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Danish architect lends touch to Seaport Village makeover



Photo courtesy of Seaport San Diego

Danish architect Bjarke Ingels.

By Thor Kamban Biberman

A renowned Danish designer, who leads a 500-member global architectural practice, visited San Diego this week to discuss his work and how he will help transform the Seaport Village property.

Bjarke Ingels, who heads Bjarke Ingels Group, came to Ruocco Park Tuesday, marking the midpoint of the design process for Seaport San Diego, a project that promises to transform the property along San Diego's waterfront.

Ingels is the lead architect for the project's new structures and public spaces. His work also will include public waterfront grounds, a new aquarium, and a learning center (the Scripps Institute of Oceanography will have a presence onsite), as well as hospitality and commercial space.

One of Time magazine's most influential people in 2016, Ingels joined the Seaport San Diego team about 18 months ago.

"It's only once in a lifetime you get a property like this," he said, adding that the site is as significant as the Sydney Opera House in Australia.

The roughly 190,000-square-foot, Ingels-designed aquarium will be among the project's showstoppers. Plans call for a multi-level subterranean structure to feature both salt and fresh water fish.

"We're creating a blue campus that's blends science with the business of water," Ingels said. "This will have a maritime learning center, and an aquarium dedicated to protecting our ecosystem."

Other features of Seaport San Diego will include a nearly 500-foot observation tower with a ride, along with retail and lodging, ranging from a hostel to a five-star resort hotel.

The most expensive hotel is projected to be a 231-room, five-star hotel. A 350-room micro hotel, consisting of about 131,000 square feet, will have rooms that average 170 square feet in size.

The hostel -- the California Coastal Commission insists on low-cost accommodations for any waterfront project -- has grown noticeably from its originally planned 225-room, 475-bed layout to 237 rooms with 490 beds, a rooftop pool, deck, and restaurant.

The design of both the retail and the office portion of the development also has changed due to the discovery of an active earthquake fault line and other factors. For example, what was to be approximately 400,000 square feet of retail space, has shrunk to about 240,000 square feet.

Office space was increased from 19,000 square feet to 150,000 square feet at the expense of retail offerings.

The final program and site plans for Seaport San Diego (also known as 1HWY1) are expected to be unveiled in November. The final architectural designs are expected to be ready early in 2019.

If all goes as Ingels, Gaffen and the other members of the development team -- which includes Jeffrey Essakow, AVR P Skyport, and Gensler -- would hope, groundbreaking for the project could take place by 2022.

Yehudi Gaffen, CEO of the development team Protea Waterfront Development, said despite the fact the development hit a snag when the fault line was discovered, the groundbreaking should take place as scheduled in 2022 and the team will be able to complete the entire development within a four-year timeframe.

While the development has multiple architects, Gaffen said it is exciting to see how well the team is working together.

"It's like they're all working for one firm," he said.

Ingels has experience with many large projects.

He is the designer of Manhattan's "The Dry Line," a 10-mile public park designed not only to provide recreation, but to protect lower Manhattan from catastrophic flooding from events such as Hurricane Sandy.

Ingels has also designed a waste-to-energy plant known as Amager Baake in Copenhagen, Denmark, that reportedly has nothing coming out of its stacks, and doubles as a ski slope for one of the flatter countries in Europe. Otherwise, he said, his Danish compatriots must go to Sweden if they want to ski.

Other Ingels designs include the Via 57 West sail-shaped residential building in Manhattan; the Smithsonian Institution South Campus in Washington, D.C.; and the Superkilen public space in Copenhagen.

thor_biberman@sdtranscript.com

