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Stadium project renderings downright dreamy

By [Michael Stetz](#), UNION-TRIBUNE COLUMNIST

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Staff SignOnSanDiego

Proposed on-site redevelopment of Qualcomm Stadium that never happened.



Photo by Staff SignOnSanDiego

Current proposal for a new Chargers Stadium near Petco Park in downtown San Diego.



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Starving artists?

Ha!

Whoever came up with that one?

Check out all the artist renderings of San Diego projects that have been unveiled over the past few years: the new downtown Chargers stadium, the new downtown library, the new downtown City Hall, the convention center expansion ...

We should build a museum to house them all. (First we'll need an artist rendering of the museum.)

The San Diego Chargers recently unveiled a rendering of yet another stadium proposal, this one for downtown. They could have their own wing at the museum, as many drawings as they have spurred.

In 2003, the Chargers initially explored building a stadium at the current Mission Valley site, along with housing and commercial development. In the drawing, the playing field is as green as money.

In 2007, two sites in Chula Vista — one on the bayfront, the other inland — were targeted. One rendering — the bay glistening, sailboats sailing — made Chula Vista look like Monte Carlo.

The next year, there was even an idea to build a deck over the 10th Avenue Marine Terminal, with the thought of putting a stadium up there. Tiny cruise ships are docked nearby in that drawing.

Last year, a local developer showed off plans for a new Chargers stadium in Mission Valley, which also included a ton of commercial development and — from what I can tell — windmills!

Each of those concepts flopped. The new stadium won't be built at any of those places. Actually, nothing much seems to ever get built, except for a baseball park — and that almost didn't happen.

But, boy, does San Diego look good on an easel.

Where are the artist renderings for the stadiums stored? Are they hung in team President Dean Spanos' house? Did he give one to running back LaDainian Tomlinson as a parting gift?

Actually, no.

"Most are digital, so I guess they sit in my computer," said Mark Fabiani, special counsel to the Chargers.

Even though a lot of spectacular, breathtaking venues have been drawn up, the Chargers still play in the same old Qualcomm Stadium.

"We'll keep on churning them out until we get something done or get to the end of the road," Fabiani said.

Architectural firms do the work themselves or contract it out to artists or designers. The Chargers work with a Kansas City firm, Populous, which came up with the recent downtown rendering — a computer-generated drawing.

Many are beautifully done. The artist rendering of the new downtown City Hall soars, looking futuristic. The real one, of course, is a dump.

But that's the job of the artist rendering, to get you all pumped up about what could be.

"It's a powerful way to communicate an idea," said Joe Cordelle, a San Diego architect who has created a lot of renderings for local projects. He did the most recent proposed convention center expansion.

Today's computer technology allows for him to create some pretty spectacular images, he said. When it came to the convention center, there are no actual designs yet so he had free rein.

His orders: Do something that looks cool, he said. Creating such an image helps sell the project to politicians and the public, he said.

He's not bummed if the projects are never realized. Indeed, his creations sometimes go viral, seen all over the world. "For me, the image is everything."

The renderings can have one drawback, said Steven Johnson, vice president of public affairs for the San Diego Convention Center. Once shown, people expect the final design to look that way.

Sometimes they don't. Think North Embarcadero, where an oval park envisioned in the port's drawing turned out to be ... just a drawing.

The renderings can cost \$1,500 to \$5,000, depending on how sophisticated you want to go, Johnson said.

The artist renderings normally depict a perfect little world. There's no place for homeless people in an artist rendering.

But palm trees? There are lots of palm trees in artist renderings. Plenty of sunshine. Our weather is even better in the drawings — and that's saying something.

The renderings can generate a lot of publicity. When the Chargers recently showed off the new drawing, it got a lot of play. The new “urban” stadium was soon all over the Internet.

In the real world, financial realities trump blue-sky images. The city’s broke, after all.

For the Chargers’ project to work, it would take a large chunk of taxpayer dough, so it might never get off, um, the drawing board.

Same with the convention center expansion.

And the new City Hall ...

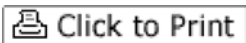
But not Petco Park. That was actually built, actually looking pretty close to an early rendering. And — just as promised — thanks to all that new revenue that came pumping in, the team boasts a roster of superstars making big bucks.

Ha!

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