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Newport Beach developer provides details on lease to renovate Dana Point Harbor



There are about 2,400 boats in Dana Point Harbor. (File photo Ed Crisostomo, Orange County Register)

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Bryon Ward, manager of the Dana Point Harbor Partnership, talks with the Orange County Board of Supervisor in Santa Ana, California, on Tuesday, October 17, 2017. Dana Point Harbor Partners is made up

of Burnham Ward Properties for retail and restaurants, Bellwether Financial Group for the marinas and R.D. Olson Development for the hotel. (File photo by Jeff Gritchen, Orange County Register/SCNG)

- **DANA POINT** — With a focus on an accelerated construction schedule, representatives of Dana Point Harbor Partners — a Newport Beach-based group selected by the county to tackle a \$330 million overhaul of the Dana Point Harbor — for the first time publicly presented concepts to merchants and boaters.

The presentation on Monday night, July 2, at the Ocean Institute was part of the regular monthly meeting of Dana Point Harbor Advisory Board, a group of harbor business leaders who formed earlier this year to have an input in the harbor renovation.

Bryon Ward, of Burnham-Ward Properties, who will work on the harbor's commercial core and Joe Uberroth, of Bellwether Financial Group, who will concentrate on the waterside, gave about 100 people a detailed look at the harbor project and discussed a schedule for construction once they get the OK from the Orange County Board of Supervisors to move forward with their 66-year lease.

“This is a huge step,” said Ward, following Monday night’s meeting. “It’s the beginning of taking input from the community, spending time with the city of Dana Point and hitting the ground running.”

The presentation included an introduction by Supervisor Lisa Bartlett on the decades-long effort to update the aging harbor and turn it into a destination.

“As the Fifth District supervisor, former mayor of Dana Point and longtime resident, I am extremely proud of this proposal to revitalize the Dana Point Harbor,” Bartlett said. “This project will be for all Orange County residents and visitors alike to enjoy for years to come.”

Orange County CEO Frank Kim presented a timeline for what would happen next if supervisors approve the lease at their July 17 meeting. OC Parks Director Stacy Blackwood then provided a broad overview of the scope of the project before handing it over to Dana Point Harbor Partners for their presentation.

James Lenthall, who heads up the harbor advisory board and the Dana Point Boater’s Association, said afterward he was pleased with the meeting.

“Overall, their plans seemed to be received very well and there was obvious excitement among the observers that we might finally be getting our new Dana Point Harbor,” he said. “This was a milestone event, and one of the final major steps on the road to breaking ground on our new harbor.”

If the master lease agreement — a more than [1,000-page document](#) released by the county on Tuesday — is approved, the development group will have a 90- to 120-day

option period in which they can take a deeper dive into the project and make adjustments to the lease. The Board of Supervisors is also expected to review a second lease agreement in which the county will pay \$20 million for the harbor's dry boat storage.

Because Dana Point Harbor Partners is taking over a project the county started work on more than 15 years ago, Ward said, he doesn't expect that the option period will bring any major changes.

"We're taking advantage of all the county has done and the approved coastal development permit," he said, adding that he and his partners already have spent a year reviewing the project. "I don't think we'll see any new ideas. It's more about fine-tuning our vision and scheduling the various components. We're all about speed. We have no interest in delaying the project."

If the lease is approved, the development group would work with the city of Dana Point to make sure changes they've made to the commercial core plan meet with the wishes of city leaders. Next, the city would need to grant site plan approvals, which could take six to nine months.

"It's important to reflect the values of Dana Point in the plan," Ward said. "We'll work collaboratively with the city to reflect that look and feel."

The project includes reconstruction of the commercial core, the east and west marinas, the Marina Inn Hotel and 52 guest slips. Under the proposed public-private partnership, the developer would design, fund and build the improvements, then operate those portions of the harbor on a 66-year lease, before returning the property to the county.

Construction would be phased and begin with the building of a parking structure to accommodate 1,800 cars. Ward said ground could be broken on the structure as early as next year and could be completed within nine months. Next up would be work on Dana Wharf and the land side, which also would be done in phases.

"Our plan is to phase the construction and keep existing merchants open and the marina and water accessible to the public," Ward said.

Construction on the docks and two hotels would start upon receipt of entitlement, which Dana Point Harbor Partners says could be within 24 to 30 months. There are plans to remodel the existing Marina Inn until they receive entitlements, then demolish it and build the new hotels. In total, there will be 266 rooms, Ward said.

For the project, the developers also envision buildings with gabled standing seam metal roofs, open plazas, unique restaurants and shops, and a surf museum.

"There will be a huge emphasis on the water with pedestrian connections between the hotels and retail," Ward said.

Jim Miller, who has operated Coffee Importers for 37 years and is president of the Dana Point Harbor Merchant Association, said Monday's meeting left harbor merchants and boaters excited about what's to come.

"Everybody was in really good spirits," he said Tuesday. "We have a company that everyone believes will do the right thing. They've got the concept down and they know what the county wants and what the boaters and merchants want. I've been very patient. We've waited 21 years."

Miller said he was impressed with the sneak peak of the harbor project. "It's very innovative how it goes from the wharf to the hotel," he said. "I think it'll make Dana Point Harbor a destination."

Donna Kalez, who operates Dana Wharf Whale Watching and Sportfishing, said she is excited the parking structure is the first proposed construction project. Her father, Don Hansen, the harbor's first tenant 47 years ago, worried about parking problems back then, she said.

Kalez said she and other harbor stakeholders will read the lease agreement and she is optimistic that the Board of Supervisors will approve it.