The Lafayette Civic Center project—now dubbed the Cajundome—has been plagued with controversy almost since its inception a decade ago. There was a battle over the sales tax to fund a downtown facility in the early 1970s, the short-lived move to sell the Municipal Auditorium and use the funds to build a civic center and a host of squabbles once it was decided to build the structure at its present site.

With the concrete and steel now slowly rising on West Congress Street, a new conflict has taken center stage: the city council has refused to name a commission to oversee the Cajundome until it is convinced that the state will fork over the dollars needed to complete the facility.

The council's concern is a legitimate one. It doesn't want to be stuck operating a facility which is incapable—by its very nature—of attracting events of the type which can generate revenue and prevent huge deficits. And there certainly is no enthusiasm for dipping into city coffers for the money to construct those items still needed—particularly when sales tax revenues are on the decline.

But the political football being played with the Cajundome can only hurt the facility—and it is starting off with a lot of potential problems in the first place. The Cajundome will be built, obviously, whatever needs to happen now is for the planning of the facility to be removed from the super-charged political arena and be placed in an environment where rational thinking about the Cajundome can take place.

And there are a raft of questions, issues and decisions which must be made, many of them quickly, if the Cajundome is to be the kind of first-class facility which can be a tremendous asset to the business and social life of Lafayette.

1. State Funding. This has been a perennially thorny issue. The cost of the Cajundome has almost doubled since it was first conceived as a joint city/state project in the late 1970s. Twice, the legislative delegation has had to go back to the well for more funds to get the project off the ground. Now the state is being asked for more: its 75 percent share of $5 million needed for such items as a parking lot, lighting and draping for the stage area and other minute—but important—details.

The legislative delegation says Gov. Dave Treen has committed the state to come up with the bucks, but the governor has still not requested the money from the Legislative Budget Committee which must approve the request. And until everyone involved feels comfortable about the state's willingness to keep ante ing up, there will probably be repeats of the current game of "chicken" being played by the City Council.

2. City Contributions. The city of Lafayette has a two-fold financial commitment to the project at this point. It still must come up with capital funding to the tune of $1.25 million for its 25 percent share of construction costs, as well as $1 million for tables, chairs, and other furnishings in the Cajundome. And once the facility is completed, the city must maintain, operate and absorb the deficit which will more likely occur.

But the city has still not settled a number of the financial questions facing the Cajundome. The city has not yet decided where the $1.25 million will come from, although Mayor Dud Lastrepp has talked about the city's capital priorities within the city's capital construction program—possibly at the expense of the street construction to find it. Nor have plans been made for the additional $1 million needed for moveable items in the dome.

The question of the deficit is an ominous one; city officials have projected that it could be anywhere from $200,000 to $1 million depending on a host of impossible-to-predict variables. But at this point there is no working estimate or forecast of how much the facility could lose given a variety of occupancy and utilization scenarios.

One possible solution to the deficit may well be an increase in the city's hotel-motel tax. An additional one percent could bring in upwards of $200,000 in revenue annually, without, many believe, hurting the lodging industry. But taxes are delicate political issues these days. And if the city decided that it wants to go this route, it should begin putting together a consensus soon so that it can be presented at the 1984 session of the legislature, when tax matters can be brought up.

3. Facility management. With all the heat and smoke being generated by the issue of dollars, an equally important, issue has gone relatively unnoticed: who will run the Cajundome and how will the management of the facility be structured? At present, the city plans to hire an in-house manager answerable to the head of the Department of Public Affairs, in an unclassified position. Until the Cajundome Commission is named, the search for that individual cannot begin.

And there are indications that the lack of on-line management is hurting the Cajundome. Already officials of the Lafayette Convention and Visitors Commission have complained that they do not have the data about the facility for booking conventions. That kind of effort must begin years in advance.

Perhaps even more important than who runs the facility is how his or her job will be structured. City officials seem content with the in-house management approach, pointing to the success of the Municipal Auditorium as proof of their position. But there are some nagging questions about the arrangement devised by the city. Facility management is a wheeling-and-dealing, no-holds-barred affair. Can the director of the Cajundome compete in the fast and furious world of concert bookings with his hands tied by city procedures? With a salary that is a fixed amount, not augmented by bonuses? A number of observers have suggested that a non-profit corporation be established to govern the facility so that politics can be kept out of its operation, or that a private management firm be retained to supervise the arena. Of course, such an approach is not problem-free; but it is deserving of study.

4. Marketing direction. The manager of the Cajundome will be forced to perform a delicate balancing act between the interests of U.S.L., the convention trade, concert and special event promoters and community organizations in need of a meeting place. He must not only make sure that all of these constituencies are kept happy, he must maintain the proper balance between them in order to generate revenues for the facility, sales tax dollars in the community and so on.

How will the facility be marketed? No one has undertaken a serious study to answer that question. Input was received from a number of constituencies during the design process, but no formal marketing study was carried out. That should perhaps be the first order of the day once the Cajundome commission is named and a director is in place.

Lafayette citizens have waited almost a decade for a first class civic center. Potentially, they now have one. But until some serious attention is given to the trouble spots which now exist, the facility will continue to be cloaked in controversy. And that could doom the Cajundome before it has a chance to get started.