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2015 deadline for Niners' choice on Hunters Point
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The San Francisco 49ers may already have gone to Silicon Valley by 2015. But if not, that looks like the cut-off date for the team to say yes or no on the city's proposal to build a waterfront stadium as part of a redeveloped Hunters Point shipyard.

The team is focusing its money and efforts on a June ballot measure in Santa Clara, where residents will vote on whether to build a publicly subsidized stadium next to the team's practice facility. But San Francisco officials and development partner Lennar Urban are forging ahead with plans to include -- up to a point -- a stadium as part of a transformation of the city's southeast waterfront. The plan includes 10,500 homes, a "greentech" hub and retail built up over 20 years

Michael Cohen, San Francisco's economic development chief, says the city is committed to keeping the Hunters Point option available to the 49ers for "a reasonable period of time," which includes how long construction can proceed without needing the land slated for the stadium.

"We think that's around the four- or five-year time frame," Cohen said as the Planning Commission prepares on Thursday to start considering approvals for the bulk of the project.

San Francisco stadium backers question whether the team can get financing for a $937 million Santa Clara stadium without selling a stake in the football club, even if voters there approve a plan that calls for a $114 million public subsidy.

"They may very well have success with the voters, but that's when the heavy lifting really begins," said former team President Carmen Policy, now a Lennar-funded consultant advising Mayor Gavin Newsom. "That's only the beginning of the road of toil and drudgery."

Another hurdle is a lawsuit by Deborah Bress, who unsuccessfully ran for Santa Clara mayor in 1998. Bress sued the city on March 12 over the June ballot language, saying it violates state election law and doesn't accurately describe the stadium plan's cost.

Things could also scuttle San Francisco's plan, including environmental opposition to a proposed bridge over Yosemite Slough that would be critical to game-day access.

The Niners' lease at Candlestick Park runs through the 2012 season, and the team has an option to renew for at least five more years, taking it through 2017. Team officials say they hope to have a 68,500-seat stadium built in Santa Clara by the start of the 2014 season. And if Santa Clara doesn't work out, team President Jed York told our colleagues Matier & Ross in December that Oakland would be the fallback option.

Posted By: John Coté (Email) | March 24 2010 at 05:05 PM

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