The Super Bowl (Blame) Shuffle

Did the S.F. Board of Supervisors complaining about the Super Bowl fumble, or did Mayor Ed Lee run a sneak play?

By Chris Roberts

The party is over, the NFL own-ers are gone, and Super Bowl City is (partially) dismantled. Now the real games, over San Francisco's hosting of the Super Bowl, can resume at City Hall: Was the deal that brought us the Super Bowl sneaked past the elected officials who spent the last month raising a fuss, or did the naysayers fail to notice until it was too late to do anything about it?

Recall that the Board of Supervisors voted in 2012 to allow the Host Committee, a collection of local luminaries — including former Mayor Willie Brown, tech magnate Ron Conway, former Secretary of State Condoleezza Rice, and various others of our betters — to bid to host the Super Bowl.

A bid, narrated by Mayor Ed Lee and some 49ers personnel, was submitted on an iPad Mini to the NFL, which announced Levi's Stadium would get the big game in 2013. Terms of the bid were never returned to the Board, including the signed agreements from city officials like police Chief Greg Suhr and fire Chief Joanne Hayes-White not to recoup any of the $5 million-and-counting in costs from the NFL.

This is in stark contrast to the city's agreement to host the America's Cup, which received a thorough grilling. Ergo, the Super Bowl deal snuck through without public review — or did it?

Nathan Ballard, a spokesman for the Host Committee, insists that any public official who wanted a briefing on the Super Bowl deal — including the agreement to foot the NFL's bill — received one. And eight supervisors, including Supervisor Jane Kim (who authored a resolution to try to get the NFL to re-negotiate) were briefed.

"Their concerns over absorbed city costs were not raised during the 38 months between formally signing on for the bid in 2012 and Jane Kim suddenly making this an issue on December 7 [2015]," Ballard wrote via email.

Kim remembers it differently. "The first time [Host Committee CEO] Daniel [Lurie] came into my office was Nov. or Dec. 2015," she says. And as for the costs? Kim has "no recollection" of any meeting outlining the cost, with anyone.

"We tried to get a briefing in December — we weren't getting any info," says Supervisor John Avalos, who also criticizes the deal, alleging it was specifically engineered never to suffer an America's Cup-like final review.

"I expected a deal would come before us [for final approval]," he says. "It never did."

This could be because nobody knew what the bill was. Tasked in December figuring out how much the Super Bowl would cost, Harvey Rose, the city's Budget Analyst, found himself stymied by city departments, who only coughed up figures in early January after he started ringing supervisors to complain about the stonewalling. (Those numbers subsequently grew.)

Post-game, fans of the deal are pulling a Cam Newton and opting for silence. Mayor Ed Lee did not respond to a request for comment sent through his press secretary. SF Weekly was promised an interview with Supervisor Mark Farrell, the Super Bowl deal's main cheerleader — who claimed on KQED that the budget figures Rose could not find received a thorough vetting last year at budget time — but he was mysteriously absent at press time.

But with a $100 million budget deficit for the next year to fill, they may have moved onto other things.

Secret Ferret

The ferret legalization movement is hampered by a need for deep cover.

Pat Wright loves ferrets — a forbidden love in California, where owning the animals has been illegal since 1933. The state's complex ecosystem and ferrets' outlaw reputation as chicken killers make the weasel-like creature verboten here and in Hawaii.

Like many ferret owners whose malfeasance gets reported to the Department of Fish and Wildlife, Wright says he's paid a high price for his pets. He's served 17 days in a maximum security prison, performed 300 hours of community service, and shouldered civil lawsuits, all because he refuses to quit his decades-long crusade to grant ferrets the same legal standing as dogs and housecats.

California ferret lovers circulated a petition to qualify ferret legalization for the 2016 ballot, but with only 10,000 signatures gathered, they fell far short of the 365,880 required. Their next move, Wright says, is to form a Super PAC of ferret lobbyists, and recruit politicians sympathetic to their cause. (So far, nobody has endorsed them.)

Momentum is slow-going, because ferret owners prefer to remain anonymous. Few will out themselves for fear of agents raiding their homes, as happened to Wright in San Diego.

Still, the Bay Area chapter of the Golden State Ferret Society boasts about a dozen dedicated members — whose last names and addresses are secret to Donna Hazelwood, the society's vice president.

"We don't tell anybody we can't trust. We don't tell neighbors," she says. "But my ferrets are the only things I'd go to jail for." - ***JL***

Cop Out

The feds will review the SFPD, but critics dismiss the 'investigation' as merely symbolic.

By Jeremy Lybarger

When Mayor Ed Lee announced on Feb. 1 that the Department of Justice would review the San Francisco Police Department, many community activists expected a wholesale investigation. At minimum, they expected the department to be held accountable for the Dec. 2 police shooting of Mario Woods, whose death sparked protests and calls for police Chief Greg Suhr's resignation.

But instead of a Ferguson- or Baltimore-style probe, San Francisco police will get a "collaborative review" that watchdogs deride as toothless. Even worse, the feds won't look into the Woods shooting (although three local investigations are pending).

The DoJ's Office of Community Oriented Policing Services (COPS), which is conducting the review, doesn't have the authority to enforce any recommendations. In fact, adopting those recommendations is voluntary. Nor will the agency monitor the SFPD once the review is over to ensure that any recommended reforms are made.

Alan Schlosser, an attorney with the American Civil Liberties Union, welcomes federal intervention but is skeptical that a COPS review can change the SFPD's entrenched culture.

"San Francisco cops have had hours and hours of training about racial bias," he says. "It's not a problem of policy or training. Chief Suhr has not created a culture where cops are held accountable for their misconduct."

As examples, Schlosser cites the 14 officers whose racist and homophobic text messages came to light in 2015. While Suhr attempted to fire the officers involved, Schlosser believes they're "the tip of the iceberg" as far as police impropriety is concerned. The SFPD's Office of Citizen Complaints is another hurdle. According to testimony that OCC director Joyce Hicks delivered before District Attorney George Gascon's "blue ribbon" investigatory panel in January, none of the 250 racial bias complaints lodged with the OCC since 2011 has been sustained.

In addition, California has strict laws regarding access to officers' disciplinary records. While Suhr has pledged to cooperate, Schlosser argues the SFPD could stymie COPS' effort to make meaningful policy recommendations.

In Baltimore, a COPS review was underway when Freddie Gray, an African-American man, died of a spinal injury while in police custody on April 19, 2015. Lester Davis, deputy chief of staff for Bernard Young, president of the Baltimore City Council, says that a COPS review was inadequate for real reform in his city.

"The issues in the department are systemic and longstanding, and the only way to fix them is to have the full weight of law behind us," Davis says, adding that "in a collaborative review, both sides are looking for concessions, and we didn't want any concessions."

The DoJ subsequently launched a still-ongoing "pattern or practice" investigation of the Baltimore Police Department, which will result in mandatory, enforceable changes for both commanders and rank-and-file officers.

Taina Vargas-Edmond, of Oakland's Ella Baker Center for Human Rights, wants the same for the SFPD. She dismisses the COPS review as "symbolic."

"If they were serious about reform, they'd have a full civil rights review with teeth," she says.