

Downsized Memorial Coliseum part of new Rose Quarter plan

By [Mark Larabee, The Oregonian](#)

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Thomas Boyd/The Oregonian

Think of it as Portland's rec room -- with a downsized Memorial Coliseum reconfigured as a cozier draw for sports, concerts and special events.

That's what the Portland Trail Blazers hope to pull off with "Jumptown," their vision for a revitalized Rose Quarter where they say music, sports and culture will intersect.

By adding condos and apartments, hotels, offices, stores and restaurants -- and potentially a "Nike interactive experience" -- the Blazers are trying to bring economic vitality to the struggling district surrounding the Rose Garden.

Included in their preliminary plans, rolled out on a new Web site Monday, is a remade Memorial Coliseum.

Blazers President Larry Miller wants to turn the aging glass palace into a more intimate venue for Portland Winterhawks hockey games, the famed Rose Festival parade and performances of all kinds.

By reducing the seating area, remodeling inside spaces and getting creative with marketing, Miller said he hopes the coliseum will be an added attraction in the bigger mix.

"It's about having energy and vibrancy here 365 days a year versus when there is a game or concert," Miller said.

Jumptown itself is a nod to a more vibrant past.

Long before the Blazers played first at the coliseum and then the Rose Garden, the area was home to a thriving, mostly African-American neighborhood. Jazz and blues clubs such as the Dude Ranch and the Chicken Coop became important cultural focal points and were popular places for established artists including Louis Armstrong and Charlie Parker. The times were chronicled in Robert Dietsche's book, "Jumptown: The Golden Years of Portland Jazz."

"We thought: How do we pay homage to the neighborhood that existed here?" Miller said. "Part of

doing that was recreating Jumptown, a place where people used to come and have fun."

The rollout of the interactive Web site, www.imaginejumptown.com, was timed with Mayor Sam Adams' call to the public for ideas to remake the Rose Quarter, which has failed to thrive since the Rose Garden opened in 1995.

Adams' Rose Quarter Stakeholders Advisory Committee, which began meeting this fall, is looking to adopt a new plan for the area over the next year. The group will accept ideas from the public through Dec. 1 on its own Web site: [www. Rosequarterdevelopment.org](http://www.Rosequarterdevelopment.org).

The Blazers, operators of both the Rose Garden and coliseum, have the right of making the first proposal for any private construction project involving the coliseum. The advisory committee will look at all the ideas, including the Blazers' plan, and make a recommendation to the City Council on what it would like to see in the Rose Quarter, including how best to redevelop the coliseum.

The Blazers' ideas for a thriving entertainment district first came to light last spring as the city negotiated with Portland Beavers owner Merritt Paulson on a deal that would have demolished the city-owned coliseum and built a new open-air, Triple A baseball park in its place.

But that deal fell through, in part because of a backlash from area residents who worried about parking and concert noise and from Portland architects and designers, who called the coliseum an architectural marvel. Since then, the building has been added to the National Register of Historic Places.

Portland Commissioner Randy Leonard, who pushed for the ballpark, said tearing down the coliseum still makes the most sense to him.

"It's a very, very attractive Costco," Leonard said. "A beautiful Triple A ballpark that has the city as its backdrop would be much more aesthetically pleasing."

-- [Mark Larabee](#)