

New firm wants to play ball at VC Fairgrounds



A mockup of what the Ventura County Fairgrounds could look like if Pacific Sports Group receives the approval to renovate the area. (courtesy photo)

IN THIS ARTICLE

[Latest news](#)

Topic

[Jorge Mercado](#)

Author

BY [JORGE MERCADO](#) FRIDAY, DECEMBER 23RD, 2022

Baseball could be returning to Ventura, brought on by an entire revamp of the Ventura County Fairgrounds.

Founded by Los Angeles lawyer Robert Young, Pacific Sports Group is a firm that has its eyes set on completely updating the Ventura County Fairgrounds by 2029, with a plan that would cost an estimated \$319.8 million.

The plans would include a buildout of a new 7,500-seat stadium for a minor league baseball team while also completely rebuilding nearly every facility so that the fairgrounds can generate activity and revenue throughout the year.

“It clearly is in need of something and that’s being kind,” Young told the Business Times.

“It’s in disrepair and I believe our proposal points the fairgrounds in the right direction and is the answer. Not only does it improve the fairgrounds itself, but it gives them further space for their venues and new convention halls, larger arena, as well as a stadium that can serve as a core function.”

The Ventura County Fairgrounds is 63 acres beachside site with large parts of it going unused most of the year. Many of the buildings are also in dire need of repair.

There are 52 fairgrounds in the state, and the Ventura County Fairgrounds was the only one in the state to not receive federal funding given to each fairground during the COVID-19 pandemic, Richard Conrad, the CEO of Pacific Sports Group, told the Business Times.

“It’s so run down and it’s beyond repair, so they didn’t want to throw good money at a bad situation,” he said.

Still, at least for the time being, any hope of the group's project being approved is currently on hold.

In an October meeting where Pacific Sports Group presented its plans, the Fairgrounds Board of Directors unanimously decided to not move forward with the project.

Some members felt the project would take away from the goal of what the fairgrounds are supposed to be.

"The project is way too much. I think it kind of relegates the fair and the livestock to the back of the bus," Dan Long, chair of the marketing committee, said during the meeting.

"I see this becoming more of a sports complex than an ag resource."

Other board members, including Long, all agreed that repairs need to happen at the fairgrounds, but did not think moving forward with Pacific Sports Group's plans was the right move now.

"We should take a shot at fixing things before we sell out to some big corporation," Long said.

The group has not lost hope yet, however.

Both Young and Conrad said the board did not hear the full pitch, adding that a \$25,000 fee they paid nearly a year ago entitles them to make the complete proposal to board directors and community members, which should take place around Feb.

"Something new, change, it's always scary but I am reminded of what Robert Kennedy said 'Some people see things as they are and say why. I see things as they can be and say why not,'" Young said.

"These fairgrounds, we the people can make this into just a wonderful, wonderful venue to enjoy all year round and not just 10 days of the year, while the remainder of the year, the property remains foul, decrepit, and deteriorating. I don't think it's a reflection of the great city of Ventura."

Conrad believes having the full backing of the community will also be crucial. Before the October meeting, the group did not release any information to the public.

This time around, Conrad is getting all the information about the project out to as many people as possible. He added the next meeting would be about a 2-hour meeting followed by a question and answer from the public.

Some of the key parts of the project include expanding the midway area by 25%, expanding the rodeo area by 86%, as well as build out two new parking garages with 516 additional spaces.

A new transit center is also part of the project, hoping to get it done before the 2028 Olympics in Los Angeles so tourists have easy access.

It would also hope to make the area safer by adding a police substation.

The ballpark would also act as a year-round venue, being used for concerts and conventions.

"There are so many benefits compared to what is coming out now and we aren't asking for public funds. It will be privately funded," Conrad said.

Pacific Sports Group would also pay as much as \$1 million in a master lease for the property halfway through the construction process if selected.

Conrad also was adamant that the project would be committed to only hiring local contractors, vendors, and businesses to make this dream a reality.

More than a dozen companies have already signed on to participate in the construction, design and overall management of the project, Conrad said.

"This a community project for the community, through and through. This is a good project by good people in this community and making it that was important to me," he said.

As for why baseball, Young said he has “bore witness to having a home team and what it means to the community.”

Young has owned four different minor league teams and is trying to establish a bigger baseball presence in Hawaii.

“I think there’s a wonderful symmetry between the fans and citizens when this is ‘our team’ and we hope to have a team that reflects the community and all it stands for,” Young said.

“I don’t want people driving by Ventura on their way to Santa Barbara or LA. I’d like them to stop. And this does it.”



Pacific Sports Group wants to bring baseball back to Ventura. (courtesy photo)