

THE ORANGE COUNTY REGISTER

Freedom, Anaheim in talks over hub naming rights

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ANAHEIM – Freedom Communications, the parent company of the Orange County Register, is negotiating an exclusive contract with the city of Anaheim that would allow Freedom to seek out a corporate sponsor for a transportation hub under construction near Angel Stadium, the company's owner said Thursday.

If an agreement is reached, Freedom would not be paid unless it finds a sponsor that suited city officials for the new Anaheim Regional Transportation Intermodal Center, also known as ARTIC, said Aaron Kushner, CEO of Freedom Communications and publisher of the Register.

Kushner declined to discuss the potential value of such a deal, nor how much Freedom would be paid if a sponsor is found.

"The basic logic is that we are the only significant media business in Orange County, and we want to use that to bring a sponsor to pay for a project that would otherwise be paid by taxpayers," Kushner said.

A sponsorship deal would likely help the city pay off the 13.5-acre property it purchased last year from the Orange County Transportation Authority to build ARTIC, a 67,000-square-foot terminal that would provide access to Amtrak, Metrolink, buses, taxis and perhaps a high-speed railway. Anaheim agreed to purchase the land from the OCTA for \$32.5 million.

Construction began last September on a \$184.2 million facility on the land, which is expected to open in late 2014. That complex will be paid for by county, state and federal funds.

"If it makes financial sense, then I don't have a problem talking to Freedom or anyone else," Anaheim Councilwoman Lucille Kring said. "As long as it's not a tobacco or alcohol company and we have the ability to determine what the sign looks like and we get a good deal, then it would be good to have this type of revenue coming to the city."

Mayor Tom Tait questioned the ethics related to the proposal. He also said any contract for a firm that would find a sponsor should be opened up for competitive bids from qualified companies.

"Not only do I question the need for this agreement, I have serious concerns about creating a financial partnership with our local newspaper, which also serves as a watchdog for the citizens over matters at City Hall," the mayor said. "Independent journalism is important for democracy."

Kushner said that Freedom's negotiations, or any deal, with Anaheim would not affect the Register's news coverage of Orange County's most-populous city.

"Just because someone has a business relationship with the Register, it does not affect how the news side operates," Kushner said. "If you can't have a business relationship with someone you report on, then we wouldn't have any advertisers in the paper."

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