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Carmen Policy: Santa Clara stadium more and more likely

JK Dineen
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The pending $70 million sale of the Great America Amusement park to JMA Ventures and the San Francisco 49ers removes a significant hurdle for the NFL team's proposed stadium in Santa Clara, said former Niners General Manager Carmen Policy.

"They were able to take one potential challenge and set it aside," said Policy, who has pushed for an alternative stadium site in the Hunters Point Shipyard. "The joint venture (with JMA) eliminates an issue the 49ers would have had to deal with in terms of ongoing litigation and other complications that would have come up."

The park's current owner, Cedar Fair LP, had sued the city of Santa Clara and the city's redevelopment agency in April 2010, alleging an environmental impact report on the stadium did not properly address traffic concerns. Not only will the purchase of the Great America property end that litigation, the parking proceeds from the Great America lot could also generate revenue for the team.

"Now I think with some serious luck and some very creative financing opportunities and an attractive win and loss record, the Niners might be able to get that stadium built as a one team stadium."

But the No. 1 challenge -- how the team will finance the new $937 million stadium -- remains very much up in the air, Policy added. The Niners have sold $138 million in luxury suites for proposed stadium. The recent 10-year collective bargaining agreement between NFL owners and players provides some additional financing for new stadiums, an estimated $100 million to $125 million a year. But to obtain financial help form the league the team will have to sell NFL executives on a one-team stadium, rather than one that accommodates both the 49ers and the Oakland Raiders. And if the 49ers do get league financing for a one-team stadium, it's highly unlikely that the Raiders would get help as well.

"I can't imagine the league subsidizing two new stadiums in Northern California," said Policy.

And Policy is convinced that Oakland will not provide public support for a Raiders stadium.

"You have to understand the politics and the appearances of trying to build a sports stadium or arena with public subsidy in a city were police officers are being laid off and firefighters are being furloughed," said Policy. "It just doesn't ring well."

Of course, Policy still thinks the Hunters Point Shipyard is a better site for the Niners and encourages San Francisco and shipyard developer Lennar to preserve the option as long as possible. Lennar, which is in the early stages of developing 10,000 units of housing at the old shipyard, has said it it would preserve a site for the 49ers for several more years.

"It's not costing the city anything to keep the option open," he said.

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