

**County seeks public input on fairgrounds revitalization**

By Carol Rosen Correspondent San Jose Mercury News  
Posted: Wed May 14 19:10:47 MDT 2014

MercuryNews.com

The Santa Clara County Fairgrounds is a place to enjoy all sorts of activities, from cat shows to motocross racing. For decades, it's also been the site of the Santa Clara County Fair, which saw its greatest popularity from the 1960s through 1990s. For the past 20 years or so, however, the fair has dropped in popularity, with most of its activities restricted to just a few days.

Now county supervisors are working on a master plan to revitalize those 150 acres on Tully Road just east of Monterey Road.

In April they gave the go-ahead to ask consultants for proposals. The aim is to hire one in August, according to Supervisor Cindy Chavez.

The supervisors' primary goal, though, is to get county residents engaged in the effort. Chavez hopes that many will attend a study session/workshop May 20 at the county courthouse at 70 W. Hedding St. to discuss what they would like to see happen to the fairgrounds.

Bruce Knopf, the county's director of assets and economic development, reiterated the importance of residents' input. The county plans to hold meetings with fairground tenants, such as Santa Clara Paintball, as well as nearby homeowner associations and residents.

"We will provide them with ideas, goals and objectives, and residents will provide us with general suggestions," he said.

On the land there "could be a large space for community gatherings, baseball fields and other sports amenities, as well as a flea market and options for housing. Right now there's a night farmers market with food, entertainment and amusements like rides for children. It's amazing and caters to families of all kinds," Chavez says.

"We're at the visioning stage right now. It's a county asset, and we want to keep it that way. At the same time we want to develop maximum revenues balanced with meeting the public's objectives," Knopf said.

"Our valley has changed dramatically since the county put aside the acreage at the fairgrounds, and the use of the space hasn't kept up with the needs of our community," said Supervisor Ken Yeager.

"The current master planning process is a chance for the county to catch up. We have an enormous opportunity with the fairgrounds site to develop a vibrant, bustling public space. Ideally, the fairgrounds will become a destination that draws people from the entire region. With the right planning, I believe that vision can become a reality," Yeager added.

That vision appears somewhat rosy, since the fairgrounds are now hardly a vibrant, bustling place.

"Since 1998-99 it's been nearly 20 years of frustration and unmet expectations. That's not for a lack of trying, but this time I want to eliminate the frustration and make the land work for the county," Knopf said.

A number of activities are held on the grounds throughout the year, including corporate meetings, weddings, quinceañeras and concerts. There also are weekly events, such as bingo on Thursdays and an outdoor farmers market on Wednesdays and Sundays. It's also home to a variety of trade shows, home shows and RV and car sales.

But it's the county fair that holds nostalgia and excitement for all ages. This year's fair, the county's 70th, is scheduled to run July 31 through Aug. 3. It's actually a weeklong event open to the public for the final few days. Judging for various is conducted during the early part of week.

There will be livestock, rides and lots of food, along with rides, exhibits and concerts.