

# \$6.5M sought for LB Arena

**OVERHAUL:** Plan would more than double floor space.

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Staff Writer

LONG BEACH — City tourism officials are seeking up to \$6.5 million for a major overhaul of the Long Beach Arena, a plan more than doubling floor space while creating a new ballroom.

The project, which remains under consideration given the city's budget woes, includes building a giant suspended curtained grid floor system that could be lowered on top of the arena's two lowest tiers.

Once lowered, the system instantly creates 45,000 square feet of open space for meetings, concerts, plays and other events. Current floor space is about 25,000 square feet.

The city's Convention and Visitors Bureau has identified more than 600 groups and organizations expressing interest in Long Beach but unable to host their events because of space restrictions.

"The system would be suspended from the arena roof, but when it comes down, it gives us that extra space and we can additionally bring down a truss (ceiling) system for different lighting arrangements, decorations, chandeliers and so on," said Steve Goodling, president of the Convention and Visitors Bureau. "It creates a loft-style ballroom experience, something more akin to the Nokia Theatre, and we believe we could attract a lot more meetings and concerts, which brings more visitors."

The arena currently attracts about 750,000 visitors annually

for concerts, banquets, plays, meetings and other events.

The CVB came up with the plan after observing the setup of the Technology, Entertainment, Design conference in recent years. TED organizers truck in a similar system for their popular conference, which draws world leaders that have included Bill Gates and Bill Clinton.

Goodling said he's approached the city about funding, which would come from the Tidelands Fund, but no firm commitments have been made.

The project remains on a Tidelands Fund wish list, but the list is packed with proposed infrastructure, maintenance and building projects totaling more than \$125 million, many of which have been stalled for years for lack of funding.

Under state law, Tidelands funds can only be used to support personnel, activities and structures along the waterfront, including lifeguards, seawalls, beach and property maintenance and other needs.

Tidelands funds helped build the arena in the early 1960s, along with the adjacent convention center and other public projects.

Goodling said the arena still serves its purpose, but needs an upgrade.

"We're competing for visitors with cities like San Jose, Denver, Phoenix and others that have more than one ballroom with more than 25,000 seats," Goodling said. "This would essentially give us another ballroom to sell to potential event planners, and at a very reasonable cost when compared to raising an entirely new facility."

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Long Beach Convention and Visitors Bureau

A rendering shows the proposed suspended floor system that would cover the Long Beach Arena's lowest tiers.