

The Daily Transcript

Established 1882

www.sdtranscript.com

Monday, March 2, 2020

C-3 panel: Big changes coming to Seaport Village



Image courtesy of C3

A rendering of the plaza for the proposed Seaport San Diego mixed-used development.

By Thor Kamban Biberman

From Point Loma to Chula Vista, San Diego Bay is about to undergo some big changes and some major challenges as well.

The future of San Diego Bay was discussed during a Citizens Coordinate for Century 3 meeting Thursday, the first in a series of events the group will hold about the bay.

The San Diego Unified Port District is preparing to release the draft of its Port Master Plan Update. A final approval of the update is expected before the end of the year.

Port Commission chairwoman Ann Moore said 1981 was the last time the Port master plan was updated. She said she knows of dozens of significant amendments since, making it clear that it was time to bring the document into the 21st century.

A great deal has already been done.

"We've had 300 interviews with stakeholders," Moore said.

One of the most important components of the Port Master Plan update is the Chula Vista Bayfront Plan, which has been in the works for at least the past 25 years.

A 246-stall RV park, which is being relocated and redeveloped, will be the first component of the Bayfront Plan.

"You will be able to rent a cabin there if you want," Moore said.

She noted there have been at least 100 meetings on what to do with the Chula Vista Bayfront Plan. The project will be anchored by a 1,600-room Gaylord Hotel and convention center.

The convention center will consist of approximately 719,000 gross square feet of convention and meeting space.

Moore emphasized the importance of the park spaces in the Chula Vista Bayfront Plan. These include the 25-acre Harbor Park and the 21-acre Sweetwater Park, along with other major open spaces.

"About 50 percent of the plan is dedicated to open space," she said.

Mike Singleton, a principal with the landscape architecture firm KTU+A, noted how ecotones (transitional areas between ecological communities) will help define not only the parks themselves, but the land around them. It means the open space will include coastal sage scrub, wetlands, and native grasslands.

Further north, Moore noted how construction is proceeding on restaurants being built on the site of the former Anthony's Fish Grotto. Known as the Portside Pier project, the development at 1360 Harbor Drive will have fresh seafood at Brigantine on the Bay, Mexican food at Miguel's Cocina, pub fare at Ketch Grill & Taps, and walk-up service at Portside Gelato and Coffee. Each of the tenants will operate as part of a single master lease. Completion is slated for the middle of this year.

Moore also touted the San Diego Symphony Bayside Performance Park Enhancement Project, which will provide a 13,000-square-foot covered stage performance area with an acoustical shell at South Embarcadero Park. The venue, which will have the capacity for 10,000 patrons, also is slated for completion this summer.

Yehudi Gaffen, CEO of Gafcon and Protea Waterfront Development, is overseeing plans for the transformation of Seaport Village into Seaport San Diego. He said it seemed like everything was wrong with the site, from an active earthquake fault to a sewage line from Coronado that also goes beneath the property. Even with these issues, Gaffen said the Bjarke Ingels-designed project is nevertheless stronger than ever -- both physically and from a planning standpoint.

One example of how the Seaport San Diego design changed because of the fault is the placement of the spire atop a 380-room hotel complex to ensure the tower had a proper foundation. This will be just one of the lodging components.

Exactly how many hotel rooms will be built at Seaport San Diego is still being determined, though Gaffen has said there could be as many as 2,000 rooms despite the fault line.

"There will be seven different price points from hostel to luxury," he said.

As for the spire, Gaffen said it will be a signature element for San Diego, comparing it to the space needle in Seattle.

In an effort to maintain a working waterfront, Gaffen said a 25,000-square-foot fish processing facility will be developed on the G Street Mole.

"About 60 percent of the fish is taken to San Pedro because we don't have the processing," he said.

Other elements will include a major event center as well as an aquarium and classrooms for the Scripps Institute of Oceanography. Wetlands also will be recreated by the bay.

While projects of this magnitude are frequently controversial, Gaffen said the team members at Protea Waterfront Development are working closely with both the California Coastal Commission and the State Lands Commission on the project.

Diane Takvorian, the long-time executive director of the Environmental Health Coalition, expressed concerns about an artificial beach that is being proposed as part of the Seaport San Diego plans.

"I wouldn't like to see children playing in the waters of San Diego Bay," she said, expressing concerns about the bay's pollution.

Takvorian said her goal isn't to get rid of all the industrial uses along the bay, but she does want those users to be good stewards of the water, the land, and the air.

"These industries put communities at risk," she said, adding that the area around Barrio Logan has the highest rates of childhood asthma in the region. "The marine terminals have 1,000 to 1,500 truck trips per week."

Moore said the Port already has policies for nonconforming uses, but said the Port Master Plan Update should provide more clarity on how to deal with these uses.

Singleton agreed with Takvorian that the Port's industrial tenants need to be good stewards.

Brad Raulston, the city manager of National City, said having elements other than industrial on his waterfront is a challenge because a vast majority of the waterfront has long been established for industrial uses.

He said National City has been able to garner funds from the Port that have helped bankroll projects such as the National City portion of the Bayshore Bikeway.

Raulston said the combined transient occupancy tax receipts from the Manchester Grand Hyatt, the San Diego Marriott Marquis & Marina, and the Hilton San Diego Bayfront are greater than his city's entire general fund. He added that there are seven parcels along Harbor Drive that are key to National City's growth.

One of these parcels would allow Pasha Automotive, which processes one out of every eight vehicles coming into the U.S., to handle those cars more efficiently. Another parcel has been targeted for a proposed expansion of National City's Pepper Park.

Finally, the panelists addressed the issue of how to deal with rising sea levels. In some cases, Port tenants are already building up the land in anticipation of that eventuality.

thor_biberman@sdtranscript.com