

Good plan, bad timing for Solano

But hold that thought

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There's plenty to like about the most recent plan to improve the Solano County Fairgrounds in Vallejo.

As Supervisor Mike Reagan aptly noted when the Solano360 Vision Report was presented to the board last week, it is part San Antonio River Walk and part Disneyland -- specifically Downtown Disney.

The vision also appears to borrow inspiration from the architecturally hailed Sundial Bridge in Redding, Vacaville's own popular CreekWalk and the Colorado Convention Center in Denver. It addresses the region's perennial need for sports ball fields and ties the property into Six Flags Discovery Kingdom across the street.

It even suggests including a permanent Ferris wheel, a reminder that this is, after all, a fairgrounds.

For all of the enthusiasm this vision should generate, Supervisor Barbara Kondylis also was right on Tuesday when she predicted that, given the state of the economy, none of this will be doable in the immediate future.

As if to punctuate her prediction, the Six Flags parent company on Saturday filed for bankruptcy protection. While the Vallejo park appears to be unaffected, it raises a concern.

And yet, there are reasons to believe this plan could be viable regardless. The Solano County Fair operates only five days a year, but its buildings are used year-round. The fairgrounds provide hall space for businesses that want to display, say, the latest in technology or recreational vehicles, for families celebrating milestones, for organizations that need a place to bring members together. A larger expo center and upgraded halls would let the fairgrounds expand that part of its operation, as well as provide individuals and businesses throughout the area with much-needed facilities.

The plan also calls for setting up rides and tents on a large grassy area during the fair, then using that space for ballfields the rest of the time.

Visitors to those upgraded halls and year-round ballfields could supply a steady customer base for shops and restaurants located alongside the proposed lake-size waterway.

Supervisors liked the plan, as did members of the Vallejo City Council. Now the question: Will a developer like it well enough to put money into the project?

That answer is going to depend on the economy.

The county and the city of Vallejo should do what they can, when they can afford to, to put this project in position to ride that next economic wave. And so what if it takes 10 years. The vision for San Antonio's Riverwalk was presented in 1929. A WPA project during the Great Depression laid the foundation for it, and it finally took off in the 1960s.

Great projects are worth the wait.