

Minutes of the August Meeting of the Land Use & Public Works Committee of the Central San Pedro Neighborhood Council

On August 19, 2013, approximately 50 people met at the Croatian Cultural Center to hear Alan Johnson of the LA Waterfront Alliance present his ideas for 1) incorporating the Los Angeles Maritime Museum into the Ports O'Call redevelopment, and 2) repurposing the historic Ferry Building as an iconic restaurant. His rationale for doing this included the creation of a better connection between downtown and the waterfront, and the opportunity to make the Maritime Museum into a world-class tourist attraction. He also discussed other plans for re-energizing downtown, including a trolley connecting the Ferry Building site with its downtown, the conversion of Sixth and Seventh Street to a one-way couplet, and gateway arch signage over Sixth Street at Harbor Blvd. However, the discussion focused on the relocation of the Maritime Museum.

After the presentation, 20 persons spoke about their concerns for the integrity of the Maritime Museum. No votes to approve or deny the proposal were taken. Almost all of the speakers agreed that the existing Maritime Museum needs an influx of energy and capital investment before it can become a competitive world-class tourist attraction. Exhibits need to be made more interactive and family-friendly. The size of the existing facility may be inadequate, and the operation would be well served by the addition of an adjunct theatre with related film exhibits. It was noted that the existing museum does not take advantage of its waterfront site, and instead turns its back to the Main Channel.

Countering this was an appreciation for a working historic and cultural attraction that should not be tampered with, for fear of losing an authentic San Pedro institution.

Repeated arguments in favor of maintaining the Maritime Museum in its present location included the site-based synergy of the museum, the IOWA, the Memorial Park and the Fire Station exhibit, to be augmented next year by the new Downtown Harbor where tall ships and other special vessels will call. It was remarked that the relocation of the Lane Victory to the south end of town was a mistake. Several agreed that, "this critical nexus between the waterfront and downtown is exactly where the Maritime Museum should be."

Concerns were raised:

- for the integrity of the artifacts that the Maritime Museum houses - if the museum were moved, pieces on exhibit or otherwise stored in the museum might be lost;
- that the Memorial Park might be disturbed, or that the HAM radio station housed in the MM would not be replaced;
- that the MM operation would be closed, possibly for years, before any replacement structure would be built and occupiable, or possibly even lost forever;
- that a restaurant in the Ferry Building might take away business from downtown restaurants, or that the Ferry Building would end up housing "just another restaurant", instead of our existing historic-cultural monument.

Arguments in favor of relocating the museum were centered on the need to reinvent the institution on a grander scale, and provide for its growth and evolution through the opportunities for additional capital that a major redevelopment would attract. Additional observations included:

- A remembrance of the Ferry Building as an historic hub – a nexus of activity, a gathering place, a functioning ferry. This critical location, a nexus between downtown and the waterfront, should support higher levels of activity.
- A potential for conditional approval based on providing a new high-quality facility, that the museum should not be shuttered for any longer than it would take to move into its new home, and that the Memorial Park should be preserved as is.
- Recognition that the Radcovich Company, an LA Waterfront Alliance partner, is an expert in the preservation and repurposing of major historical properties, particularly for restaurant purposes. Wayne Radcovich has significant and long-standing ties to the conservation community.

Overall, it was heard that San Pedro needs to somehow find a balance between its reverence for historic presence and acceptance of the need to grow and evolve. It is not desirable that it remain in a limbo of “great potential” forever. Plans for San Pedro’s waterfront should aim to improve the economic situation of its citizens.

It was also agreed that more detail is needed before the community can come to agreement on the future of the Maritime Museum. The sequence of redevelopment is critical, pointed out James Allen. Countering that, redevelopers pointed out the need to determine in advance if the proposed relocation is viable, as a part of early project planning.

Finally, Michal David, who worked with the Port in their waterfront master planning stage, suggested a novel idea: accept the repurposing of the Ferry Bldg as an iconic restaurant and activity hub, but place a bigger and better Maritime Museum immediately south of the Ferry Bldg at the north end of Ports O’Call, retaining its centralized location.

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