

# Thinking outside the Rose Quarter box

By [Janie Har, The Oregonian](#)

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Thomas Boyd/The

OregonianThe city has extended the deadline for ideas from the public on what it should do with the city-owned Memorial Coliseum. Justin Gast has no political connections, no deep pockets. He's just a managing editor for a trade publication who rides his bike past the Memorial Coliseum almost every day and sees what could be.

Gast envisions an outdoor amphitheater with a view of the city, a hotel to welcome visitors and music clubs to turn this dead corner of Portland into a more diverse Pearl District.

"There has to be another option that the public gets behind."

## **Got an idea?**

Find applications to submit a concept for Memorial Coliseum at [www.rosequarterdevelopment.org](http://www.rosequarterdevelopment.org). You can submit ideas just to see what sticks or to solicit partners who could help turn the idea into a fully developed proposal. View current proposals at the Web site.

His is among two dozen or so proposals that have come in since Portland Mayor Sam Adams called for a citywide brainstorm on what to do with the aging coliseum and, by extension, the moribund Rose Quarter.

Few of these early ideas come with seed money or blueprints. And they won't have the financial backing of bigger players, such as the Portland Trail Blazers, who have their own plan. But what the ideas lack in specifics, they make up in imagination and desire.

"I don't have a stake in this venture," says Gast, 33. "I don't have an architecture or contracting firm that could benefit from my vision. I'm just a Rose City citizen who sees a tremendous amount of potential for this area."

The Rose Quarter in Northeast Portland holds the Memorial Coliseum and the Rose Garden. Even as fans flock to the Garden for sporting and music events, the general area remains dead most days and nights.

Last summer, Adams convened a 32-member task force to study the future of a coliseum in need of millions of dollars in upgrades and no firm consensus.

The Blazers would like to turn the district into a sports and entertainment playground called "JumpTown." Architects want to keep the coliseum's unique bowl-in-a-glass design. Military veterans cherish the monument to their service in the sunken plaza.

City Commissioner Randy Leonard thinks the coliseum is ugly and wanted to raze it for an open-air Triple-A baseball park.

"The future of that area really touches on the heart of Portlanders. It's really important we think about it that way," says Sandra McDonough, chief executive of the Portland Business Alliance.

"But it's also important we think about the economic viability of what we do there."

Sean-Michael Riley, 34, is a freelance video editor and the first to submit his plan online. Like the Blazers, Riley envisions a rollicking night life destination with music, sports, and restaurants -- but with a roller coaster outside the coliseum.

Riley moved back to Portland after eight years in Los Angeles, where the traffic and the sprawl wore him out. But he credits the City of Angels in one critical area.

"They think a little bit bigger sometimes when it comes to development or public entertainment," he says. "Portland lacks BIG."

Portland also lacks a world-class natural history museum, says Gina Botel, 29, a political science student at Portland State University. She first came up with the idea in 2004, talking with her family over a meal at the Widmer Gasthaus Pub near the Rose Quarter.

After consulting with architects and museum experts, Botel said she realized the current building could easily house a Museum of Natural History specializing in the Pacific Rim. Best of all, the current building could stay as is.

"I could picture it," she says. "The large glass structure illuminated from within to reveal stunning prehistoric fossils hanging from the rafters. The large open spaces filled with displays and interactive exhibits."

Many of the proposals involve entertainment or family amusement. One pitch calls for a botanical garden, maybe with butterflies. Another an aquarium. Several are for a baseball stadium.

Alan Smith, 55, an administrative assistant at Standard Insurance, pictures people turning out wind-turbine propellers or solar cells in a glassed-in coliseum.

"It would bring in a lot of jobs," he says. "Which I think would be more valuable than a place for entertainment."

The Portland Development Commission, the city's economic development arm, has extended the deadline for submissions from Dec. 1 to Jan. 8. Kevin Brake, senior project and program coordinator, expects fleshed-out proposals from the Blazers and others, such as architects, to come later.

All proposals must be submitted by the deadline to be considered. The Blazers have first dibs on development of the coliseum, but that option expires next November.

Cost will matter, since the city doesn't have urban renewal or other public money to throw at development. But how to pay for a project isn't as important at this stage, says Brake, given that the mayor is looking for uses and values that resonate with residents.

"It's an even playing field, and we are really trying to keep it that way," Brake says. "It's pretty cool that people are throwing all kinds of stuff in there, whether they're realistic or not."

Portland developer Doug Oblatz says he's not sure whether to jump in with a retooled version of his earlier plan for a community recreation and athletic center, given the Blazers' deep pockets.

"We're not afraid of playing the role of David in the David and Goliath story, but we want to make sure we have a good slingshot," he says.

-- [Janie Har](#)