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NFL Super Bowl demands are unrealistic

The National Football League needs a healthy dose of realism about San Diego politics if it thinks the city will pony up another \$20 million for Qualcomm Stadium improvements' in order' to compete for the 2002 Super Bowl.

That, simply, is beyond the boundaries of political reality.

After investing \$78 million to expand the stadium for the 1998 Super Bowl, San Diego weathered one of the fiercest political storms in its modern history. Popular discontent with the project and the related extension of the Chargers' lease continues to haunt City Hall. No elected official is about to risk another tempest by proposing to spend \$20 million more to attract another Super Bowl - especially after the event here on Jan. 25 was such a stunning success.

There clearly is no need for a major overhaul of the stadium to stage a spectacular Super Bowl in San Diego. This year's extravaganza demonstrated that. In fact, as the host city for Super Bowl XXXII, San Diego garnered praise from all quarters for putting on one of the most exciting spectacles in NFL history.

So why are some team owners suggesting that San Diego sink another \$20 million into Qualcomm Stadium? One answer may be that the NFL merely is trying to gain maximum bargaining

leverage now that it has narrowed the list of potential sites for the 2002 Super Bowl to two cities, San Diego and New Orleans.

It's only natural for the NFL to seek concessions from the competing cities. But asking for, a major renovation of Qualcomm Stadium is a nonstarter, and NFL owners should understand that in no uncertain terms.

That doesn't mean, of course, that more-modest improvements are not a fair subject for negotiation between the city and the football league. San Diego is more than willing to spruce up the Q for another Super Bowl.

Besides, regular improvements must be made at any stadium to maintain it properly. For example, 47,000 older seats at Qualcomm are in need of replacement, at a cost of \$2 million. And other renovations may be warranted as well, such as expanding the press box to accommodate the horde of sportswriters and broadcasters who cover the big game.

But the NFL can forget the notion of lowering the playing field to provide a better view for some lower-level seats. That would be an enormously costly project of questionable technical feasibility.

San Diego is a great site for the Super Bowl in 2002. The NFL surely knows that. It shouldn't try to put the arm on the city with unrealistic requests for another major stadium renovation.