



## CHARGERS SAY "CHARGE IT"

"Charge it," San Diego Chargers representatives told the city's Chargers Citizens Task Force.

During the unveiling of the Big Idea that would keep the team bolted to San Diego, Chargers spokesperson Michaela Fabriani, former Clinton mouthpiece, proposed that the city issue \$200 million in bonds to cover half the costs for a new football stadium.

No surprise. We know the NFL does not like the \$78 million remodeling job we did on our stadium six years ago at their behest—no more Super Bowls for San Diego in this broken down tacky beach shack.

The team also proposed that an "urban village" replace 66 acres of parking lot, which would, in the sloppy-down economic model invented by that other sports team, generate enough in taxes and fees to cover the bond payments.

Heard that, done that. Taxpayers built a downtown baseball park because it was about redeveloping East Village into an urban village—a village of skyscrapers, so it now seems.

Here is the interesting part: the Chargers want San Diegans to sign the credit card receipt with a vote in 2004.

Turning the 2004 election into a plebiscite on the Chargers will turn a very dull municipal midterm campaign into a real contest instead of the usual re-election non-election voters sleep through.

In the normal course of election events, incumbents in the City of San Diego rarely face challengers, no matter how unpopular or poorly they have served.

That is because with term limits, viable challengers wait out the eight years rather than face the daunting fundraising capabilities and special interest support afforded incumbents.

But, with the Chargers on the ballot, the Mayor and four Council Members up for re-election will not only have to run on their records, but on financing a new stadium. To charge, or not to charge, that will be the question.

Scott Peters, Ralph Inzunza and the Mayor are already out on the stadium limb after promoting closed door negotiations with the Chargers in December.

The gloomy economics of this weekend's Super Bowl makes a new stadium even tougher to sell. Hotel room rates, which generate room taxes to cover a good part of the downtown ballpark bond debt, are three quarters what they were for the last gladiatorial glitz-krieg held in San Diego.

And, few former Super Bowl high roller companies are spending like the drunken sailors they once were, even if they are not in bankruptcy. This is a bad time in American history

to lavishly spend shareholder investments and employee retirements.

Among the few party-down companies at this year's Super Bowl is Maxim Magazine, who spent their funny money turning an old downtown warehouse into a simulated "red light" district, decorated with under-clothed and well-siliconed girls selling, well gee, who knows what.

In spite of its dubious taste in glorifying prostitution, thanks to Maxim, we are reminded that San Diego's most successful redevelopment project converted a real red light district for cruising sailors into the Gas Lamp District, a bona fide urban village until a glowing ballpark took over the skyline.

But, it does take a village to sell a stadium, or just about any project in San Diego judging from recent sales pitches to communities by commercial and housing developers. A recent University City meeting featured a Westfield Company executive pitching a Big Box expansion and shopping cart experience for University Town Center as a village project. Please.

San Diego is giving a whole new feeling, if not meaning, to the word village, which according to Roget can be approximately synonymous with metropolis or boom town. High rises, great big-box malls and yes, sports stadiums actually might qualify.

The proposal that an "urban village," complete with housing, retail and a hotel, would pay the bond debt for a new Mission Valley football stadium is a stretch even in our Village-city universe.

The state gets the lion's share of property taxes unless the area is a redevelopment zone in which case the city can capture the incremental increase in property value from new development.

So, some judge would have to buy that those 66 acres of Qualcomm parking lot concrete qualifies as blight for the city to reap much benefit from housing. Besides, there are costs associated with the pesky niceties like parks, libraries and public safety that often must accompany housing.

For cities, sales tax trumps property taxes in every circumstance. That is why even the best of city village plans tend to metamorphose into the uninspiring Great Big Box shopping malls blooming ubiquitously around the county.

And, even if the parking lot gets the blight green light, the Governor says he wants to shift half the revenues from every redevelopment agency in the state into depleted state education coffers to plug up the colossal state budget deficit.

To Charge-it or not to Charge-it, that is the question the San Diego Chargers want to ask voters in 2004. Pity the politician who has to answer that question in a sound bite.