

\$500M hotel-pier plan to be unveiled

1 Long Branch may get ferry

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LONG BRANCH — A \$500 million plan to expand the hotel operation of Ocean Place Resort and Spa, rebuild the city's famous pier and introduce ferry service to New York is expected to be unveiled tonight at a City Council meeting.

"We're in the process of hammering out the final details," Mayor Adam Schneider said Monday night. "After this, we get to work."

The proposed project is in the city's hotel/campus zone, one of four waterfront areas in the city's ambitious but controversial redevelopment plan.

The hotel's owner, Ocean Place Development LLC, a partnership of Orr Partners LLC and Tiburon Capital LLC, proposes to redevelop its oceanfront site with 61 additional hotel rooms, a second hotel tower, 200 condo-hotel units for occupancy and rental, 275 condominiums, and more than 100,000 square feet of retail space and parking garages for 2,300 vehicles, according to city officials.

Schneider said construction could take up to five years and require state environmental approval under the Coastal Area Facility Review Act.

"It's a huge project, the biggest so far," Schneider said. "It's interesting: The hotel was the first project 20 years ago that was supposed to kick off redevelopment . . . but the hotel now is surrounded by newer buildings so the hotel owners saw the need to design the upgrades there and make larger facilities with ballrooms, exhibit halls, a lot of green features, the pier. . . . It's a valuable asset to the city."

"Cautious support"

"I basically like the project in terms of what it brings to Long Branch," said Councilman Brian Unger, a frequent critic of Schneider's administration who voiced "cautious support" for the plan.

"We definitely need more hotel rooms, the ferry to New York is a benefit to the city. But to me, it changes the skyline of Long Branch," said Unger, who noted the proposal dwarfs Pier Village, with more than double the retail space. "I'm not convinced our citizens would want to see an urbanized beachfront from one end to the other," he said.

The proposed redeveloper agreement between Long Branch and Ocean Place Development LLC calls for the developer to provide specific givebacks to the city, including a \$20 million contribution toward both reconstruction of the city's pier and bringing in ferry service.

The Long Branch amusement and fishing pier, adjacent to the hotel site, burned down in 1987. There is ferry service to New York out of Atlantic Highlands, Highlands and Middletown. The new pier also would be publicly owned and would not have the amusement rides that were a hallmark of the previous pier.

Unger said the developer's proposed contract with the city, at almost 100 pages long, has not been made available to the public in advance of the meeting, at which he and other council members will be asked to make an initial endorsement of the project.


A link to the proposal is available on the city's Web site. However, the link was not working Monday.

"For a project with such enormous impact on the city, the public should be thoroughly informed before every vote and

every public hearing," Unger said.

Unger said while the mayor is within his rights not to fully disclose details about the contract until the council meeting, which starts at 6 p.m. at city hall, "there's no law requiring secrecy either," Unger added. "It's completely up to Mayor Schneider."



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