

Elks Field sale could preserve Sun Bowl



School site has other benefits

By David DeMille

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ST. GEORGE — The Elks Baseball field could soon become the location of a downtown elementary school — this, without impacting the nearby Dixie Sun Bowl — with the St. George City Council voting Thursday to sell the property.

The 6-acre location, tucked between the Sun Bowl and adjacent homes on the 300 East block of 100 South, is smaller than the sites typically used for new schools, but Washington County School District officials say there should be plenty of space if they use a new 2-story design for the building.

It's a rare chance to build a new school in the downtown area, and doing so on a smaller property can allow the city to make a separate decision

CHRIS CALDWELL / THE SPECTRUM & DAILY NEWS

The Elk's Field and The Dixie Sun Bowl have been major factors in recent plans for the building of a new school in the area.

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regarding the future of the Sun Bowl, Superintendent Larry Bergeson said after the meeting.

"It's a very positive thing to have a brand new school with new facilities in it in the downtown area," he said.

The move would allow the district to move out of the nearby East Elementary, making room for Dixie State University to expand its footprint and make way for projected enrollment growth. The Utah Legislature has already allocated \$1.5 million to DSU for the purchase.

DSU spokesperson Steve Johnson said the current plan is to make improvements on the building and use it for classroom and office space.

"It's not every day that a landlocked school can inherit seven acres of property, including a building that already includes built-in classrooms and office space,"



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The Elk's Field and the Sun Bowl have been major factors in recent plans for the building of a new school in the area.

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he said.

It also would not impact the Sun Bowl, giving the city a chance to consider improvements or other uses for the aging structure, which has been little used in recent years outside of the annual Dixie Roundup Rodeo.

Several residents spoke up in opposition to trying to save the arena,

which opened in 1948, arguing that it is an eyesore and doesn't fit well with the surrounding neighborhoods and parks.

"I appreciate nostalgia, but there are times when granny is on life support you want to let it go," said Richard Hutchins, arguing that any money spent on renovations could be better

spent elsewhere.

Council members argued that the Sun Bowl decision could be made at a later date, with some saying they would prefer to find ways to make more use of it and keep it.

Residents have argued that the arena has significant historic value — the community came together to raise \$35,000 for its construction, an enormous amount at the time for the 4,000 or so residents living here then.

"I sincerely disagree with you that the Sun Bowl has outlived its life," Councilman Jimmie Hughes said.

City Manager Gary Esplin said he saw the land sale as being separate from the Sun Bowl, noting that there were various other reasons for limiting the school to the Elks Field property, such as the potential cost of demolishing the Sun Bowl.

Bergeson agreed, noting that it also would improve safety by keeping the school away from the busier 400 East street.

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