



The San Francisco Deltas will play their home games at the famed Kezar Stadium next year. (Ekevara Kitpowsong/Special to S.F. Examiner)

EDITORIAL: San Francisco Deltas find a home

MICHAEL HOWERTON / Mar. 20, 2016 12:00 a.m. / OPINION



It was reason to cheer. The City welcomed the San Francisco Deltas, our new professional soccer team, last week by giving them a home field: the green expanse of Kezar Stadium.

The Deltas, which will be the first West Coast team for the Division II North American Soccer League, will host 15 to 20 games next season on the Kezar grass, a popular venue for local school sports and home of the 49ers from 1946 to 1970. For San Francisco sports, this is sacred ground.

The Delta's permit to play at the stadium is for five years, after which the team plans to move to a new stadium to be built somewhere in the area.

The permit to let the team play wasn't without controversy. The permit approved by the Recreation and Park Commission bypasses a decades-old city policy that bans alcohol at the stadium, allowing beer, wine and limited hard alcohol sales at games. The commission received pushback from some neighbors opposing the move, who feared it would lead to too many drunken disturbances around the Haight. But to an overwhelming degree, community members embraced the new team.

Eleven out of 24 local community groups favored bringing the team to Kezar, and Rec and Park reported it received 1,400 letters of support and only 23 opposed. That level of enthusiasm is hard to argue with and speaks to a growing appetite for soccer in San Francisco.

As Joe Goldmark, owner of the nearby Amoeba Music on Haight Street, wrote the commission urging approval of the permit, saying it would bring more business to the area: "This seems to be a win/win for all involved. We believe that soccer brings out a well behaved family crowd and it seems to be a good use of the facility."

We concur with this sentiment. And we will hold the team to its vow to be a good neighbor and positive force in the community.

Team CEO Brian Andres Helmick promised Delta games won't interfere with school events at the stadium and emphasized he took neighbors' concerns about increased traffic and unruly fan behavior seriously. "It's bad business if we have any type of problems," he told the commission.

The team had agreed as part of the deal to sell 3,000 tickets for \$20 or less for each game and to donate another 200 tickets to local youth and nonprofit groups for seniors — good news in a region where we have tremendous professional teams with ticket prices that have outpaced the ability of most families to attend games.

The team will also spend half a million dollars to make renovations at both Kezar and Boxer Stadium in Balboa Park, where the team plans to practice. Rec and Park also confirmed that with the professional team moving in, there are no plans to replace the Kezar field with artificial turf.

It's an exciting beginning for a new team with a goal of winning over The City's heart.

Michael Howerton is editor in chief of the San Francisco Examiner.

BRIAN ANDRES HELMICK **JOE GOLDMARK** **KEZAR STADIUM** **MICHAEL HOWERTON**
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