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## Dynamo fans push county for stadium

Commissioners appear less than eager to chip in on downtown project

By LIZ AUSTIN PETERSON  
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Harris County officials still showed little enthusiasm for the proposed Dynamo stadium Wednesday as supporters tried to up the pressure on Commissioners Court to join a deal that Houston Mayor Bill White said hinges on the county's participation.

Dynamo fans plan to gather at the proposed stadium site this morning for a news conference planned by the Houston East End Chamber of Commerce, the Houston Hispanic Chamber of Commerce and two other organizations. The proj-

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## STADIUM: Downtown deal needs \$10 million from county

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ect's supporters also were circulating an online petition directed at swaying Commissioners Court.

White asked Harris County in July to contribute \$10 million to the project by joining the city's East Downtown Tax Increment Reinvestment Zone at the stadium's proposed site. He said Wednesday the fate of the project rests in the county's hands.

### Committing to a TIRZ

Asked what would happen if the county rejects the request, White replied, "That would really be up to the Dynamo."

Under a tax increment reinvestment zone, property tax revenues generated within the boundaries are frozen at the level when the zone was created.

As development occurs and property values rise, tax revenue above that level — known as the increment — is funneled back into the zone to pay for improvements to help attract more investment.

If Harris County partners with Houston on the East Downtown TIRZ, each government would agree to forgo \$10 million of its share of property taxes from the area to help pay for the stadium. Dynamo co-owner Anschutz Entertainment Group is willing to invest the other \$60 million to build the \$80 million stadium, team president/general manager Oliver Luck said.

Commissioners Court proto-

col dictates that formal proposals to participate in such projects must come from the commissioner whose precinct would be affected. The lion's share of the site is in Commissioner El Franco Lee's precinct, while a smaller portion is in Commissioner Sylvia Garcia's.

A member of Lee's staff said he was not granting interviews about the stadium Wednesday.

Garcia said she was reluctant to use tax dollars to build a stadium without voter approval.

"I will keep listening until I hear from the taxpayers that this is something they really want us to do," she said. "I'm going to keep doing my due diligence . . . to assess what's best for the county post-Ike and in today's current economic climate."

### Looking for more info

County Judge Ed Emmett is deferring to Lee and Garcia on the issue and has not said how he would vote if the plan came before Commissioners Court, spokesman Joe Stinebaker said. Commissioner Steve Radack said he was willing to discuss the idea, but did not know enough about the project to make a decision yet. Commissioner Jerry Eversole's office said he, too, had not been given enough information to comment.

The city has spent \$15.5 million in public funds to buy land downtown where the Dynamo would like to build. The six-block site is between Texas and Walker streets on the north and

south, and Hutchins and Dowling streets, just east of U.S. 59 in an area undergoing loft-style residential development.

Earlier this year, the stadium was projected to cost \$105 million and AEG's contribution had been pegged at \$80 million. Luck said the stadium plans were pared down as officials compared them to other Major League Soccer facilities that cost less to build.

Asked why the company did not build the stadium on its own, without public money, Luck said that type of project generally is not a wise investment.

"They don't really pencil out when they're 100 percent private investments," he said.

### Is there a plan B?

Luck said AEG should have no problem financing the project despite the market meltdown but "in an ideal world" would like to have an answer from the city and county by the end of the year so it can prepare its corporate budgets.

He said he was optimistic the county will join the TIRZ, and said he was not sure what the Dynamo would do if the downtown deal falls apart.

Renovating the Astrodome or Robertson Stadium on the University of Houston campus, where the team currently plays, would be expensive, he said.

Chronicle reporter Carolyn Feibel contributed to this report.

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