

# Daily Journal

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## THE 2016 CLAY AWARDS

*The 20th Annual California Lawyer Attorneys of the Year*

### Real Estate & Development



Photo by Alex Drecun | Special to the Daily Journal

Douglas M. Champion, Danielle Katzir, Sean K. Tierney, Amy R. Forbes, Farshad E. More and Patrick W. Dennis of Gibson, Dunn & Crutcher LLP

### Smoothing the way for the gridiron's return to Los Angeles

Like an ace running back dodging defenders, Amy R. Forbes of Gibson, Dunn & Crutcher LLP took it to the house for a proposed new NFL stadium in Inglewood on a 60-acre site near the Forum and Hollywood Park Race-track.

And she did it in record time, obtaining project approvals less than two months after the high-profile development — including not just football but a 6,000 seat performance venue and more than 4 million square feet of hotel, office, retail and residential space — was announced in January 2015.

The revived L.A. Rams plan to play their first game there in the fall of 2019. Forbes said she'll be at the event despite her lack of enthusiasm for football.

"It's an admission against interest, but no, I'm not a football fan," she said. "But of course I'll go to the opener. I have colleagues here who explain the game to me."

Forbes and an extensive roster of fellow Gibson Dunn lawyers plus elec-

tion law specialists at Bell, McAndrews & Hiltachk LLP conceived an innovative path that complied with the California Environmental Quality Act while streamlining the process and shaving several years off the approval process.

To accomplish the formation of the venture and entitlement of the property in record time, Forbes used a voter-sponsored initiative process, which is legally exempt from CEQA review.

"I'm the captain, and using the initiative process was my theory," Forbes said. "But as my father used to say, theories are marvelous, but execution is a little harder. Nothing like this had ever been done on a project of this scale."

Forbes and her team looked at every stadium project in California over the prior decade and put together a comprehensive mitigation plan designed to assure the electorate nothing was being hidden. "We knew the potential hot buttons, and we addressed every one," she said.

In planning to take the project to

*Hollywood Park Land Company matter (NFL Stadium, Los Angeles)*

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voters, before any opposition could develop, she and her colleagues were negotiating with themselves. "We wanted to answer all questions before they were asked," she said.

They set up a Gibson Dunn "red team" of theoretical critics that included the firm's Daniel M. Kolkey, a former state appellate justice, to scrutinize each facet. "This was unlike a regular transaction where there's another side," she said of the months of planning that went into the proposal before they took it public.

"It was a big idea and it helped that we got the enthusiasm of the commu-



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— AMY R. FORBES

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nity behind us," Forbes said. "Three or four people came before the city council and spoke against it, but the facts of the situation and our very robust mitigation planning meant there really was not much pushback."

Using professional signature gatherers, the team got 22,000 Inglewood voters to sign on to the plan in two weeks — more people than had voted in any recent Inglewood election, Forbes said. That helped persuade the city council to unanimously adopt the initiative on Feb. 24, 2015, eliminating the need for an actual election.

Forbes' big idea had gotten a big boost from the state Supreme Court, which a few months earlier ruled in *Tuolumne Jobs & Small Business Alliance v. Superior Court*, 59 Cal.4th 1029, that qualified voter initiatives adopted by a city council, rather than placed on the ballot, are also exempt from CEQA. Forbes recalled the moment she and her colleagues realized they had enough signatures to ensure an election. "That was when I knew we could pull this off," she said. "I said, 'Oh, my goodness, this really is happening.'"

Before seeking signatures, project backers mounted a road show, taking the plan to voters in a series of town hall-style meetings. "The developers did the talking," Forbes said. "I was there, but I didn't speak. No one wants to hear from the lawyers."

— John Roemer