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## RSL keeps finances secret

Corroon says taxpayers need to know; team says records too sensitive

**By Derek P. Jensen**  
**The Salt Lake Tribune**  
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As negotiations intensify between Real Salt Lake and Salt Lake County over paying for a soccer stadium, a legal joust has erupted over disclosing the team's financial records.

County officials are ready to release the papers, but RSL attorneys are blocking them. On Thursday, the team's lawyers vowed to appeal the county mayor's decision to honor an open-records request from reporters and community activist Stephen Pace. That appeal prevents disclosure of the data - for now.

Dean Howes, RSL's chief executive officer, argues the team's financial records are sensitive and should not be subject to public scrutiny.

"In this case, competing sports and entertainment franchises, both locally and nationally, could use detailed information about Real's business operations, trade secrets and estimated revenues to outbid, interfere with, improperly duplicate and otherwise undermine every aspect of Real's ongoing operations, all without having to disclose any of their parallel information," Howes wrote in a statement.

But county Mayor Peter Corroon maintains the team - which is seeking up to \$45 million in public funding for the proposed Sandy stadium - owes the information to taxpayers.

"We have spent the past 16 months working to make Salt Lake County government transparent and accessible to the people," he wrote. "An open, honest and ethical government must be more than a promise. It requires us to explain to the public how and why its money is being spent. They have a right to know what we're doing, and I'm committed to telling them."

RSL's defiance troubles tax watchdogs.

"It sounds like they have something to hide," said Mike Jerman, vice president of the Utah Taxpayers Association. "If Real is going to have their hand out for 40-plus million dollars, taxpayers deserve some proof that their financial plan is viable."

Attorneys for both sides have fired letters back and forth, jockeying for position. But prior to RSL's appeal, the county intended to release the records all along, according to Doug Willmore, chief administrative officer.

"Sunlight ought to be on everything," he said. "That's why we made the decision."

The records request, made under the Government Records Access and Management Act, called for the release of RSL's finances and business plan.

Cassie Dippo, spokeswoman for Common Cause of Utah, declined to make any legal judgment but called Corroon's statement "excellent."

Howes counters that RSL is under no legal obligation to release its books and argues no other business

would agree to the disclosure. He says Utah Jazz owner Larry Miller never was asked to publicly reveal such information before receiving public assistance to help build the Delta Center.

Darrin Casper, the chief financial officer for the county, says he can understand the resistance - vendors and competitors could perhaps get a leg up.

"But if you're Real," he notes, "you put yourself in a fishbowl."

Now, RSL's attorneys will argue the team's case before the County Council. If the council upholds the mayor's decision to release the records, the team could take its case to court.

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