

SUNDAY OPINION

Should L.A. run the Greek?

THE CITY of Los Angeles, which has enough problems getting the streets paved and the trash picked up, may now be getting into the concert business. Earlier this month, after a nasty, political fight over which of two entertainment giants should be awarded the multimillion-dollar contract to operate the venerable Greek Theatre, the Board of Recreation and Parks Commissioners threw out the bids and decided to let the city staff have a crack at running the venue. This is a bad idea, and Mayor Eric Garcetti and the City Council should put a stop to it.

Clearly, the decision on who should run the Greek became excessively politicized. The Recreation and Parks Department spent nearly two years on a complicated, multistage evaluation designed to insulate the contract process from outside meddling. But when the commission picked Live Nation instead of the Nederlander Organization (which has managed the theater for four decades) and its partner Anschutz Entertainment Group, all sides brought their lobbyists, lawyers and community supporters to the fight at City Hall. The City Council eventually rejected Live Nation and directed the staff to redo the bidding.

With time running out on the current contract, Recreation and Parks Depart-

ment managers came up with a new idea. Why not run the theater themselves? City employees could handle the concert calendar, maintenance, concessions and parking, and professional promoters would book and advertise the acts. The city might even make more money by cutting out the middleman, officials said.

Here's the problem: The city doesn't have a good track record of running profitable entertainment venues. The city hired AEG in 2013 to take over operation of the money-losing city-run Convention Center with the hope that the company could cut costs and increase the number of conventions. Last year, the Los Angeles Zoo brought in a private nonprofit to manage marketing and promotions and to attract more visitors and donors. In general, the city should focus on its core responsibilities of public safety, infrastructure maintenance and basic services. Does it really make sense to hire the professional staff needed to manage a large concert venue or to take on the responsibility for making much-needed capital improvements to the facility when the city already has a hard time keeping park bathrooms clean?

The answer to the Greek Theatre mess is to fix the contracting process, not to give up on private management or have the city get into a business in which it has no expertise.

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