

Plans for new arena up for public debate

Arena

Residents can weigh in Thursday at a special city council meeting

Melissa Daniels Palm Springs Desert Sun USA TODAY NETWORK

Cary Brazeman moved to Palm Springs from Los Angeles about three years ago out of a desire to settle in a less dense community with more responsive public services.

Now the largest indoor venue in the Coachella Valley will be built half a mile from his home.

“You’re talking about impacts that are potentially destructive, and impacts that are potentially character- changing,” Brazeman said. “I’m not opposed to an arena, I’m opposed to an arena of this capacity.”

The yet-unnamed arena, announced this summer by the Agua Caliente Band of Cahuilla Indians in partnership with Oak View Group, will be built on tribal land just north of Agua Caliente Casino Palm

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Springs. The plans have generated excitement among residents who are eager for more entertainment options, as well as concerns about big changes to life in downtown Palm Springs.

Starting in the fall of 2021, the facility will host a new American Hockey League team that will serve as the minor league affiliate for the expansion National Hockey League team in Seattle. With about 10,000 seats available for hockey games and about 11,300 for other events, the site is expected to draw top-tier concerts or possible Vegas-style residences through a partnership with Live Nation.

On Thursday, residents will have their only opportunity to weigh in during the planning process at a special Palm Springs City Council meeting at 6 p.m. at the Palm Springs Convention Center.

Representatives of OVG will give a presentation and provide detailed information on parking and traffic, tribe spokesperson Kate Anderson said.

The City Council also will vote on whether the arena conforms with existing plans for city development and decide on recommendations to send to the tribe as part of its review process.

Bordered by East Alejo and Amado roads to the north and south on a lot between North Calle Encilia and North Calle el Segundo, the site of the future arena is currently a parking lot. The intersections around the site are controlled with stop signs, and parts of the site lack sidewalks.

City Manager David Ready said the city and the tribe will work together to determine who is responsible for paying for what types of infrastructure upgrades that are deemed necessary. The governments have already had several meetings about the project, he said.

“They certainly understood that some of these effects have to be mitigated, and they indicated they absolutely wanted to work with the city to make sure this is a win-win for everyone,” Ready said.

The tribe’s government operates separately from the neighboring cities, and it has

in neighborhood. He’s also concerned that there could be more emergencies with the addition of thousands of people streaming into downtown to attend hockey games, concerts and other arena events.

Brazeman, who works in real estate marketing and studied emergency response times in Los Angeles while a candidate for city controller in 2012, considers the underground design, meant to protect mountain views, a “Trojan horse” that disguises the thousands of people who will be clogging up the streets in the area.

“To what extent do we need to increase fire and police staffing to accommodate crowds of this size on a regular basis?” he said.

Several adjacent properties by the arena are residences, including the Movie Colony East neighborhood that sits to the north of East Alejo Road behind a wall of shrubs. The residential developments of Palm Springs Deauville and St. Tropez Villas are to the east, with Plaza Villa at the southeast corner.

Julie Spira, a part-time resident who has lived at Palm Springs Deauville for 17 years, already has signed up to receive information about tickets. But she’s concerned about how she’ll be able to get in and out of her home to visit her parents in the east valley during event nights.

Spira and other Deauville residents are also concerned that the structure, which will rise about 60 feet, will obscure the mountain views that were part of the reason they purchased property there.

“I think it’s going to be good for the community that we are going to have more energy in downtown Palm Springs, I just wish we could have a better solution for parking,” she said.

Brazeman also wants to know whether the area will see infrastructure improvements like sidewalks, crosswalks, street lights, or traffic signals to help control the pedestrian and vehicle traffic that will be flowing through the area.

Despite his concerns, Brazeman is optimistic that the planning process between the tribe and city will address some of the questions that have been swirling among residents.

“The tribe historically has been a good neighbor,” Brazeman said. “And I’m hopeful that they will listen to our concerns about the scale of this project, and make adjustments accordingly. We don’t want to kill the golden goose that is Palm Springs.”

its own planning department that handles development on tribal-owned land. In Palm Springs, the process for how the governments work together is laid out in a land-use agreement that was originally crafted in 1977 and underwent several amendments since.

The tribe ultimately decides how it contributes to the neighboring governments. Last year, for example, the tribe last year gave \$25,000 worth of fire protection equipment to the Cathedral City Fire Department and \$50,000 worth of equipment to the Palm Springs Fire Department.

Small city, big plans

Doug Carstens, an environmental lawyer in Hermosa Beach who has examined arena impacts in Los Angeles, San Diego and Inglewood, said placing an 11,000-person capacity arena in a comparably small city like Palm Springs has magnified impacts.

“This may be large and ambitious, and it may be very positive for the community,” he said. “It’s not bad just because it’s big, it depends on how it’s done.”

The latest project report shows the attendees will be expected to park at lots and garages around downtown Palm Springs and walk to the arena. Just 650 spots will be available on site, and they’ll mostly be reserved for staff and VIP ticket holders.

Residents and city officials have raised concerns about the amount traffic, the lack of parking, and the influx of people in a part of town that currently has many non-signalized intersections and a lack of sidewalks.

Brazeman’s biggest concern is that emergency vehicles will run into gridlock when responding to calls

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A rendering of the upcoming downtown Palm Springs AHL hockey arena due to open in 2021.
COURTESY OF THE FEAREY GROUP

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An arena is planned to replace the large parking lot in the center of this photo downtown Palm Springs.

JAY CALDERON/THE DESERT SUN