

NEWS

Activists blast city's consultant for cozy ties, 'rosy' projection on Project Marvel

By **Madison Iszler**, Staff Writer
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Araceli Herrera, founder and director of Domesticas Unidas, stands with other concerned citizens as she holds a sign that reads "No! Project Marvel," outside of the Alamodome in downtown San Antonio on Monday, August 4, 2025. They gathered there for a press conference to publicly criticize the city's economic impact analysis of Project Marvel.

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Grassroots community groups are blasting [a forecast](#) commissioned by the city of San Antonio to highlight the potential economic benefits of creating a sports and entertainment district downtown.

[COPS/Metro Alliance](#) leaders say the report by consulting firm [CSL International](#) doesn't capture the possible risks of the projects that would make up the district. And they're asking why the private sector isn't playing a bigger role in its development if the outlook is as rosy as the firm reports.

Mayor Gina Ortiz Jones also criticized CSL's projections.

“That’s not the level of analysis or review of data that certainly I was expecting,” she said. “I think we’ve got to get more in terms of what the data actually was, and I would argue we need an independent economic analysis, which would better illuminate the assumptions that were made, so we can all have confidence in those numbers.”

In the report released last week, CSL said it expects expanding the Convention Center, renovating the Alamodome, turning the former John H. Wood Jr. Federal Courthouse at Hemisfair into a music venue and building apartments, restaurants, offices and shops around the facilities to generate \$18.7 billion worth of spending over 30 years.

The city could collect \$351 million in taxes over three decades from an increase in visitors, residents and events, according to the hospitality consulting firm, which has offices in New York, Frisco and Minneapolis.

COPS/Metro also says the report isn’t an independent analysis because CSL has contracted with the city in the past — for Convention Center-related analyses — and could land future work on Project Marvel, as the district is known. In the report, the firm’s principals said they “look forward to contributing to the next phases of project development and implementation.”

The sports and entertainment district’s build-out is expected to cost several billion dollars.

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“If I look at the energy, political power, all that the city has put in to creating this — I look at that and go, imagine if we took half of that and put that into addressing the unmet infrastructure needs for our whole city,” said Beverley McClure, an organizer with COPS/Metro.

Her organization is part of a growing wave of opposition to Project Marvel — groups that don’t want tax dollars spent on the development.

A coalition called [“No! Project Marvel”](#) — which includes Pueblo Over Profit, the Esperanza Peace and Justice Center and the Coalition for Dignified Housing — also decried CSL’s report.

The forecast is “jaw-droppingly vacuous” and doesn’t include market, cost or risk analyses, said Susan Strawn, a member of “No! Project Marvel” and former District 1 City Council candidate.

CSL provided no explanation of the data underlying its assumptions and no study of alternative uses for the public funding that’s expected to flow into the district, she said during a press conference Monday outside the Alamodome.

CSL said its estimates are based on forecasts for direct spending and indirect and induced spending, which are transactions between businesses and higher consumer spending.

The firm’s projections don’t include a new arena for the Spurs at the former Institute of Texan Cultures site. But consultants hired by the NBA franchise expect the arena to generate \$225 million annually in direct spending and \$897 million in total economic output, according to CSL.

CSL said its consultants reviewed the Spurs' projections but would need to conduct their own assessment of the arena.

The firm declined to make any principals available for interviews. The Spurs did not provide a copy of the franchise's analysis to the San Antonio Express-News. Jones said she directed City Manager Erik Walsh to ask the Spurs for the document.

"We have to understand the (return on investment) on each of these things," Jones said.

Bexar County commissioners will vote Tuesday on whether to call for a venue tax election to provide funding for the arena. The City Council is scheduled to discuss CSL's estimates for the district at a meeting Wednesday after Mayor Gina Ortiz Jones canceled a special gathering to discuss it last week.

City officials have proposed paying for various projects in the district with property tax revenue generated by development at Hemisfair and taxes on hotel rooms and rental cars, along with federal and state funding and private-sector investment. The county's contribution to the arena would come from taxes on hotel rooms and rental cars.

City officials have put the price tag of the Spurs arena at between \$1.3 billion and \$1.5 billion. The Spurs are proposing contributing \$500 million and asking the city to kick in \$500 million and the county \$311 million.

Expanding the Convention Center could cost \$750 million, a second Convention Center hotel \$750 million, and renovating the Wood courthouse between \$100 million and \$150 million. It's unclear what it would cost to overhaul the Alamodome, though city staff have said some upgrade programs they've looked at would cost more than \$1 billion.

Geoffrey Propheter, a professor of public affairs at the University of Colorado at Denver, echoed opposition groups' concerns about CSL's report.

"The consultant's incentive is to help get the project done, because that's how the consultant will get hired into the future for other 'analyses,'" Propheter said. "They have an incentive to tell their client — in this case, the San Antonio City Council — whatever they need to hear to make this thing look rosy."

CSL's 22-page slideshow is lean on details, he said. It doesn't include information about the consultants' methodology or what assumptions they're making about spending by visitors and residents, hotel prices, occupancy rates and other factors. There's no analysis of whether the city and county can attract enough business to support two more event venues, the arena and redone courthouse, on top of the Frost Bank Center, the Spurs' current home on the East Side, and Alamodome.

"It's useless for policy-making," Propheter said. "It's useful if you've already made up your mind and you're looking for some type of documentation to justify the fact that you've already made up your mind about this."

“If you just want to convince people of something, and those people, either for one reason or another, don’t have the time, don’t have the interest in learning about economics, then this is perfect because it grossly oversimplifies a complex scenario on the finances into a very digestible document,” he added.