

SCOTTSDALE REPUBLIC

OPINIONS EDITOR

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OUR VIEW

Hotel tax should be hiked for Cactus League's future

Two years from now, when the Oakland Athletics move into Hohokam Stadium, they'll enjoy a few amenities the Mesa ballpark's current tenants — the Chicago Cubs, set to move to a new park nearby — have gone without since the stadium opened in 1997.

These include a new, upgraded weight room, along with substantial renovations to a locker room that has gone largely unchanged over the past 15 years. The familiar red-and-blue trim throughout the stadium will be painted over to reflect the Athletics' green and yellow color scheme. All of the changes will be paid for by the Cactus League, part of an effort to make its facilities as desirable as possible to retain the 15 teams that call the Valley home each spring.

The overhaul is a fitting analogy for a league that knows it, too, must implement some sweeping changes of its own if it wishes to remain economically viable.

The problem is, no one seems to know exactly what those changes will be.

The Hohokam Park rebranding is one

of several multimillion-dollar projects financed by the Cactus League through a handful of revenue sources, primarily a rental-car tax that began in the early 1990s to support the league after it almost folded in the late 1980s. That tax, which collects 3.25 percent of Maricopa County rental-car transactions, is set to expire in early 2031.

"We're going to need to find other (revenue) sources," said Tom Sadler, executive director of the Arizona Sports and Tourism Authority, which handles the money generated by the rental-car tax and a separate 1 percent hotel tax.

"There are a few ideas incubating out there," he said, but declined to offer any specific proposed solutions at this point, indicating only that funding would need to be raised on a countywide level and not through the efforts of individual municipalities.

That latter approach has been exercised in recent years with varying degrees of success, including Glendale's fiasco with Camelback Ranch and Mesa's coup in persuading its residents to pony



A rental-car tax that began in the early 1990s to support the Cactus League is set to expire in 2031. TOM TINGLE/THE REPUBLIC

up \$84 million in funding for the new Cubs stadium.

One potential new source might be the implementation of a league-wide "ticket tax," said Chris Calcaterra, vice president of marketing and promotions for the league. The new tax, strictly hypothetical at this point, would represent a significant shift away from a model that has in many ways been dependent on the strength of the local tourism industry.

The league has done an admirable job

in nearly doubling the number of its teams in the past decade and, in the process, transforming itself into an enormous annual boost to our economy. Whether it can retain those teams and its impact will hinge on its ability to adapt what its leaders believe to be an untenable funding model.

While the rental-car and general-sales taxes are indeed at their respective breaking points, there's still room to raise hotel taxes as a funding mechanism for the league. Scottsdale and Phoenix, for example, have lodging-tax rates lower than those of seven other municipalities in Arizona.

Presently, the Sports and Tourism Authority earns a little more than \$20 million per year from a 1 percent countywide hotel-tax increase implemented in 2001.

Although that revenue stream is set to expire in 2031, doubling it would facilitate improvements the league may need to keep its existing teams while strengthening its bond with a rebounding tourism industry.

Scottsdale Leadership opens doors to community service

Nothing has been more instructive and pivotal in my development as a community leader as my time spent with, subsequent graduation from, and continued involvement with Scottsdale Leadership.

While I have been involved in the community for a number of years and continue to be through boards and community organizations, Scottsdale Leadership has helped me evolve and strengthen those existing roles while developing new ones.

For example, Scottsdale Leadership led me to Partners for Paiute, where as a board member I was able to work with fellow classmates to see through their vision of establishing a community garden. Paiute Community Garden is now a sustainable place where community members of all ages come together to grow fruits and vegetables and learn



MY TURN

JONATHAN MILLER

the importance of healthy eating.

Through a friend and alumnus of Scottsdale Leadership, I also became a member of the Scottsdale Sunrise Rotary. This is a dedicated group of community volunteers who focus on issues surrounding the youth in our community. We recently distributed more than 650 dictionaries to third-grade classrooms throughout Scottsdale. In addition, we will be hosting the 28th Annual Special Day for Special Kids, an event designed to honor and provide a fun day for special-needs children and their families.

Through a Rotarian and Scottsdale Leadership classmate, I became in-

involved with the Dream Fair, a program aimed at bringing students of all ages together and provide them with the resources they need to prepare for high school, college or a career.

The Scottsdale Leadership core program gave me the opportunity to meet with fellow class members, City Council members, city staff and community advocates to discuss the visions and future of Scottsdale. From this, I gained a better understanding of the issues the community faces. These issues have been a concern to me and fellow members of the Scottsdale Area Association of Realtors Government Affairs Committee. As a group, we had the chance to discuss the Scottsdale General Plan with those who were instrumental in putting the plan together.

Scottsdale Leadership helped me develop a better understanding of non-

HOW TO APPLY

Scottsdale Leadership is accepting applications for its 2013-14 program. For more information, call 480-627-6710 or visit scottsdaleleadership.org.

profit organizations in the community, how they are funded and their needs. This realization led me to become involved with Social Venture Partners, an organization that works to unite nonprofits that would not typically overlap.

These are the kinds of experiences that Scottsdale Leadership alumni are involved with every day. Scottsdale Leadership is a platform from which great things happen, and I encourage you to get involved.

Jonathan Miller is a graduate of Scottsdale Leadership and a Realtor.