

Daily Breeze

LA harbor commission OKs 30-year lease extension for Battleship Iowa



Preliminary rendering of Battleship USS Iowa and proposed linear park area with multipurpose building on the left. More finalized renderings are expected this summer and the building will not necessarily reflect the design in this view. (Rendering Courtesy Battleship USS Iowa)

By [DONNA LITTLEJOHN](#) | dlittlejohn@scng.com | Daily Breeze

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The Battleship Iowa will remain in its current spot in the Los Angeles harbor for another three decades — and its operators have set their sights on creating a veterans park and multipurpose community building on adjacent land.

The Los Angeles harbor commission approved a lease extension for the iconic World War II battleship on Friday, March 15. The lease, which was initially set to expire in May 2027, will now run through March 2057, pending Los Angeles City Council approval.

The ship arrived in San Pedro in 2012 amid hopes it could become a top tourist attraction.

And it's become one.

From educational programs to special events — the biggest of which is LA Fleet Week — the docked ship has become one of San Pedro’s most recognized mainstays.

“When the Iowa came, we had a true national attraction,” said Alan Johnson of Jerico Development, which is creating West Harbor, a massive new attraction in the San Pedro portion of the LA Waterfront. “I personally couldn’t imagine the town without it now. It’s part of the fabric of the community.”



Lance Cpl. Caleb Joyce of Camp Pendleton sits atop an amphibious combat vehicle with the USS Iowa in the background on Saturday, May 27, 2023, at LA Fleet Week in San Pedro. (Photo by Howard Freshman, Contributing Photographer)

The nonprofit that runs the battleship, which was recently designated as the national Museum of the Surface Navy, has been looking to boost that popularity even further.

It had a five-year plan to move the battleship to [a more southern portion of the LA Waterfront](#), closer to West Harbor, which is under construction and expected to open next year.

[But officials determined the move would be too costly.](#) So the ship’s operators have now staked the Iowa’s future on its current spot, just north of the Los Angeles Maritime Museum, and next to the town’s cruise ship terminal and the Vincent Thomas Bridge.

The ship is set to receive a \$6.7 million state grant to create a Freedom of the Seas Park and Pavilion at berths 88-89, according to a harbor commission board report.

The historic vessel, Battleship Iowa CEO Jonathan Williams told the harbor commission on Friday, is looking to “continue to carry that message of freedom of the seas.”

But the California Department of Natural Resources required the Iowa to have at least a 30-year permit before formally approving the grant.

While the City Council still needs to OK the lease extension, the Iowa on Friday moved closer to meeting that condition.

Plans for the project are still in the initial phase, though renderings are expected to come out this summer.

The project would eventually create:

- The 35,000 square-foot Freedom of the Seas Park, with walkways, benches, plazas, memorials, family-friendly public art and luggage storage for cruise passengers who are visiting.
- A 5,000 square-foot multipurpose building near the historic LA Fireboat canopy. That building will offer space for community gatherings, conferences, graduations and other events, and will also boast a restaurant, catering kitchen and smaller spaces for some functions.
- Pedestrian friendly connections, with a pathway linking the southern end of the cruise terminal to the Iowa, culminating at the Downtown Harbor cut at Sixth Street and Harbor Boulevard, and to the main promenade connection that will lead into West Harbor.
- Roadways, parking, signage, fencing, landscaping, decorative elements, programming and public transit connections that will help serve as a bridge to the downtown and harbor improvements.

The parking area should remain relatively the same — but with landscaping elements — while the roadway that currently curves around and alongside the Iowa will be replaced by the park space.

“Twelve years ago when it arrived, it was doubtful we’d succeed,” Williams said about the battleship. “Today, we are the waterfront’s most transformational asset.”

And the Battleship Iowa is set to be transformational for decades to come.



Los Angeles Mayor Karen Bass, speaks aboard the USS Iowa to celebrate the start of LA Fleet Week 2023 with a press conference welcoming visiting Sailors, Marines, Coast Guard members and Soldiers who are in town through Memorial Day weekend in San Pedro on Wednesday, May 24, 2023. (Photo by Brittany Murray, Press-Telegram/SCNG)