

WHAT WE THINK

Swim Hall is nice — at right cost

Yes, the International Swimming Hall of Fame in Fort Lauderdale is a nice attraction for the city, and has been since 1965.

And yes, it has been showing its age for a few years. It lacks the buzz to attract people.

But no, that doesn't mean the city should get into any kind of bidding war to keep the facility here. Particularly since the bidding could involve Fort Lauderdale tax dollars against private investment millions in California. That's not a battle Fort Lauderdale should even attempt to win.

Fort Lauderdale is in the process of constructing a \$32.4-million aquatic complex, featuring two Olympic-sized pools and a four-story parking garage. But Hall of Fame officials — who have threatened to move before, to Pompano Beach and Hollywood, among other places — say the city is not meeting their needs. And with the 50-year lease with Fort Lauderdale running out in 2015, the Hall is looking toward Santa Clara, Calif. Yes, that's the same Santa Clara that just beat out South Florida to host Super Bowl 50.

Santa Clara, with a rich swimming history, is pledging to raise more than \$10 million from private sources to lure the Hall there, plus a \$2-million endowment for museum operations.

"The city of Fort Lauderdale has been very supportive of the Swimming Hall of Fame," Fort Lauderdale Mayor Jack Seiler told the Sun Sentinel Editorial Board. "We



TAIMY ALVAREZ/SUN SENTINEL

The Swimming Hall of Fame CEO Bruce Wigo at the Fort Lauderdale museum. Yes, the lease is up in 2015, but let's not get carried away trying to keep it.

have made financial concessions before. We can't compete with a private entity that wants to pledge money. You can't use city dollars for that.

"We have a fiscal responsibility to our taxpayers."

Hall of Fame CEO Bruce Wigo told Sun Sentinel reporter Larry Barszewski the new space offered by the city is insufficient, and has nothing distinctive about it.

Attendance at the Hall has not been great in recent years, with only about 12,000 paying customers last year. The deteriorated grandstands also have caused a reduction in events. Hall officials say a planned redesign would place them in an unappealing building, making it difficult to attract more visitors. Various contract proposals have been exchanged between

The Buzz

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Fort Lauderdale and the Hall, but now things appear to be at a standstill.

If you haven't been to the Hall, you're not alone. Its sparsely attended museum has some interesting artifacts, but is in need of updating. Displays that feature long-ago swimming icons, such as Johnny Weissmuller and Esther Williams, are not what you would call a big draw these days.

Would it be nice to keep it here? Sure. It's part of the city's history, and used to be a popular spot for big swim meets and for world-class swimmers to train.

Would it be sorely missed if it picked up and moved to Santa Clara? Not according to its attendance figures.

"(The Hall of Fame and the city) have been a good partnership," Seiler said. "They are a part of the Fort Lauderdale family, as much as Stranahan House or the Riverwalk.

"But you can't throw money just to try and convince people they need to stay."

The mayor is right. The Hall of Fame would be nice to keep in South Florida. But the city shouldn't enter a bidding war with deep, private pockets to keep it.