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A look at alternative locations for Warriors arena

By **John Coté** Updated 10:14 pm, Saturday, December 28, 2013



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One of the possible sites for the Warriors is the area atop Moscone Center near children's spots.

A common refrain from opponents of the Golden State Warriors' plan to build a \$1 billion arena complex on San Francisco's waterfront is: "We support an arena, just not on that site."

Opponents of the team's proposed 18,000-seat overwater arena on Piers 30-32 just south of the Bay Bridge - and condominiums, a hotel and retail space on a parking lot across the Embarcadero - say it's just the wrong spot. An arena can not comply with the public trust doctrine governing waterfront development in the state, which requires public benefits and maritime use, and San Francisco has far better inland locations, opponents say.

The suggestions range from demolishing the historic Bill Graham Civic Auditorium or part of Moscone Center to having an arena replace Candlestick Park after it gets torn down in about a year.

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Many of those alternative proposals are impractical at best, city officials say.

Tearing down Bill Graham Civic Auditorium, a Beaux Arts edifice built in 1915, would require all manner of government approvals to strip its landmark status, something Planning Director John Rahaim has never witnessed happen.

"That's a tall order," Rahaim said.

Such arguments don't deter arena opponents.

"That's like saying Candlestick is a landmark building," scoffed Quentin Kopp, a retired judge and former city supervisor. "Civic Auditorium is nothing."

And while city officials might balk at demolishing part of Moscone Center as a huge waste of money and a political nonstarter, those fighting the waterfront location note it could cost up to \$170 million to rebuild Piers 30-32.

"You can build anything anywhere," said Lawrence Stokus, a retired mortgage broker and arena opponent who rents an apartment across from the piers. "It's just a question of whether you want to do it and pay for it."

The city and the team are considering two other sites in the environmental impact report being prepared: Seawall Lot 337, which the Giants use as their main parking lot, and the site of the former Mirant Corp.-owned Potrero Power Plant.

City officials, though, say the best option is clear.

"There's pretty broad agreement that a multipurpose venue like this is needed in the city," said Ken Rich, Mayor Ed Lee's director of development. "When you start looking at possible locations, and you take into account transit access, physical fit and the idea of not displacing future housing locations, Piers 30-32 rise quickly to the top of the list."

It's the most publicly vetted option and it has distinct advantages, including a waterfront location. Lee, who once referred to the arena as "my legacy project," has likened the proposed venue to the Sydney

Opera House.

Its proximity to transit and downtown are major advantages, and it would provide public access on a dilapidated pier that is now a parking lot. A lookout platform high on the arena would offer a new destination with sweeping views. Designers say the new pier would be seismically safe and meet sea-level-rise guidelines.

It's also the location where the Warriors want to build, much of it on their own dime, and it would bring an NBA team - plus the benefits of an arena - to a city that has neither.

The up-front cost to the city would essentially be met by giving the team a 2.3-acre lot across the Embarcadero appraised at about \$30 million a few years ago but now probably worth more, and use of the piers. All other city contributions for the development would come from revenue generated by the project, according to a tentative deal.

Rebuilding the piers could cost \$170 million, and the city would be obligated to reimburse the Warriors up to \$120 million from the project's revenue, including the sale of the city-owned waterfront lot and annual rent credits on the pier of about \$2 million. Costs for providing traffic officers, police, cleanup crews and expanded transit service during events have yet to be sorted out.

An arena 125 feet high would block Bay Bridge views from parts of the Embarcadero and for some neighbors. Rebuilding the piers by putting new pilings in the bay would be disruptive to the environment, although the old pilings would be removed.

Traffic in the area is already congested, and adding an 18,000-seat arena could create gridlock, especially when events coincide with a Giants game. The condo tower and hotel across the Embarcadero that are planned as part of the development would add congestion and occupy land that some opponents want used for affordable housing.

Transportation is both a great advantage and great disadvantage of the site.

It is less than a mile to BART, the Ferry Building, the Caltrain station at Fourth and King streets and the planned Transbay Transit Center. Officials hope most people will take these methods and walk or use local transit the rest of the way to the arena. Pedestrians along the Embarcadero don't have to worry about intersections. Muni already stops nearby, and new ferry and water taxi landings are planned for the arena site. The key would be increasing transit service, which requires money, and persuading patrons not to drive. A planned 500-space garage on the pier would be for VIPs only.

There are a number of other sites being proposed, each with their pros and cons:

Giants Parking Lot A / Seawall Lot 337

Pros: Once described by former Mayor Gavin Newsom as a "natural" fit for an arena, the site is near Caltrain and Muni stops. The under-construction Central Subway would provide transit from the Union Square area. The site wouldn't entail building over water, which would alleviate much of the

opposition from environmental groups. It has enough room to accommodate an arena, and the city owns it.

Cons: City has already signed an exclusive negotiating agreement with the Giants to develop the 16-acre site, and the team plans to essentially build a neighborhood there, including housing for 2,000 residents and office and retail for 7,000 workers. If the city backs out, that could get politically complicated. It would also mean less housing in a city that needs more, because Piers 30-32 couldn't accommodate the type of high-rise development the Giants are proposing, including a mix of five or six buildings of varying heights, with two or three taller than 300 feet.

Transportation: Muni and Caltrain are close, but BART and ferries are significantly farther away. For cars, Interstate 280 is closer than it is to Piers 30-32.

Former Mirant power plant site, 1201 Illinois St.

Pros: Large enough to accommodate an arena. An arena would not displace housing, because none is planned for the site, which would require cleanup of soil contaminated by toxic chemicals.

Cons: Private company, NRG, owns the site and would have to agree to a deal. Distant from city center and transit options.

Transportation: Muni's T-Third line runs nearby and Caltrain is fairly close, but no BART or ferry connections. Increases incentive to drive.

Candlestick Point / former Hunters Point Naval Shipyard

Pros: Plenty of space for an arena. Could be an economic engine for the lower-income communities nearby.

Cons: Far from city center, making it impractical for conventions and other events. Poor transit access, forcing people into their cars. Placing it here would require renegotiating an agreement with the developer, Lennar Urban, and would displace housing planned for the site.

Transportation: Caltrain and a single Muni rail line are only somewhat close. No BART or other regional access. A bus rapid transit system for the planned housing, retail and other developments is years away from being started.

Caltrain station yard and surrounding area

(Different options, including area bounded by Berry, Hooper and Seventh streets)

Pros: Three blocks from Caltrain and Muni T-line. If I-280 overpasses are torn down, one proposal for channeling cars onto surface streets would funnel them right toward the possible arena site.

Cons: There isn't room for an arena, and the city doesn't control the site, including a proposed plot that is used by garbage and recycling collection company Recology. Other areas couldn't fit an arena unless Caltrain tracks are reconfigured or placed underground, an expensive endeavor that at best is

years away. Tearing down the I-280 off-ramps, which could improve car access to the site, is an expensive idea that may never happen.

Transportation: Close to Caltrain and Muni, but far from BART and ferries.

Moscone Center

(The area that includes the Children's Creativity Museum, playground, carousel and Yerba Buena Ice Skating and Bowling Center)

Pros: Downtown location in transit-rich environment.

Cons: Political outrage from residents over demolishing a playground and other frequently used children's facilities in an area with few, although backers of this idea say the amenities could be rebuilt around and on top of an arena. Expensive engineering problem to demolish facilities and then build an arena on top of the underground convention space. Construction would force cancellation of conventions, which are vital to the city's economy. About \$1.8 billion in local economic activity comes from Moscone Center annually from conventions, including Dreamforce and Oracle OpenWorld, about one-fifth of the city's tourism economy, according to city reports. City is already in the midst of a \$500 million expansion of Moscone Center.

Transportation: Great access to Muni and BART lines on Market Street, as well as Central Subway and Transbay Transit Center. No ferry access. Cars would be problematic.

Bill Graham Civic Auditorium

Pros: Central Civic Center location in transit-rich environment. City owns the property.

Cons: While college basketball games have been played in the auditorium, the site is too narrow for a modern NBA arena. Demolishing a landmark Beaux Arts structure built in 1915 would cause an outcry from preservationists and require government approval.

Transportation: Close BART and Muni access. No ferry or Caltrain access. Long walk to Transbay Transit Center.

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