

Stamford group unveils plan for boatyard

By MATT KIERNAN

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STAMFORD -- A grassroots group interested in bringing Brewers Yacht Haven back to its former glory presented a vision Wednesday intended to create hundreds of jobs and economic development on the marina.

Hosting a public hearing at Stamford Government Center, members of Save Our Boatyard unveiled their ambitious plan to dozens of local residents and boaters for the Building & Land Technology-owned site.

While a costly endeavor, Save Our Boatyard founder Marueen Boylan says the estimated \$30-40 million project will bring in hundreds of millions of dollars a year to the city from the boating industry.

"It's a win-win situation," said Boylan during a Q&A session at the hearing.

A video created by Darien-based designer Scott Connery and played at the event outlined plans for the 14-acre property that included constructing buildings for offices, boat storage and repair, yacht sales, a bed and breakfast, general store, ship building museum and restaurant center and emergency personnel.

The development would create approximately 200-300 jobs, said Boyland.

The site would allow for public and private access for boaters and visitors, she said.

"We worked a lot of hours in putting it together," Boylan said of the design which has been in the works since December.

The proposal challenges plans presented by BLT.

The property management firm has previously announced intentions to bring the hedge fund company Bridgewater Associates from Westport to the site. It has also introduced the idea of a six-acre boatyard and animal shelter.

A 850,000-square-foot headquarters would be created for Bridgewater.

But as of recent, Bridgewater has been mum on whether it wants to relocate as it works toward a decision.

"This situation cannot drag on any longer," Boylan said.

In a phone interview Thursday, Mayor David Martin said he had a private viewing of Save Our Boatyard's ideas and thought "they had a nice design," adding it looked like the group put a lot of thought into them.

He said, though, BLT is interested in bringing something other than a boatyard to the property -- whether Bridgewater or another company -- that it may find more financially beneficial.

Martin said the challenge is examining the gulf between Save Our Boatyard and BLT's plans.

"We need to restore a functioning, effective boatyard as soon as possible, and that's the critical path," said Martin.

BLT's attorney, John Freeman, could not immediately be reached for comment.

According to Boylan, a developer could purchase the site or enter a lease agreement with the city for 50-99 years.

Boylan said her group's design would create long-term, skilled jobs and increase commercial and residential property values in the area.

It would also connect the boatyard to the rest of the city with a bus stop area and public parking.

"You've got to get the government to buy into it and they're not going to," said Gino Bottino, commander of the United States Power Squadron's Stamford unit, at Wednesday's hearing.

Bottino said he had no agenda in his attendance, and that the issue comes down to money.

He said he came to the meeting to make sure Save Our Boatyard's plan included public water access, safety measures and procedures in case of an environmental emergency, such as a diesel fuel spill.

"This is a very nice concept, but it's just pretty pictures," said Bottino.

The United States Power Squadrons is a nonprofit organization focused on making boating safer through educational classes.

The Save Our Boatyard plan has some reputable investors on board, according to Boyland.

She said as for taking it a next step, she is willing to present it to local boards for review.

"We have no opposition to Bridgewater coming to Stamford, just not to the boatyard," said Boylan.