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Subject:	HPS/49ers Stadium news clip 28JUL11
Date:	Thursday, July 28, 2011 8:02:38 AM

49ers stadium in San Francisco still in play, say backers

By: Dan Schreiber
SF Examiner
07/28/11 4:00 AM

As a decade of peace came to pass this week in the NFL, new opportunities opened for financing new stadiums. Yet the 49ers promptly announced that the team is still moving at full speed on its proposed new home in Santa Clara.

But proponents of keeping the team in its namesake city have their own basic message: "Don't forget about us."

A new stadium in San Francisco has long been part of the greater development plans to build 10,500 new homes on the shuttered U.S. Navy base at the Hunters Point Naval Shipyard. But the 49ers' lease in the current Candlestick Park runs out in 2014, and the team's stated goal is to be in Santa Clara by the start of the 2015 season.

Although both the 49ers and the Oakland Raiders say there are no solid plans for a shared stadium, the NFL has been amenable to that in the recent past. At the New Meadowlands in New Jersey, a joint home for the New York Jets and New York Giants was a required precursor to the NFL loan that made it possible.

Carmen Policy, a former 49ers president, is now a consultant for Lennar, the company looking to execute the massive redevelopment. He said a new stadium in San Francisco would include a spectacular view of downtown, a far cry from the banal scenery in the South Bay.

"It just makes more sense," Policy said, adding that all the planning hurdles for the site are addressed and the fans of both Bay Area teams would be better served by a site farther north.

Along with a $100 million commitment from Lennar on construction, those so-called planning "entitlements" have been the main selling point by proponents in San Francisco. But the site's downside has long been the difficulty fans have getting to and from that isolated corner of The City. And if often-unpredictable Raiders owner Al Davis gulps down some serious pride and eventually agrees to sharing a stadium in San Francisco, the site would get double the games.

The San Francisco Municipal Transportation Agency, anticipating the new Hunters Point population, is pursuing a fix that could also address the slow state of egress on game days. Peter Albert, manager of urban planning initiatives, said the SFMTA is close to securing a prestigious $120 million federal grant to better link the southeastern corner of The City with rapid-transit buses and widen Harney Way, which connects with U.S. Highway 101.

Albert said the transportation plan will be pursued regardless of what the 49ers decide to do, which is not much in San Francisco, based on what team President Jed York has been saying lately about a bright future down south.

"Jed made it very clear we are moving forward with our plan here in Santa Clara," said Steve Weakland, 49ers spokesman. "Having a 10-year agreement in place will help create stability and move forward with financing plans."

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