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Move Chargers to Del Mar Fairgrounds



By George Mullen

The San Diego Chargers are in need of a new home. Coincidentally, an out of town distressed real estate owner (the State of California) is suddenly looking to sell the Del Mar Fairgrounds in order to raise desperately needed cash.

A golden opportunity is before us. A marriage made in Heaven if you will.

Having stared down at the Del Mar Fairgrounds from my home everyday for over 15 years, it is obvious to me that this may be the perfect location for a new state of the art Charger stadium. The site is 406-acres (Petco Park is 18-acres), has close and easy highway access, ample parking, adjacent to Del Mar's beautiful beaches and the San Dieguito River, several appealing locations within the site to build a stadium, and the site is well tested with large crowds. The location is familiar and appealing to county residents because most have attended the County Fair and/or Horse Races numerous

times. And since NFL football games are almost exclusively on Sundays, there won't be any added stress on Highway 5 during work day traffic hours.

With the Amtrak-Coaster train station only one mile from the Fairgrounds, this site is an easy location to reach via public transportation for San Diegans. Furthermore, a North County location with easy train access will put the Chargers in the enviable position of drawing a multitude of football fans from highly populated Los Angeles and Orange County, as the Del Mar Horse Races have done for decades. A South Bay Charger stadium would eliminate such an opportunity. (Note: Los Angeles does not currently have an NFL team, and an established Charger team in North County may competitively scare away owners from launching one.)

There are multiple revenue streams available here besides just the Chargers. With only eight Sunday Charger home games a year, the annual San Diego County Fair and Del Mar Horse Races could easily continue at the site, as well as the numerous weekend events and concerts. (The site supposedly generates nearly \$95 million in annual revenue already.) With a bit of creativity, the Charger stadium could be built as a multi-purpose complex with a state of the art Convention Center. Furthermore, the western tracks of the property have prime ocean views and are alongside some of the most beautiful beaches in the world - this area is ripe for hotel and/or condominium development and would be infinitely more appealing (and priced accordingly) to potential overnight visitors and home buyers than the same in Mission Valley.

In these difficult economic times, the hurting hoteliers and retailers of Del Mar, Solana Beach and adjacent San Diego should welcome the influx of potential new business and overnight visitors that would come with this facility. Likewise, local residents would see strong home value appreciation with a surge of highly paid professionals looking for permanent housing, plus wealthy Los Angeles football fans seeking nearby weekend beach get away homes. As such, the cities of Del Mar and Solana Beach would see an upward spike in property and sales tax revenue.

Some environmentalists will scream bloody murder over this, but don't they always. Such protests are a non-starter because I am suggesting a site within the existing used part of the 406-acre facility, not in the protected areas. And the fact that the whole valley is a river basin is no different than Mission Valley in that regard. (The most favorable stadium location may be where the Del Mar Arena and Surfside Race Place currently are, these facilities could easily be incorporated into the new super structure.)

Del Mar's notorious NIMBY residents will no doubt come out of the woodwork on this one, but don't they always. It is important to note that many of these NIMBY residents are the same ones who relentlessly complain about the Fair and Horse Races with respect to traffic, riff raff and such – even though every single one of them moved to Del Mar knowing full well that the Fair and Horse Races have been staples of this community for over 70 years.

The Chargers and other serious business minded entities (Gaylord Entertainment, etc.) should seriously consider this golden opportunity - either with an outright purchase of the property, or possibly a public-private revenue sharing partnership. A distressed seller like the State of California hints at the opportunity of getting a dirt cheap price, along with the possibility of business and development guarantees. Now is the time to strike a deal, before a reckless Federal bailout of California is launched.

Everyone wins at this location - the State of California, the Chargers, the fans, the local businesses and hotels, the nearby cities and residents, the city of San Diego, and even the football fans in Los Angeles and Orange County. The Super Bowl will likely become a repetitive event at this world class beach location as well.

It doesn't get much better than this folks.

About the Author: Mullen has been in the investment management business in downtown San Diego since 1987. He is an artist and writer as well and his website is www.StudioRevolution.com. He resides in Del Mar.