

New Portland Timbers MLS franchise promises \$30M in annual economic impact

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BY: Sam Bennett

Major League Soccer officials announced Friday morning that the Portland Timbers will receive an MLS franchise, confirming rumors in recent days that Portland had a lock on the franchise. One official lightheartedly called Friday's announcement "the worst kept secret in Portland."

At a press conference before a boisterous crowd chanting "We want MLS!" in downtown Portland, Merritt Paulson, Major League Soccer Commissioner Don Garber and city officials said the Timbers have the franchise and can begin selling tickets for the 2011 season. Paulson owns the Portland Timbers soccer franchise and Portland Beavers baseball team. Paulson is financing the \$45 million bid for a Major League Soccer franchise in Portland, set to begin playing in 2011.

Paulson promised the MLS franchise will bring \$30 million to local businesses annually and create 300 long-term jobs.

"Welcome back, Soccer City U.S.A.," said Mayor Sam Adams.

Garber said PGE Park will be a "state-of-the-art, world class facility" that could host World Cup soccer qualification matches.

"Today is another historic day in the sport of soccer in the U.S., as Portland will be the 18th team in Major League Soccer," said Garber. "I think we made the right decision as evidenced by what's going on today. I've never seen anything like this." He predicted an "incredible rivalry" between Portland and Seattle, where 32,000 attended a pro soccer game Thursday night.

"This is kind of guy all of us in pro sports want to have in our family," Garber said referring to Paulson. "How could you have a city named Soccer City and not have a professional team here at the highest level?"

"Seattle Sounders: we're coming back after you in 2011," said Paulson, to cheers from the crowd.

City Commissioner Randy Leonard, who helped broker the deal with Paulson, said the deal "required having a mayor that supported bringing Major League Soccer to Portland." Without Adams' support, Leonard said, the deal would not have been possible.

Adams wagered "a friendly, but very serious" challenge that the Timbers will have a better first season in 2011 than Seattle and Vancouver, B.C. Fans at the event responded by chanting "No pity in the Rose City."

The Portland City Council last week approved a proposal to negotiate with Paulson. The council's approval of the proposal means that negotiations will move forward for Paulson to strike a deal that will involve renovating PGE Park for Major League Soccer and building a new park for the Portland Beavers baseball team in the Rose Quarter at the current site of the Memorial Coliseum.

The deal would include Paulson's \$40 million purchase of an MLS franchise and \$89 million in costs for the renovation of PGE Park and construction of the Beavers stadium. Paulson would also kick in about \$23 million for stadium construction.

For more information, go to www.PortlandMLS2011.com.