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Salt Lake County may yet use tax on stadium

Council appears reluctant to break 'understanding' with Legislature

By [Leigh Dethman](#)

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Don't mess with the Legislature.

That's a warning several Salt Lake County officials have reiterated throughout negotiations to use public money to build a soccer stadium for Real Salt Lake.

Lawmakers had an "understanding" with Salt Lake County that if local leaders opt to collect additional hotel/motel tax money, made possible through legislation passed earlier this year, then they must spend it on a Sandy soccer stadium, said House Speaker Greg Curtis, R-Sandy. Break that promise, and Curtis said he won't be happy.

Last week, County Mayor Peter Corroon nixed contributing such funds for a Real stadium, as plans are currently formulated.

Such an agreement over using hotel taxes for the project never made it into the actual state law, but everyone knew not to break it, Councilman Joe Hatch says. Now the county plans to cement that commitment, as the County Council is expected to pass a resolution Tuesday reaffirming a pledge to heed the Legislature's demands.

"I'm going to stick to my word," Hatch said. "My word is my bond, and I'm not going to break it."

The only way the county will spend the hotel tax money on anything else is if the Legislature gives its approval, the proposed resolution states.

Salt Lake County has been collecting tax money from hotels and motels to pay for Salt Palace expansion. The Legislature removed a sunset provision on the old law, allowing county officials to continue to collect the tax if they so choose.

Hatch said if stadium funding falls through, county officials will not choose to use the money anywhere else.

"No, if we do not spend this money on the stadium there isn't going to be the money," Hatch said. "It's just not going to occur. There is this misperception that this money is out there and we'd use it for other things."

However, not everyone on the council is on board with the resolution. Speaking to a group at the Utah Taxpayers Association conference Friday, Councilman Mark Crockett said county officials should be able to use the hotel tax money anywhere they please.

If legislators wanted the county to use the money only for a stadium, they should have put that language into law, he said.

In a March meeting, Councilman Randy Horiuchi characterized the understanding with the Legislature as a series of "winks and nods," and he warned his colleagues that if the county torpedoed stadium funding the county's credibility would be "damaged to the point that if we ever had a legislative agenda on Capitol Hill, this will serve as a reminder you should never do business with Salt Lake County."

Crockett said such backroom politics should never happen when millions of dollars of public money are on the table.

"I would prefer that we mean what we say and say what we mean at each level of government," Crockett said.

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