

Dana Point boaters, merchants get closer look at what harbor and marina will look like after \$330 million overhaul



The Dana Point Harbor Partnership, from left, Dustin Schmidt, Bryon Ward, and Joe Ueberroth, present the proposed plans for the Dana Point Harbor renovation to the public and the Dana Point Harbor Advisory Board at the Ocean Institute in Dana Point on Monday, September 24, 2018. (Photo by Leonard Ortiz, Orange County Register/SCNG)

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James Lenthall, president of the Dana Point Harbor Advisory Board speaks to a public gathering at the Ocean Institute to hear about proposed plans for the Dana Point Harbor renovation plans from members of the Dana Point Harbor Partnership in Dana Point on Monday, September 24, 2018. (Photo by Leonard Ortiz, Orange County Register/SCNG)

Boaters and merchants got a first look Monday, Sept. 24, at what the renovated Dana Point marina will look like after the 47-year-old Dana Point Harbor undergoes a \$330 million renovation.

The presentation by developer Dana Point Harbor Partners, which included details and a construction timeline for the long-awaited project, was held at the Ocean Institute during the monthly meeting of the Dana Point Harbor Advisory Board. More than 100 people attended, including county and Dana Point city officials.

Dana Point Harbor Partners received approval from the Orange County Board of Supervisors in July to develop and take over the 66-year harbor lease. The group is now in a 90- to 120-day option period during which the development team can take a deeper dive into the project and potentially adjust the lease.

Local boaters and merchants on Monday were anxious for more project specifics related to parking, the phases of construction, what happens to the retailers and the status of boat slips and dry boat storage

“We got a better understanding of the marina, the parking structure and time frame,” said Donna Kalez, who operates Dana Wharf Whale Watching and Sportfishing and has a fleet of 16 boats in the harbor. “It’s important that the merchants stay open during construction and Bryon Ward is committed to that even though it cost him more money.”

Ward, of Burnham-Ward Properties, and Dustin Schmidt of R.D. Olson Development will work together on the harbor’s commercial core. Joe Ueberroth, of Bellwether Financial Group, will build the waterside.

Together they outlined the project and said, in the best-case scenario, construction on the first phase — which includes a three-level parking structure near where the launch ramp day parking is now and close to Dana Wharf — could start by the end of 2019.

“Right now, whale watch and Catalina Flyer people are scrambling for parking,” Ward said. “Retail has 600 spaces. What we’re doing in the parking structure exceeds what you have now in total.”

Ward discussed plans for two hotels, up to 266 rooms, that would include a revamp of the Marina Inn and a boutique-style hotel similar to the Lido Hotel in Newport Beach but with a Dana Point twist. Once the lease with the county is signed, Ward said, it will be three years before all rooms will be available. In the meantime, the Marina Inn will be refreshed, for guests looking for a lower-cost option, he said.

Plans to renovate the wharf area with new facades on existing buildings is being done to keep businesses open during construction. A surf museum is also planned.

While Ward and Schmidt detailed the land-side development, Ueberroth unveiled a plan that gave boaters a first view of the marina.

“I build marinas across the world and I try to use other ideas tried in other harbors,” said Ueberroth, who said the harbor’s marina is the largest on the West Coast.

“We will be leading edge and we will look at, ‘What do we need to look like in 20 years,’ he said. “The intent is to build a world-class facility that you will love and that meets the community of today.”

Ueberroth said he plans to reduce the number of slips in the harbor from 2,451 to 2,323, partly due to compliance with the Americans with Disabilities Act and by adding larger slips. Now, more than 50 percent of the slips in the harbor are shorter than 30 feet long while the greatest demand comes from people with boats longer than 30 feet. Some with boats in the 35- to 60-foot range have been waiting for more than a decade to get a slip, he said.

In the new marina, more than 50 percent of the slips will be longer than 30 feet.

Some boaters raised concerns about higher-priced slips, but Ueberroth said costs will be dictated by the market. He said that at some point, management of the marina might be consolidated under one group. But for now, the East and West basins are managed separately. Ueberroth said he will honor those leases after he takes over the lease from the county.

The harbor's dry storage will be racks instead of a full building. The racks will have a cover and will be screened on the sides.

Ueberroth said he expects it will take two years to get through the entitlement process with the California Coastal Commission and then four to five years to build the marina in phases.

"Seven years from now the marina will be fully revitalized," he said.