

United Soccer League (USL) Opportunity in Santa Rosa

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Overview

- USL is interested in expanding into Santa Rosa and began discussions with the City of Santa Rosa about development of a multi-purpose stadium for professional men's and women's soccer.
- In these discussions, USL expressed an interest in the Fairgrounds property.
- A potential stadium at the Fairgrounds could accommodate other athletics, including youth sports, and could create new energy and revenue for the Fairgrounds.
- A new sports entertainment complex could not only bring significant economic benefits to the Fairgrounds itself, but also the entire region, including job creation, increased visitation, private investment, and overall contribution to local quality of life.

Timeline

December 2024

- USL approached the City of Santa Rosa to discuss opportunity

March 18, 2025

- City and USL signed exclusive negotiations agreement (ENA)

April 2025

- April 15th > City staff discussed USL opportunity with the City Council
- USL began meeting with key stakeholders in the market
- City staff reached out to County staff to begin coordination

May 2025

- USL expressed preference for Fairgrounds property
- Informal workgroup formed with staff from City, EDC, and Fairgrounds

June 2025

- June 3rd > City Ad Hoc Committee formed to support USL exploration
- City and USL began community engagement

August 2025

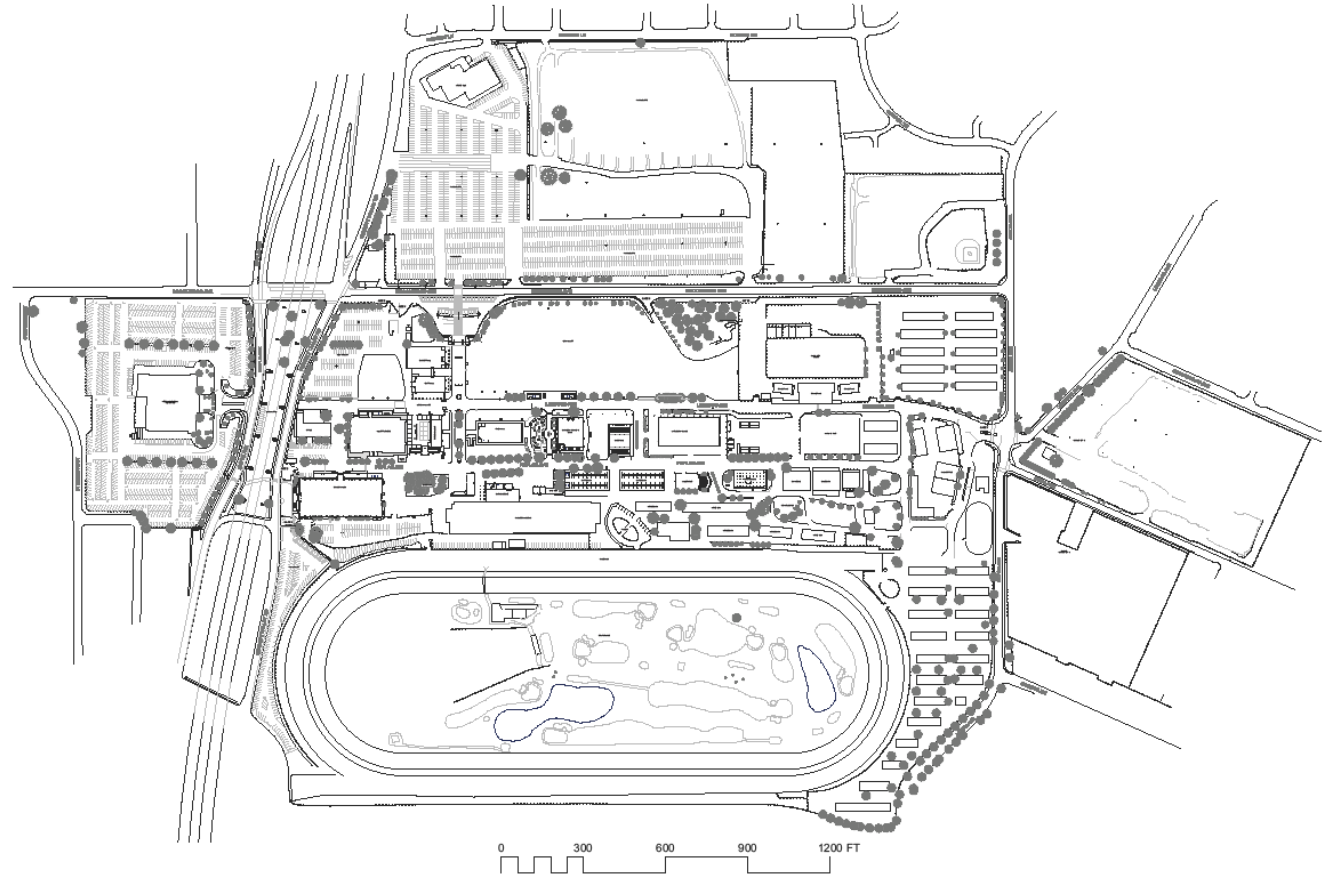
- Aug 13th > Supervisors Hopkins and Coursey and Fair Board reps met with County staff to discuss opportunity and identify next steps
- Aug 28th > City Mayor sent request to Board Chair for the County assign a representative to participate in the City's Ad Hoc Committee

September 2025

- USL began meeting with County staff
- City executed contract with Kosmont for USL project consulting

Fairgrounds Site

- Owned by the County of Sonoma
- Board of Supervisors contracts with Sonoma County Fair and Exposition, Inc. to operate the Fairgrounds.
- Composed of 18 separate parcels acquired over almost a hundred years
- Purpose of property is to host the annual County Fair, support agricultural community, and serve as a resiliency center.
- Additional land use options under review by County Counsel.



Opportunities at the Fairgrounds

- 200-acre, multi-use complex with 6 meeting and exhibition halls, 2 open-air arenas, 1 covered arena, equestrian facilities, RV Park, golf course, and 5-acre lawn area
- In April 2025, the Fair Board announced the cancellation of horse racing.
- With the horse track no longer in use, the Fair Board is considering new development opportunities.



Examples of USL Projects in CA

Lancaster Municipal Stadium in Lancaster, CA

- Built in 1996 as baseball stadium and converted to soccer in 2025.
- 5,300 seats
- City paid \$16.2M for renovation using bond financing.

Heart Health Park in Sacramento, CA

- Built on Cal Expo Fairgrounds in 2014 and expanded in 2015.
- 11,500 seats
- Privately funded for approximately \$5M.
- City is building a new 20,000 seat stadium, which broke ground in August 2025.
- City's Railyards Enhanced Infrastructure Financing District (EIFD) contributing \$42M towards \$175M stadium cost.

Modesto, CA Under Development

- In August 2025, City approved redevelopment of a downtown city-owned site for new stadium, and second site for training fields and mixed-use development and housing.
- City will contribute a portion of the costs with bond financing, with lease payments from USL and increased tax revenues to pay debt service.

Next Steps

- Complete title review of Fairgrounds and conduct further analysis on land use options.
- Add County of Sonoma as additional party to ENA between City of Santa Rosa and USL.
 - This allows USL to begin their due diligence, conceptual design, and financial feasibility analysis on the Fairgrounds site, which is expected to take about one year.
 - County staff will coordinate with Fair Board throughout the evaluation process.
- Once the feasibility analysis is completed, should all parties wish to move forward, we would advance the ENA into a Memorandum of Understanding for development.
 - If USL decides on a different site, the County and City would still have a joint ENA with USL to continue to work together on other potential projects.
- Staff will return to the Board of Supervisors with an update in Summer 2026

Staff Recommendation

1. As a Board of Supervisors and Fair Board, provide feedback to staff on the USL opportunity.
2. Authorize County staff to coordinate with the City of Santa Rosa and USL to amend their existing exclusive negotiations agreement to include the County of Sonoma as an additional party.
3. Direct staff to engage with USL and the City of Santa Rosa to begin next steps, including the study of feasibility, governance, financing models, and development options.
4. As a Board of Supervisors, discuss the request from the Mayor of Santa Rosa to provide a liaison to the City Ad Hoc.

Discussion