

Industry plans to start grading for potential NFL stadium site

By Jason Henry, San Gabriel Valley Tribune
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INDUSTRY >> The first real groundwork on a site possibly slated for an NFL stadium may start as early as January, according to city officials.

The city's former redevelopment agency agreed to spend \$172 million installing the basic infrastructure when it leased the property to developer Ed Roski Jr., the billionaire head of Majestic Realty Co.

The lease requires the city to build the infrastructure, regardless of whether the stadium proceeds, according to City Manager Kevin Radecki.

"Under that lease, there is an obligation to put in the infrastructure," Radecki said. "At a certain point, (the developer) will have to decide which direction they want to go."

Roski could not be reached for comment as he is out of the country, according to his assistant. She said he would like to speak about the stadium project but could not until December.

Roski announced his plans to build a state-of-the-art, \$800 million stadium and bring an NFL team back to Los Angeles in 2008, but shovels have not yet penetrated the dirt at the site off Grand Avenue near the interchange of the 60 and 57 freeways.

Gov. Arnold Schwarzenegger even threw his weight behind the project. He came to Industry in late October of 2009 and signed a bill that exempted the development from parts of the state's environmental review process.

The dissolution of redevelopment agencies largely contributed to the delay in establishing the infrastructure, according to Radecki.

"We had to get a ruling from the Department of Finance that it was an enforceable obligation," he said.

An enforceable obligation means a city must follow through with arrangements entered into by its redevelopment agency before the dissolution. The Department of Finance decided in February that Industry's lease agreement with Roski constituted an enforceable obligation, according to its website.

Four years after Schwarzenegger's visit, the "shovel-ready" project finally may get its start, though perhaps not in the way Los Angeles NFL fans have hoped.

The city previously approved two uses for the site, giving it the green light as an NFL stadium and as an industrial-commercial center, according to City Engineer John Ballas. The installation

of the infrastructure complies with both uses; the grading does not necessarily signal that Los Angeles will get a football team, Ballas stressed.

“We’re not aware of any team or arrangement, and we wouldn’t be because that movement would have to be done relatively quickly,” Ballas said. “The former development agency has an obligation to rough grade the site and install the infrastructure, and that’s independent of what they choose to build up there.”

The first phase of that development, expected to cost \$7 million, could start as early as January once the city receives the go-ahead from the state Department of Finance, Ballas said.

“It’s called rough grading,” Ballas said of the first phase. “You fill in the valleys and you cut the tops off the hills until you have a level top surrounded by slopes.”

The city’s lease agreement ultimately requires it to perform rough grading and landscaping, as well as establish streets, storm drains, electrical services and water systems.

“We’re doing the infrastructure and creating one rough grade site and then turning it over to them,” Ballas said.

If Roski chooses to move forward with a stadium — or a commercial site — it is up to him to make the necessary adjustments to the infrastructure, Ballas said.

The start of work on a stadium would initiate the terms of settlement agreements made with neighboring cities Walnut and Diamond Bar. Diamond Bar would receive a \$5 million first payment of an overall \$20 million settlement when grading permits are issued specifically for a stadium, according to the agreement.

“We’re just sitting back and waiting to see,” said Walnut City Manager Rob Wishner.

The NFL remains mum about a return to Los Angeles and has not publicly backed Roski’s project or a rival downtown stadium proposal by the Anschutz Entertainment Group.

A number of teams have been linked with possible moves to Los Angeles, including the San Diego Chargers, the St. Louis Rams and the Oakland Raiders, according to multiple news sources. All three have openings in their contracts that could allow a move. Raiders owner Mark Davis told San Jose Mercury News sports columnist Tim Kawakami in August that Los Angeles was on his mind.

“An opportunity for us to get a new stadium is always on my mind,” he told Kawakami.

NFL Commissioner Roger Goodell said at the Oct. 8 Fall League Meeting that the NFL does want to return to Los Angeles.

“It’s imperative that we do it successfully if we do,” he said at the time. “We don’t have that solution right now, but we know there are millions of fans there who would like us to get back there as a franchise, and we would like to do that. The stadium is a key component of that. It’s a foundation for that, and we haven’t found the right solution for it yet.”

The NFL has no preference for a stadium, he said.

“Everyone likes to say this site or that site is the preferred site,” Goodell said. “We want a site that works, we want a site that’s going to produce that success that we talked about, and that’s the ultimate objective.”