Cajundome deficit may hit $728,000

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LAFAYETTE — The Lafayette Cajundome may post a deficit as high as $728,000 for fiscal year 1987, more than $300,000 in excess of what was originally estimated.

That's according to Ken Young, president of the firm Recreation Leisure Services, which is hoping to get a management contract for the rest of the fiscal year that ends Oct. 31. Young outlined the dome's fiscal dilemma at a council briefing Thursday morning.

The City Council will consider the RLS contract Tuesday. After last month's firing of the dome's director, Mike Barber, the city's chief administrative officer, Glenn Weber, has been in charge of the facility.

Mayor Dud Lastrapes is recommending to the council that RLS take over the reins, at least for the next eight months. RLS now provides several services at the dome, including food and beverage concessions.

Young said at the briefing that the dome's attendance figures in the past few months have dropped to half of what they once were. The dome opened in November 1985.

Revenue was first estimated at $1.5 million, but that has been revised to $954,000 and an estimate of expenses, first set at $1.9 million, has been reduced to $1.7 million.

Young said the dome deficit could only amount to $500,000 if several things occur.

He said a substantial revenue increase will be recorded if the dome gets the go-ahead to hold dirt events, such as tractor pulls, motorcycle racing and rodeos. The administration of the University of Southwestern Louisiana must approve dirt events in the dome, however.

The concert market is expected to improve later this year and a major concert booking at the dome will probably be announced soon, he said.

Young said the dome will have to compete with the Baton Rouge Centroplex, which will mean more aggressive negotiations with promoters.

The dome management also will have to work more closely with the Lafayette Convention and Visitors Commission to help get conventions to Lafayette, Young said.

More suites and advertising panels in the dome will have to be sold to raise revenue, he said.

Also, the dome could become part of a chain or route of facilities used by promoters for booking their events, he said.

In the proposed contract with RLS, the city would pay the company a maximum fee of $6,250 a month, in addition to a maximum payment of $20,000 for expenses.

The Lafayette Cajundome Advisory Board has given its unanimous recommendation of the RLS contract.

But Councilman F.V. "Pappy" Landry asked why RLS is being chosen to run the dome for the coming eight months, without considering other management firms. He questioned why the administration doesn't choose a permanent management firm immediately.

Councilman Al Simon countered that the city needs to conduct a marketing study first to see how the dome should be managed. Landry also has opposed spending $28,000 for the city's share of the study. The issue has been tabled twice this month.

William Rucks, chairman of the dome's advisory board, said he and fellow board members are comfortable with the selection of RLS.

Landry expressed concern about the effect of the dome's deficit on the rest of the city budget, and Weber said the administration shares that concern. But Weber said any management firm could be chosen and the deficit would still not be eliminated.

Young also cleared the air about hiring of employees. He said he has never been told by anyone in the city to hire individuals to work at the dome.

"I hope we don't have to stay on this subject very much longer," he said.

Barber was fired after he fired Greg Davis, his assistant. Recently, Davis was rehired by Young as business manager.

"There is no one who is going to demand the hiring of an individual or the firing of an individual," Young insisted.