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SATURDAY, JULY 14, 2012

## LONG BEACH. A \$7 MILLION UPGRADE FOR ARENA

An artist's rendering by architecture firm John Sergio Fisher & Associates Inc. shows the small lounge design that would be possible in the Long Beach Arena under its \$7 million renovation. Project backers say the arena will be the first of its kind to be able to be reconfigured for multipurpose special events.



## Putting venue back on the A-list

Steve Goodling, CEO and president of the Long Beach Convention & Visitors Bureau, says the arena will be suitable for any planned event.

Scott Varley  
Staff Photographer



By Kelsey Duckett Staff Writer

LONG BEACH — In its heyday, the Long Beach Arena was bringing the biggest music acts to town — The Rolling Stones, Red Hot Chili Peppers, Elvis Presley and No Doubt, to name a few; but its glory days are over.

That could soon change.

The newest project at the Long Beach Convention & Entertainment Center won't only be innovative and trend-setting, it will be the first of its kind anywhere.

The \$7 million project, which Long Beach Convention & Visitors Bureau President & CEO Steve Goodling said "would put Long Beach Arena back on the map," will bring A-list artists, professional boxing matches, new conventions and a host of other events to town.

The 45,000-square-foot, multipurpose event space will have the capability to customize itself to suit any event planner's palate, he said.

The versatility of the arena will

ARENA A7



Scott Varley Staff Photographer

Architect John Fisher shows how the Long Beach Arena would look with partitioned sections and a lowered ceiling in a boxing match layout. Arena remodeling is due to finish in January.

### ARENA

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expand dramatically, Goodling said, adding that "it isn't about repurposing the space, but additionally purposing the space."

"When you walk into the arena, you won't feel like you are in an arena, you will feel like you are at a special events arena," he said. "There isn't any public space like this in the world. We are pioneering this idea."

Funding for the project was allocated during a Feb. 17 Long Beach City Council meeting — with money coming from the tidelands Measure D oil revenue. The meeting, part of a quarterly budget adjustment, appropriated more than \$17 million in "high priority" capital projects.

The project has been on a fast track and is in the bidding stage, with the convention center's management company, SMG, handling the bidding process for the project. Bidding ends on July 24, with construction starting by or before Aug. 1 and expected completion of the project in January.

Improvements to the arena include creating a "loft-style" ballroom, which will be amplified because of the suspended steel tension grid system that will act as the ceiling. The grid, which can be raised to accommodate a sold-out, 13,000-person concert, or lowered to accommodate a 50-person dinner, or removed entirely, will provide the intimate environment desired when attending any event.

"We are creating a hanging art piece that can change the space dramatically to accommodate any event," said John Fisher of John Sergio Fisher & Associates Inc., one of the two architects working on the project. "The steel tension grid system allows us to light every single spot of the entire arena. We will have complete and total flexibility to handle any

and every event."

The ballroom space, with seating for up to 5,500 people, will double the Convention Center's current ballroom capacity.

The steel tension grid will support \$1 million worth of state-of-the-art LED and stage lighting, sound systems and decorative elements.

"If you want to have an event, we are the only people you have to talk to," Mike Ferguson, director of the Theatre Projects. "We will have it all — sound, lighting and atmosphere. This literally creates a focused space for any event. It is a virtual creative space."

In addition to the steel tension grid, electronically operated curtains that drop from the ceiling, enclosing the floor area and covering views of the upper deck seats while providing audio and visual equipment, will be installed. The entire arena renovation project will also include replacing aging equipment and other modernizations.

SMG General Manager Charlie Beirne said the project won't affect events that currently take place at the arena, like Disney On Ice. In fact, he said, the state-of-the-art technology will enhance, if promoters want, the show or event.

"The essence of this project is to transform the arena into a multipurpose 'loft-ballroom' space that creates a unique theatrical environment," said Jerry Sherman of Jerry Sherman Architect, the other architect on the project.

"This type of environment will help define the Long Beach Arena as one of the most unique and flexible facilities in the nation."

"Our interior canopy, if you will, floats over the event space, creating another dimension to the space below that will define each and every event in its own special way."

Goodling said there is no reason that Long Beach residents should have to drive all over for a good concert or boxing match. Instead, he said, the community should be able to

look in its own backyard.

"If you want to go to a good boxing match, you have to drive. If you want to go to a good concert, you have to drive," he said.

"We will now have it available in the heart of 20 million people between the Inland Empire, Orange County and



File photo

The existing Long Beach Arena is shown during a robotics competition last year. The space is cavernous for smaller events, but a renovation allows the venue to become more intimate.

L.A. County.

"The residents of Long Beach won't have to look far, and that is a statement that makes me proud."

The financial impact on the city will be great, Goodling said.

"This will have a positive economic impact on our city — these events will fill our restaurants, our hotels, our streets, and that is what our residents want," he said. "When people

catch a show or any event they generally head downtown early to grab dinner, so activating this building further creates a greater overflow to all the surrounding businesses."

The ball is already rolling on bringing in bigger and better events to the arena, Beirne said.

"It is our goal to have to turn people and events away because there is just no available time," he said.

Ferguson said that this is the opportunity to create a new identity.

"This new exciting space is being created in a beloved landmark," he said.

"This project will provide a well-appointed flexible space, ready to be transformed to suit the needs and vision of the event."

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