

McArthur Court Facts:

Opened: Jan. 14, 1927, with a men's basketball game against Willamette University

Current seating capacity: 9,087

Men's basketball 2000-01 home attendance average: 8,441 (six sellouts)

Women's basketball 2000-01 home attendance average: 5,150 (led Pac-10 for 4th consecutive season)

Women's basketball 1999-2000 attendance: 5,852 (Duck women's all-time season high)

Women's basketball all-time single-game attendance: 9,738 on March 8, 1996, against Oregon State

Source: University Department of Intercollegiate Athletics



Photo illustration by Jonathan House Emerald

New sports arena proposal interests campus, city alike

■ Officials like Charles Rusch's proposal, but agree that the idea needs more discussion, funding

By Marty Toohay
Oregon Daily Emerald

The revelry from McArthur Court's 75th birthday bash has barely ended, and already people throughout Eugene are pronouncing the venerable stadium ready for retirement.

More than one month after Mac Court turned 75, former University architecture professor Charles Rusch proposed a new 16,000-capacity sports arena to host University basketball games. His proposal, delivered to the City Planning Commission Feb. 18, didn't give many specifics or blueprints. But he pegged the area on Franklin Boulevard near Hilyard and Patterson streets — next to the site of the soon-to-be-erected federal courthouse — for a location.

Rusch said he proposed the spot primarily to ensure that city road construction in the new courthouse area will not prevent future arena construction.

But some city and University officials said the plan is a "dream arena," and people shouldn't expect to hit a new location any time soon for Duck games and events.

"It'll be another three, four or five years before we can start seriously talking about a new arena," University Vice President Dan Williams said.

City Planning and Development spokesman Mike Sullivan said, "It's too early to get much of a read on this," and City Councilor David Kelly said the idea "is interesting but needs a lot more discussion."

Kelly, whose ward includes the University and will include the new federal courthouse, said he has mixed reactions about the proposal. He said that the area "is certainly ripe for redevelopment," but worried that the arena and surrounding amenities could "siphon off the energy and enthusiasm from the core of the new downtown before it's had its renaissance."

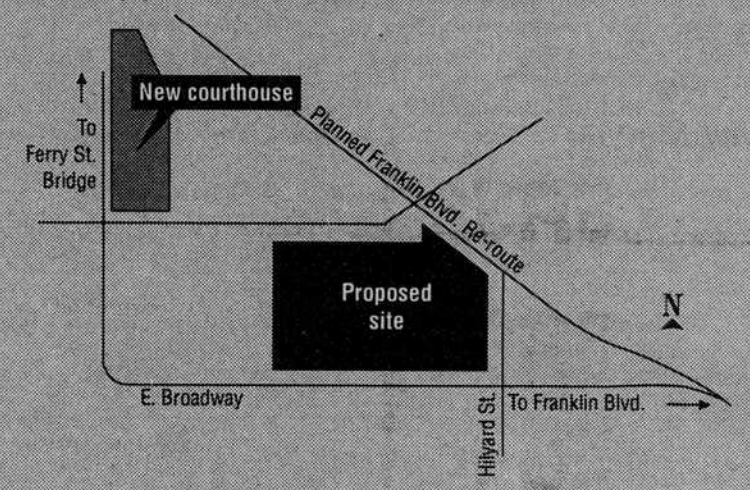
Williams agreed that the idea is interesting, and one the University had not considered, but the Athletic Department currently has other priorities.

"We've already got a \$90 million (Autzen Stadium renovation) project going," he said.

In many ways, Mac Court is not keeping pace with the growing Uni-

Getting out of 'The Pit'

A former University professor has proposed to build the new arena near the site of the new courthouse. The building would provide ample parking for events and seat 16,000.



Heather Gee-Pape Emerald

versity. It is the smallest sports arena in the Pacific-10 Conference, it costs more to maintain the venue than other Pac-10 arenas, and it lacks luxury seating, Williams said. He added that the venue is "too old and worn out" to be renovated.

Williams said the University had assumed it would eventually build a new basketball arena in the Autzen Stadium-Moshofsky Sports Center area. The advantages of Rusch's proposed site include better parking, more space to build, utilization by community groups and the possibility of incorporating the city as a financial partner, according to Williams.

The proposed arena would also host social events, like concerts, and would be by far the largest such structure in Lane County. The proposed arena could host performing acts that Eugene residents would otherwise have to drive to the Rose Garden or the Gorge Amphitheater at George, Wash., to see.

Sullivan said the idea is "intriguing," and could help develop the area around the courthouse.

"No one's really tried to pin down any specifics, though," he said. "I couldn't even say" whether Eugene will ultimately support the proposal or contribute financially to it, he said.

Athletic Department spokesman Dave Williford said he "couldn't begin to guess" how much a new arena would cost without more detailed information, but said it is "realistic and safe to say that it could run in the \$100 million range."

Any funding for the arena would come from donations, stadium profits and possibly city money, but University general funds and Oregon University System money would not be used.

Rusch, a member of Eugene's planning commission, envisions the arena as a focal of the area around which shops, restaurants and clubs could cluster and create a nightlife. He suggested that it would be a better use of the area along the Willamette River than the businesses currently there, such as McDonald's, Dunkin' Donuts and Pizza Hut.

Kelly added that discussions of a new arena might divert much needed attention and alumni donations from the School of Music's proposed performance center.

If talks with the University do not become serious until the middle of the decade, however, Kelly said the new downtown plans could flower and the performance center could gather the necessary funding and attention.

"I don't dismiss the (arena), but I'm not on board yet, either," he said. "Let's let this cook for a while."

If the proposal turns into a new arena, or any new arena is built, Williams said Mac Court will continue to host activities as well as wrestling, volleyball and possibly women's basketball.

"People enjoying basketball at Mac Court should not feel threatened," Williams said.

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