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## OPINION // COMMENTARY

## Ball is in Mayor Jones' court — will she take the win or open door for Spurs' exit?

By almost any measure, a deal that has the Spurs contributing \$500 million to a new arena is a win for San Antonio.

By **Josh Brodesky**, *Express-News Editorial Page Editor*

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Mayor Gina Ortiz Jones holds a news conference at the Municipal Plaza building in downtown San Antonio, Monday, calling for a delay in negotiations over a Spurs arena.

Sam Owens/San Antonio Express-News

I was 11 years old and had never heard of San Antonio until the Spurs drafted my childhood hero, Sean Elliott, in 1989.

While I have never met Elliott, who went on to be a star here, I sometimes joke about how much we have in common. We are from Tucson, graduated from the University of Arizona, love San Antonio and shared the dream of playing ball in the NBA.

In 2013, nearly 25 years after the Spurs drafted Elliott, I was weighing moving from Phoenix to San Antonio. At that time, Phoenix was home to four major league franchises, and while I would never take a job or make a life decision based on the professional sports landscape in a given community, the Spurs gave San Antonio a certain heft.

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San Antonio is a smaller media market than Phoenix — some colleagues in Arizona were quick to note this — but it is robust enough for at least one major league franchise. That counted for something, and it likely matters when it comes to relocations and recruiting.

I share these anecdotes as a reminder of how intrinsic the Spurs are to the San Antonio brand — in some ways, the team puts the city on the map — and also as a note of caution as to what the community could

lose should an arena deal fall through, opening the door for the Spurs to move to a different market.

Unimaginable? The Arizona Cardinals were once the St. Louis Cardinals. The Los Angeles Dodgers were once the Brooklyn (Trolley) Dodgers. The Seattle SuperSonics became the Oklahoma City Thunder. The San Diego Chargers bolted for Los Angeles.



San Antonio Spurs' stars Tim Duncan, left, Manu Ginobili, center, and Tony Parker talk on the bench in 2014. It is hard to imagine San Antonio without the Spurs, and yet, that becomes possible should an arena deal not come to fruition.

Darren Abate/Associated Press

We tend to think of the relationship between the Spurs and San Antonio as special because of the five NBA championships and top draft picks — the good fortune and commitment to excellence that stretches from David Robinson to Tim Duncan to Victor Wembanyama.

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But perhaps we do so to the point of self-delusion. In truth, there is nothing inherently special about the relationship that tethers the Spurs to the Alamo City. The Spurs are a business that we happen to cheer for, and sometimes businesses relocate.

AT&T once called San Antonio home, but Dallas had more to offer.

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Now, to be clear, Peter Holt, chairman and managing partner with Spurs Sports & Entertainment, has made his commitment to San Antonio known in [various statements](#) and, perhaps most importantly, in a proposal for a new arena downtown that could cost about \$1.3 billion.

That proposal includes [\\$500 million toward the arena](#); coverage of cost overruns; \$60 million for a “community benefits agreement” to fund child care initiatives; discount tickets; and other possibilities. The Spurs have also pledged \$500 million in surrounding development, which, of course, could be taxed to help fund the arena.

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No one is threatening to leave, but that doesn't mean the Spurs will stay should their offer be rejected. Not in a world in which voters in Oklahoma City approved an arena deal in 2023 [with Thunder ownership contributing \\$50 million](#). Not in a world in which Las Vegas, Austin, Nashville, Tenn., and Seattle are credible NBA destinations. Not in a world in which the Los Angeles Lakers were sold for \$10 billion.





San Antonio Spurs legend Sean Elliott slams the ball at the Alamodome back in the day. Elliott and his teammates helped put San Antonio on the map with their success.  
Joe Barrera/EN

Against this competitive backdrop, Mayor Gina Ortiz Jones would do well to declare victory: \$60 million for child care initiatives falls in line with her campaign priorities. Plus, she has a deal anchored with 10 times more private investment than the one voters approved in Oklahoma City and a lease that locks the Spurs in San Antonio for a generation.

Moving this project through would allow her to shift her focus to an affordable housing bond, flood infrastructure and the revamping of Ready to Work, the city's job-training program. Failure threatens these other priorities.

But instead of championing this as a win, Jones has sought to delay, saying she wants a more in-depth analysis about the arena and the larger Project Marvel, the city's proposed sports and entertainment

district downtown.

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Yet the broad terms of an arena agreement are well-defined: \$500 million from the Spurs, \$500 million from the city, up to \$311 million from Bexar County, pending voter approval in November.

By slowing things down, Jones risks losing a big vote to City Council and hobbling her new administration with symbolic defeat, all for what is likely, at best, a marginally better deal. And should voters reject the arena — far more likely without the mayor's support — the door opens for the Spurs to leave.

Certainly, there is another city whose voters would take this deal.

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Aug 13, 2025



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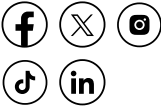
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