

Portland scores ML Soccer

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By ERIC ADAMS, Kgw.com Staff

PORTLAND, Ore. -- Portland is now home to another major league sports franchise.

Major League Soccer officials announced on Friday that Portland has won an expansion franchise in 2011 and becomes the 18th pro team in the U.S. and Canada.

The city's minor league soccer team, the Portland Timbers, will be elevated to the top tier of North American soccer beginning with the 2011 season, club owner Merritt Paulson announced.



"The Timbers name and legacy should ascend with Portland to the Major League Soccer level ...

This will increase the national and international spotlight on Portland ... while bringing family-friendly and fan-friendly sports to Portland," Paulson said.

'Timber Army' welcomes MLS

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- [Soccer speculation heats up](#)
- [Mayor rallies soccer support](#)
- ['Straight Talk' with Merritt Paulson](#)

Major League Soccer Commissioner Don Garber made the announcement and thanked Paulson for his drive to bring pro soccer to town as fans at the conference chanted, "There's no pity in the Rose City," an allusion to the instant rivalries created among Pacific Northwest franchises in Seattle and Vancouver, B.C.

The league recently granted Vancouver, B.C. a bid to host an expansion franchise in 2011.

Insiders had long speculated that Portland would receive the league's second and final bid of the year.

Paulson, owner of the Timbers and minor league baseball franchise Portland Beavers, financed the pro soccer bid with \$40 million of his own money.

He said pro soccer would not cost city taxpayers, even though the deal crafted between the Timbers and city leaders lacks about \$15 million in funding. MLS officials required its new expansion franchises play in soccer-only venues, which meant PGE Park would need to be converted and renovated, and a new baseball park constructed on the current site of Memorial Coliseum in the Rose Quarter.

Paulson claimed the deal would immediately create 600 short-term jobs and 300 long-term work opportunities, while pumping \$30 million in revenue into the city.

City Commissioner Randy Leonard, an ardent supporter of pro soccer in Portland, thanked Paulson and Mayor Sam Adams for the achievement.

Adams called the MLS expansion a "smart investment in Portland's future" and wagered that the Timbers would finish with a better season record in their first year than either franchise in Seattle or Vancouver.

"Now, we speak the language spoken by more cities around the world -- the language of soccer football," the mayor said.

Soccer rumors started swirling Wednesday

Quest for ML Soccer

- [Season tickets for Major League Soccer](#)
- [Seattle pro soccer debuts](#)
- [Soccer negotiations hit snag](#)
- [Task forces pushes ML soccer](#)
- [Soccer fans rally for new stadium](#)
- [Paulson plugs soccer on 'Straight Talk'](#)

Rumors of the upcoming announcement spread across Internet message boards and local media outlets as early as Wednesday morning, including [SoccerCityUSA.com](#) and another Web site devoted to bringing a pro franchise to town.

"It looks like this is going to be the celebration we have all been waiting for," Portland resident Jeremy Wright wrote on one message board.

Wright has been a vocal proponent of pro soccer in Portland and even wrote an [editorial](#) supporting the Merritt Paulson project for The Guardian, a British newspaper.

Seattle's pro soccer team, Seattle Sounders FC, [debuted Thursday](#) at Qwest Field. The team already has sold 20,000 season tickets and has more than 30 sponsors, according to KING5 News.

City Council voted 3-2 to approve MLS proposal

The City Council approved the pro soccer project proposal on March 11. The deal included renovating PGE Park and building a new baseball stadium.

Commissioners Amanda Fritz and Nick Fish voted against the proposal but it ultimately passed 3-2 with votes from Dan Saltzman, Leonard and Adams.

The mayor claimed the proposal would bring Portland "two stadiums for the price of one," since PGE Park would be reused for major league soccer, Portland State football and area high school football games.

"We are in the midst of the worst economy in recent history - this means job losses, tough program cuts, and drastic impacts on our homeless, youth and elderly. My vote today was not about the merits of a stadium deal, but about protecting our dwindling public resources," Fish said in a statement. "In this tough economy, we need a major league commitment to parks, affordable housing, jobs and education."

The report said an MLS franchise would also bring other "community benefits" with it, and that it would elevate Portland's international status at a time when the city aims to become the greenest urban economy in the U.S. **Details:** [Read the city proposal \(PDF\)](#)

But the proposal upped the city's financial obligations by about \$4 million. The report noted that the new \$89 million estimate could also increase after stadium designs and engineering plans were completed.

Under the proposal, Paulson would be the team's owner. However, the team would pay to rent a renovated PGE Park from the city and those funds would be deposited in the Spectator Facilities Fund.

Bonds would be issued to cover the \$89 million and recouped through the Spectator Fund, under the proposal.

"The city will own both PGE Park and the new AAA baseball stadium, and the Beavers and new MLS franchise will lease stadiums from the city. These rent payments will help to finance the city's debt obligations," the proposal said.

The new minor league stadium would seat about 9,000 people at the site of Memorial Coliseum in Rose Quarter.

Paulson hailed the city's proposal, calling it a "good deal for the city and for taxpayers."

More: [Merritt Paulson statement on soccer proposal \(PDF\)](#)

"If you are a worker, this creates jobs; if you are a taxpayer, this protects you from risk. If you are a fan, this means even better soccer and baseball ... If you love Portland, as I do, this revitalizes an area of the city ripe for renewal and showcases Portland to the nation and world," Paulson said.

In the deal, the Paulson family has reportedly agreed to personally guarantee to pay any cost overruns the city may accrue to convert PGE Park into a Major League Soccer stadium.

KGW Reporters Scott Burton and Randy Neves contributed to this report.

