

Glendale names arena bidders

But city could lose Phoenix Coyotes if non-hockey outfit is hired to run site

By Caitlin McGlade
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Four bidders have submitted proposals to manage Jobing.com Arena, a task that historically has been handled by the venue's anchor tenant, the Phoenix Coyotes.

The bidders include a couple of

smaller, local events companies and two subsidiaries of other Valley sports teams, the Arizona Cardinals and Phoenix Suns. Glendale released the names to *The Arizona Republic* on Wednesday after repeated requests for the public records.

Glendale staff and consultants are combing through the proposals

this week to select finalists.

The city sought the outside proposals to establish a fair market price for arena management.

However, if city officials struck an arena-management deal with a non-hockey firm, the city likely would lose the Coyotes, who have played at the \$220 million arena since it opened in 2003.

Potential Coyotes owners, including Renaissance Sports & Entertainment, which is the National Hockey League's most recent se-

lected buyer of the team, have sought arena management and the multimillion-dollar payment from the city that comes with it.

Renaissance principal Anthony LeBlanc told *The Republic* several months ago that the group would seek an arena-management deal in the \$15 million-a-year range.

Renaissance did not submit a proposal to manage the arena, but Glendale's interim city manager

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Arena

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has continued to negotiate with the company.

The city would not release the amount that others put in as bids for the job. However, the city budgeted \$6 million for arena management in the new fiscal year, which begins July 1.

The City Council is expected to vote on an arena-management contract June 25, although the mayor and others this week said it isn't a hard and fast deadline.

Perhaps not for Glendale, but NHL executives are less patient.

League Commissioner Gary Bettman noted the NHL's board-of-governors meeting is set for June 27. "Stuff's going to happen," he said Wednesday at the opening of the Stanley Cup Finals.

The commissioner said decisions must be made by Glendale and the league. "I haven't set a deadline, but time is getting shorter," he said.

The specter of relocation was raised. "We don't think it's fair to fans, and we don't think it's fair, unless you have to move, to do it to communities that build you buildings," Bettman said.

But it is an option. "It is possible the team won't play there next year," Deputy Commissioner Bill Daly said.

The Coyotes' future has hung in limbo since the NHL purchased the team in Bankruptcy Court four years ago.

The City Council last fall had approved a deal in which the city would have paid an average of \$15 million annually for a Coyotes buyer to manage the arena. That buyer, Greg Jamison, was unsuccessful in purchasing the team.

That left the ongoing hockey saga to a newly elected council. That includes Mayor Jerry Weiers, who on Election Night said the city would strike a hard but fair deal. "Glendale is not your cash register," he said at the time.

One of the new council's first major decisions was to put the arena-management contract out to bid.

First-term Councilman Gary Sherwood fears the council didn't act soon enough.

He and the rest of the council will get a first look at the bids on Tuesday, when they review finalists' proposals in a closed-door session.

Sherwood said he doesn't think the council will have enough time to make a final decision by June 25 because of the volume of information and numbers to be vetted.

"I could easily see this going into July," he said. "I'm a little embarrassed that we haven't been better prepared."

The council recesses on June 28, but members could convene in a special meeting.

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**NHL COMMISSIONER
GARY BETTMAN**

On the Coyotes at Jobing.Com arena

The council's non-hockey choices for arena management include the following:

» Phoenix Arena Development Limited Partnership, a subsidiary of the Suns that manages US Airways Center.

» SMG, in collaboration with the Arizona Cardinals' Rojo Event Management and Select Artists Associates. SMG is a Philadelphia-based firm that has managed more than 230 venues, from sports stadiums to civic centers, around the world.

Rojo Event Management has thus far focused on bringing events to University of Phoenix Stadium, where the Cardinals play in Glendale. Select Artists Associates is an entertainment-bookings firm with offices in Florida and Scottsdale.

» The Phoenix Monarch Group is a locally based firm. It's unclear whether it currently manages any venues. Company officials did not return a call for comment, and the firm's website is under construction. One year ago, council members said Monarch had approached city officials about operating the arena for \$7.5 million.

» R Entertainment is a Scottsdale-based firm that man-

ages one venue, the Pepsi Amphitheater in Coconino County, and has about 50 contracts with other venues around the country to book shows on site, according to Kerry Dunne, a partner with R Entertainment.

The firm brings about 30 events a year to the amphitheater but has at least one event going every three days at one of its contracted site, Dunne said.

"We are certainly the little train that could," Dunne said. "But we know how to fill arenas."

City Attorney Nicholas DiPiazza said details of the finalists' proposals will be posted in the days before council votes.

However, the lack of public discussion has frustrated some residents.

"The peoples' patience are wearing thin about hockey and the lack of transparency," resident Ken Jones told council members during a meeting this week.

Kevin O'Malley, an attorney who specializes in government procurement processes, said it is typical for proposals to be reviewed in executive session to protect the competitive nature of the process and for the public to learn the details after a tentative winner is chosen.

For now, Glendale would only release the names. City code requires the names of those submitting proposals, and other relevant information, to be publicly recorded when the bids are opened.

What O'Malley found abnormal about Glendale's process is that the city is simultaneously working on a deal with Renaissance and the firms submitting proposals.

With the bids now in and deadlines pressing, the council will have to decide whether it has the stomach to give the contract to a non-hockey firm and risk the Coyotes' departure. The team was a linchpin in the city's efforts to create a sports and entertainment district.

The team brings thousands of fans to the Westgate Entertainment District 41 nights a year, supporting the restaurants and bars outside the arena.

Some argue that the area will struggle without the team, while Westgate's owners have said that the opening of an outlet mall last fall makes the shops and restaurants less dependent on the Coyotes.

"I worry about the arena if the team isn't there. I think it's likely to get boarded up because they won't have enough events to sustain it," Bettman said Wednesday.

"I worry about what happens to Westgate and all the businesses and people who are employed there. I'm worried about the impact it may have on the football stadium, of having a situation on its front steps that may not be ideal anymore."

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