

NEWS • News

West Harbor in San Pedro poised to enter the final stretch of waterfront push



West Harbor rendering, aerial view. The new waterfront attraction is set to open in 2023. (Courtesy Studio 111)

By **DONNA LITTLEJOHN** | dlittlejohn@scng.com | Daily Breeze

PUBLISHED: November 8, 2021 at 6:00 a.m. | UPDATED: November 8, 2021 at 6:01 a.m.



Among the more recent pieces of the plan under discussion — though still just in the “aspirational” category — are a wave-surf pool; a pickle ball court; a dog-centric space with a dog park and pet-related merchandise; a world-class play area for children and families; and a lighted “aero” bar, visible from a distance, that will shuttle folks high into the air for drinks and a panoramic port view on 15-minute intervals.

None of that is inked quite yet, said Eric Johnson of Jerico Development, but talks with vendors are ongoing. Most of those elements would be planned for the northernmost part of the development, just south of the new town square at the Los Angeles Maritime Museum. The aero bar would be positioned more toward the center entryway, where visitors will see the brigantine ships docked.

An amphitheater is planned for the southern end.

Buildings will occupy the center — but so will generous outdoor space for walking, recreation and dining.

With 65,000 square feet of the overall waterfront venue now leased — and looking like the rest will fill up quickly — developers are now going out for the needed debt financing, a process that is “going well,” Johnson said.

But it has taken longer than hoped.

The overall lease with the development team creating the attraction on the 42-acre site, now branded West Harbor, was approved in May 2016, although community discussions about a project to replace the aging and struggling — and now demolished — Ports O’ Call Village go back 20 years.

With much of the infrastructure now in place, including most of the waterfront promenade, construction on the buildings is set to begin early next year and the attraction is expected to open sometime during the first half of 2023.

“We’re executing leases for over 65,000 square feet, which is a dramatic change from where we were during the COVID crisis,” said Wayne Ratkovich, founder of The Ratkovich Co., the lead developer on the project. He and his partners appeared for a routine lease extension action by the harbor commission on Thursday, Nov. 4.

“The quantity and quality of those tenants has created great momentum for the



Among independent anchor tenants already signed for long-term leases (at least 10 years) are Yamashiro, an iconic Los Angeles/Hollywood restaurant with a history in LA going back more than a century; Mike Hess Brewing, a San Diego craft brewery; Hopscotch, which offers experiential art with food and beverages; Poppy + Rose, famous for its country-style breakfasts and chicken sandwiches; Sugar Factory, which offers candy-inspired installations, food and cocktails; Jay Bird's Chicken, a quick-service Nashville-style hot chicken restaurant; and a Mexican cantina.

More recently, a deal was signed with Olala Crepes from San Diego.

Commissioners last week asked about more San Pedro-based restaurants, bars and other businesses having a place in the project. Developers answered that was also part of the plan. But because those would be clustered in spaces amid the larger anchors, agreements would come later for those.

While the pandemic slowed the process, it also provided time for the developers to engage in a rebranding, changing the name from the San Pedro Public Market to West Harbor. The rebranding happened because the concept grew into more of a regional destination, developers said, adding that changing the name also meant there would be no confusion with a longtime Ports O' Call tenant, the San Pedro Fish Market).

Tweaking some of the initial physical designs, which were criticized by some in the community as being too stark and drab, also lent itself to a rebranding.

"We looked at the design of the buildings with an eye toward making small changes," Milan Ratkovich, executive vice president of The Ratkovich Co., told commissioners.

Colors and physical outlines were "lightened," bright nautical flags were interwoven throughout the project footprint and indoor-outdoor mezzanines were added to buildings that were made larger. More glass was added to buildings to maximize the water views.

Another result of the pandemic pause: a decision to add more outdoor dining and recreation space.

The pandemic was a "curve ball" in construction timing, Johnson said, and coupled with the myriad regulations required by the state and city made the



“The reality,” Johnson said, “was that it really couldn’t be done any quicker than we’re doing it.”

Harbor Commissioner Anthony Pirozzi, meanwhile, is pushing for a part of the new section of promenade to be opened to the public now, saying it’s needed to spark enthusiasm and catch the vision of the development that is coming.

“This has been a heck of a journey for all of us,” he said at the Thursday board meeting.

“We need to find a way to open up the promenade along the north side,” Pirozzi said. “The community really needs to walk the promenade, they need to feel it, they need to be on the water’s edge.”

But complications seem to prevent that, port officials said, noting it is a construction zone and there are safety protocols preventing public access.

Frustration over the time it has all taken has been palpable in the community, along with some hard feelings in the wake of Ports O’ Call’s closure, especially when the popular Ports O’ Call Restaurant shut its doors in 2018, to clear the property so preliminary work could begin.

Embracing the new development has come slowly for many who grew up with Ports O’ Call and believe the town’s local flavor will be lost.

Lee Williams, a Realtor and immediate past chairman of the San Pedro Chamber of Commerce board of directors, urged developers to bring in local restaurants to ensure that a “unique San Pedro presence” will remain rooted along the town’s waterfront.

Hurdles ahead include relocating the Harbor Breeze cruise operation on the waterfront until its permanent site is ready, Johnson said.

The San Pedro Fish Market site also will have to be vacated as construction proceeds. That mainstay waterfront business initially was to be part of the new development and remains a huge draw, but the owners have decided to build on a new site, near the Vincent Thomas Bridge and the World Cruise Terminal, about a mile north along the channel — where the business will have more room.

The cost of the West Harbor development, meanwhile, likely will go higher than the current \$150 million projection by the time it is built. Johnson said.



And when it's done, there's little doubt that West Harbor will cast a very different image from the Ports O' Call of old. The transformation from that 1960s tourist attraction, designed as a quaint replica of a New England fishing village, will be dramatic.

Opening up the waterfront and showcasing the authenticity of the location — the Port of Los Angeles — were the primary drivers of the new development, Johnson said.

While successful in its heyday and beloved by locals, Ports O' Call came with drawbacks, developers said.

"We're not the old Ports O' Call, which was faking being somewhere else with buildings that prevented people from getting to the water," Johnson said. "We're not going to hide the port 'behind' us and pretend it's New England."

[Sign up](#) for The Localist, our daily email newsletter with handpicked stories relevant to where you live. [Subscribe here.](#)

[Newsroom Guidelines](#)

[News Tips](#)

[Contact Us](#)

[Report an Error](#)



Tags: [development](#), [Port of Los Angeles](#), [Top Stories Breeze](#), [Top Stories LADN](#), [Top Stories LBPT](#), [waterfront](#)



Donna Littlejohn | Reporter

Donna Littlejohn received a bachelor's degree (double major) in journalism and political science from California State University, Long Beach, and began her career in daily journalism with the San Pedro News-Pilot, transferring to The Daily Breeze staff in 1998 after the San Pedro publication closed.



VIEW COMMENTS

Join the Conversation

We invite you to use our commenting platform to engage in insightful conversations about issues in our community. Although we do not pre-screen comments, we reserve the right at all times to remove any information or materials that are unlawful, threatening, abusive, libelous, defamatory, obscene, vulgar, pornographic, profane, indecent or otherwise objectionable to us, and to disclose any information necessary to satisfy the law, regulation, or government request. We might permanently block any user who abuses these conditions.

If you see comments that you find offensive, please use the “Flag as Inappropriate” feature by hovering over the right side of the post, and pulling down on the arrow that appears. Or, contact our editors by emailing moderator@scng.com.

