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Possible SDSU stadium: 22,700 seats

No cost estimate, but university leaders share vision

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BROOKINGS - The rapid rise of South Dakota State University's athletic program means it's fast outgrowing its facilities, but a new master plan that includes expanding its stadium seating to almost 23,000 will rely mostly on the goodwill of its donors.

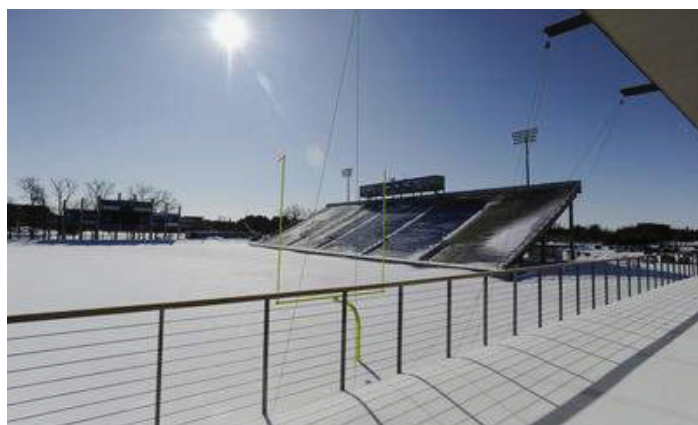
Late last week, Athletic Director Justin Sell was given an updated master plan created by Crawford Architects. The Kansas City, Mo.-based firm was hired in October to generate a vision for the next 20 years based on the needs and means of the state's largest university.

At the center of those plans is a revamped Coughlin-Alumni Stadium with seating jumping from roughly 10,000 to 22,700, and the potential to expand to 40,000 if SDSU ever needs something that large. It would add amenities such as club seats and luxury boxes as well as a new fieldhouse that would tower over the recently completed \$6 million Dykhouse Student-Athlete Center in the north end zone.

SDSU has played at Coughlin-Alumni Stadium since it opened in 1962. In addition to being outdated, the facility now is undersized for the emerging NCAA Division I program. The football team drew 13,265 fans per game last fall, the second time in three years that the average attendance exceeded the seating capacity of 10,000.

But at this point, the project and the master plan are more wish list than blueprint. The conceptual drawings are nonbinding and reliant on private funding, according to Sell.

"We needed to get the master plan together so we could start working on some cost elements," Sell said. "At the same time, we're doing a market analysis so we know what we can afford and if there's a market here that would help us be able to do that."



View of Coughlin-Alumni Stadium from the upper deck of the new Dykhouse Student-Athlete Center at SDSU.

That market analysis is ongoing, meaning there is no official price tag for any portion of the potential project. For the sake of comparison, NCAA Division II Augustana opened a 7,000-seat stadium this fall for \$11 million, while a proposed plan for a new Howard Wood Field was pegged at \$33 million for the ability to expand to 20,000 seats.

Next: Presenting plan to potential donors

The next step is for SDSU fundraisers to present the drawings to potential donors. A budget deficit probably removes state help as a viable option. The best-case scenario, according to Sell, would be to present any or all pieces that have gained enough financial support to the Board of Regents for approval in October.

"I don't know how the donors are going to react," Jackrabbits football coach John Stiegelmeier said. "I think there's a lot of support for our football program. Does that translate into millions of dollars to build a stadium? Hopefully, but I don't know that."

Football is only one piece of the puzzle. The master plan includes many other improvements that SDSU president David Chicoine touched on when pitching an incomplete list of future building projects to the regents in 2008.

Needed or not, coming up with donations in these economic times isn't ideal, as SDSU Associate Athletic Director for Development Mike Burgers said. But it could save money in the long run.

"If we're able to do it, it is a good bid environment," said David Murphy, the lead architect on the project. "People who have the ability to build are finding good value."

Designed for phases, incremental growth

In addition, the master plan is designed to be built in phases, enabling incremental growth without looking incomplete, according to Murphy, who was involved with a \$295 million renovation of the Green Bay Packers' Lambeau Field in 2003. In fact, one wall of the Dykhouse Center - not fully inhabited yet - already has been tabbed for future demolition.

SDSU has an aggressive plan for its sports facilities. But are its donors able and willing to keep pace?

"We'll get some really nice looking pieces of literature and sit down and try to match them up with some donors that might be interested in helping us move these projects forward," Sell said. "This is really a year of exploration for us. It gives us a chance to throw out all these things and see what's working."

THE NEXT GENERATION?

A massive renovation of 48-year-old Coughlin-Alumni football stadium is at the center of a new 20-year master plan for the South Dakota State athletic department. Among the proposed specs:

- 22,700 seats that could expand to 40,000.
- 25 luxury suites with room for 10 more.
- Club seating with a private lounge.
- A five-story grandstand on the west side.
- Additional restrooms, concessions and merchandising.
- Expanded south-end seating for students and the band.
- A second video board on the north end.

COUGHLIN-ALUMNI

Opened: Sept. 22, 1962

Capacity: 10,000

Average attendance:

- 2009: 13,265
- 2008: 9,907
- 2007: 11,218
- 2006: 9,652

Largest crowds:

- | | | |
|----------|----------------|-------------|
| • 16,345 | Nov. 17, 2007 | NDSU |
| • 16,193 | Oct. 19, 1985 | USD |
| • 15,866 | Oct. 18, 1975 | USD |
| • 15,523 | Oct. 24, 2009 | N. Iowa |
| • 15,521 | Oct. 4, 2008 | McNeese |
| • 15,338 | Sept. 29, 2007 | S.F. Austin |