

MEMORANDUM

TO: Sacramento City Leadership

FROM: Sacramento Solons Revival Project

RE: Strategic Case for Sacramento's MLB Expansion Bid. Narrative, Data, and Competitive Positioning

DATE: April 2026

Purpose

This memo synthesizes publicly available data, market analysis, and competitive intelligence relevant to Sacramento's formal MLB expansion bid ahead of the May 2026 press conference. It is intended as a resource for the bid's public narrative strategy and to document the strongest available arguments for Sacramento's candidacy.

Executive Summary

Sacramento is the most uniquely positioned Western expansion candidate in the 2026 MLB expansion race for one reason that no other city can replicate: it is currently operating as a live MLB market. The Athletics' residency at Sutter Health Park (2025–2027 seasons) provides verifiable attendance data, corporate engagement metrics, and observable fan behavior that competing cities such as Salt Lake City, Portland, and Nashville cannot present. When paired with the Northern California territorial vacuum created by the A's departure for Las Vegas, the region's established public-private partnership infrastructure, and a historic franchise identity in the Sacramento Solons, the Capital Region's case to MLB is both strategically differentiated and grounded in hard evidence.

The May press conference is a high-stakes inflection point. This memo recommends that the bid's public framing foreground the live market data argument above all others, while acknowledging the financing and ownership gaps with specificity and a credible resolution pathway.

Section I: The Market: Demographics and Territorial Context

Sacramento's Capital Region encompasses approximately 2.5 million people across Sacramento, Yolo, El Dorado, Placer, and Sutter counties. The broader Northern California interior, from the Oregon border through the Central Valley to Fresno, represents more than 10 million residents currently served by no MLB franchise.

The San Francisco Giants hold territorial rights across Northern California. When the Athletics depart for Las Vegas following the 2027 season, the Giants will be the sole Major League Baseball franchise in Northern California. This situation is, by any reasonable geographic standard, an anomaly in the league's market structure. The Giants' effective service area centers on the Bay Area and does not extend meaningfully into Sacramento, Stockton, or the northern Central Valley.

Mayor McCarty has articulated this correctly: "I think MLB is going to give a hard, hard look at Sacramento with only one team in Northern California." The territorial argument is not an obstacle to Sacramento's bid if properly framed; it is Sacramento's strongest structural argument. A league that leaves 10 million Northern Californians without an accessible franchise is leaving a significant and demonstrable market gap unaddressed.

Key framing point: Sacramento does not compete with the Giants. It fills the vacuum the Giants have never adequately filled.

Section II: The Athletics Residency as Live Market Proof

No competing expansion candidate can present what Sacramento presents: a functioning MLB market, currently operating, with real data.

2025 Season Baseline:

- Home attendance: 768,464 total, averaging 9,487 per game (81 home games)
- Full-season rank: Lowest home attendance in MLB
- Context: Second-smallest stadium in MLB (capacity ~13,000–14,000); no Sacramento identity in team branding; minimal local marketing infrastructure at launch; \$25 lawn tickets available day-of.

2026 Season Early Indicators:

- Opening Day 2026 (April 3, 2026): 12,410 attendance, setting a Sutter Health Park all-time record.
- A's introduced "Sacramento" branding elements for 2026, including Sacramento-labeled jerseys and Sacramento Saturdays programming.
- Season ticket waitlists were present heading into 2026; Opening Day tickets sold out in advance.

Analytical framing: The 2025 attendance figures should not be read as a ceiling; they should be read as a floor. The correctable variables (stadium branding, marketing investment, ticket pricing structure, team identity) were all suboptimal in Year 1. The structural variables (fan base, geographic catchment, market size, stadium location) demonstrated viability regardless. The trajectory from 2025 to 2026 Opening Day is the relevant data trend.

No city presenting a stadium rendering has this. The stress test is live, and it is producing the data that MLB needs to make an evidence-based decision.

Section III: Historical Foundation: The Sacramento Solons

Sacramento's baseball history is not incidental to its expansion case. It is a material asset.

The Sacramento Solons were a charter member of the Pacific Coast League in 1903, competing continuously (with brief interruptions) through 1960 — a 57-year run. The Solons won back-to-back PCL championships in 1938 and 1939. Edmonds Field, their home from 1936 onward, was a genuine community institution. On June 10, 1930, Sacramento hosted the first night game in Pacific Coast League history — five years before any major league club held a night game.

The name "Solon" carries particular resonance in California's capital city. Derived from the ancient Athenian legislator who reformed the code of Greek democracy, the term was long used in journalism as shorthand for senator or lawmaker. In Sacramento, the name is not branding, but rather an identity. It reflects the city's civic character and its position as the seat of California governance.

The Solons were effectively displaced in 1960 by the same force Sacramento now seeks to fully integrate: the arrival of Major League Baseball on the West Coast. The Dodgers and Giants moving to California in 1958 collapsed the PCL's independent structure and eliminated the market space the Solons occupied. Sacramento is not seeking to join MLB for the first time. It is seeking to reclaim the standing it was denied when the league expanded westward and left the capital city out.

Significance for bid framing: Every other expansion candidate is constructing an identity from scratch. Sacramento is restoring one with genuine baseball history.

Section IV: Competitive Analysis: Western Expansion Field

Salt Lake City

Strengths: The Larry H. Miller Company is leading a \$3.5 billion mixed-use Power District development with a shovel-ready stadium site. The Utah state legislature has committed up to \$900 million in public funding. The bid has a named, credible ownership group (the Miller family, with a demonstrated MLB-adjacent track record as longtime owners of the Triple-A Salt Lake Bees). National analysts, including ESPN's Buster Olney and former executives, have identified Salt Lake City as a frontrunner.

Weaknesses: The Mountain time zone creates meaningful broadcast window disadvantages. Late-inning West Coast games air past prime time in the Eastern and Central markets that drive national television revenue, a structural factor in any franchise valuation. Salt Lake City's MSA population of approximately 1.2 million is smaller than Sacramento's regional footprint, though the broader Salt Lake-Provo-Orem Combined Statistical Area reaches an estimated 2.8 million; the relevant market size figure depends on which geographic definition MLB applies. No live market data exists as the entire case rests on projections and renderings. The stadium has not been built, and the ownership group has not yet purchased a franchise.

Assessment: Salt Lake City is Sacramento's primary competition for the Western slot. The bid is well-capitalized and has structural advantages in financing readiness. Sacramento's counter-argument should foreground the broadcast/time zone disadvantage, and above all, the live market data advantage is the one differentiator that Salt Lake City structurally cannot replicate, regardless of how much capital the Miller family commits.

Portland

Strengths: Metro population of approximately 2.5 million, comparable to Sacramento. Portland Diamond Project (PDP) has secured approximately \$800 million in state financing and identified the Zidell Yards waterfront site. Natural Pacific Northwest rivalry with Seattle creates a compelling division geography argument.

Weaknesses: Portland still lacks a confirmed lead ownership partner. The general partner gap is PDP's own stated primary concern. No live market data. The Zidell Yards site is not yet shovel-ready. Portland's civic history with large public projects creates additional complexity.

Assessment: Portland is Sacramento's secondary competition. It has stronger market demographics than Salt Lake City but weaker financing readiness. The ownership gap is Portland's most significant vulnerability.

Nashville

Assessment: Near-consensus Eastern expansion pick. Not directly competitive with Sacramento for the Western slot, but relevant as evidence of league seriousness about expansion timeline.

Section V: Financing Framework

Mayor McCarty has stated a new ballpark would cost "in excess of \$1 billion." The following financing mechanisms have been identified as available:

West Sacramento Special Taxing District: Property tax capture rates in West Sacramento run at approximately 48 cents on the dollar, compared to roughly 22 cents in the city of Sacramento. The taxing district mechanism used for Sacramento Republic FC's stadium project provides a legal and precedent-backed framework for a larger MLB application. This is the core public finance instrument for a P3 structure.

Economic Impact Justification: The Greater Sacramento Economic Council has estimated approximately \$650 million in annual economic impact from an MLB franchise, supporting the public investment case. A target of 2 million fans per season at an expanded MLB-caliber facility at or near Sutter Health Park is consistent with comparable markets.

Ownership Group Strategy: The Mayor has publicly described a strategy of targeting investors who finish second in the San Diego Padres sale process. This is MLB-ready capital that was organized for franchise acquisition but was outbid, and it is a creative and potentially viable pathway to securing a lead investor.

Identified Gap: The single most significant open item in Sacramento's bid is a confirmed lead ownership partner. This is also Portland's primary vulnerability. Sacramento's May announcement will be substantially strengthened if it can name, or credibly describe, the ownership group structure.

It is important to note here that Sacramento's ownership landscape, while not yet formalized, has a significant existing asset that Portland lacks entirely. Kings owner Vivek Ranadivé purchased the River Cats and Sutter Health Park in 2022 and personally brokered the A's residency arrangement, offering the facility rent-free. He has stated publicly that he has cultivated a direct relationship with Commissioner Manfred and that he views the residency as Sacramento's audition for expansion, saying the city is "in pole position to get the new franchise." Commissioner Manfred, in a January 2025 visit to Sutter Health Park, publicly praised Ranadivé as an owner who is in touch with his community, adding that such qualities "make a huge difference in terms of the long-term success of the franchise." No formal commitment has been made, but Ranadivé's existing infrastructure, league relationships, and stated intentions represent the closest thing to an ownership foundation in the Western expansion field.

Section VI: Recommended Narrative Framework for May Press Conference

Based on the foregoing analysis, the following argument structure is recommended for the May 2026 announcement:

Lead with the data no one else has. The Opening Day 2026 record, the trajectory from 2025, and the live stress test argument should be the opening frame. This is Sacramento's unique differentiation, and it should be stated plainly and early.

Frame the territorial vacuum as a strategic opportunity. The post-A's Northern California landscape is not a complication for Sacramento's bid, but rather, the central argument for it. The league will have a choice between an underserved Northern California interior market of 10 million people existing in the shadow of a monopoly and power vacuum, and a Mountain time zone market with structural broadcast disadvantages. That framing is more durable than a population comparison, which shifts depending on which geographic definition is applied.

Claim the history. The Solons are an asset. A 120-year baseball relationship with the Pacific Coast League, back-to-back championships, the first night game in west coast professional baseball history — these are legitimizing facts that no other expansion candidate can offer.

Be specific about financing. Vague references to "public-private partnership" will not differentiate Sacramento from the field. Specificity about the West Sacramento taxing district mechanism, the property tax rate differential, and a credible pathway to the \$1 billion threshold will differentiate.

Name the ownership pathway. If a lead investor has been identified, name them. If the Padres' bidder strategy is the active pathway, say so with as much specificity as possible. The ownership gap is Sacramento's greatest remaining vulnerability and the one most worth addressing early and publicly before the competition does. Narrative control is the key.

Conclusion

Sacramento's expansion case is real, it is timely, and it is uniquely supported by evidence that no other Western candidate possesses. The May press conference is the moment to present that case with as much precision and confidence as possible.

The Sacramento Solons played their first game in the Pacific Coast League in 1903. They were displaced not by failure but by the arrival of the same league that Sacramento is now seeking to join. The Capital Region has the market, the infrastructure framework, the civic leadership, and the historical standing to make that case.

The window is open. The data is there. The argument is strong. The time is now.
