy's Task Force on Chargers Issues.

In fairness, Dealy is still a few weeks away from unveiling the full extent of his vision. It would be wrong (and rude) to dismiss his proposal before it can be formally presented. Besides, it's not as if there's some better idea already on the table.

Chula Vista is on hold, indefinitely. Two other county parcels are potentially in play, Fabiani said, but neither owner has seen fit to surface just yet.

Asked to assess his optimism level yesterday, Dealy said he was at 5 on a 10-point scale. From a stadium standpoint, that's progress.

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I'm glad you mentioned Detroit. They also have a state of the art football stadium...right next to their state of the art baseball stadium. Not to mention the Palace at Auburn Hills for NBA basketball and Joe Louis Arena for the NHL.

Amazing how that city which is barely alive can support four professional sports. Can build stadiums for teams that never win and San Diego can't put a deal together to keep the Chargers.

There hasn't been leadership in this town with vision since Pete Wilson.

Finally, what will happen to the Qualcomm site after the Chargers leave? You guessed it, redevelopment. Except without a stadium there will be enough room to build an additional 5000 residential units and more hotels and offices. No matter how you spell it, Mission Valley is going to be crowded. Just maybe, now is the time to tie an infrastructure deal to the redevelopment package, get some stimulus money, put some people to work and build a stadium. If we don't get some leadership with vision soon, San Diego will always just be a pit stop on the way to T.J.

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