

# The Post and Courier

## Cruise ship terminal plan catches fair winds with initial Board of Architectural Review approval

By [David Slade](#)

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Charleston's Board of Architectural Review is not known for recommending large signs, but they suggested the new cruise ship terminal should have large, free-standing letters on the roof that spell out "Welcome to Charleston."

The idea of a welcome sign facing the water was among several directed at architects for the State Ports Authority on Wednesday, at a meeting where the BAR granted initial approval for the terminal design.

The BAR's recommendations are often incorporated into building design plans, between the initial "conceptual" approval and the more detailed reviews that follow.



Photo by Wade Spees

Thom Penney of LS3P architectural firm answered questions Wednesday from Board of Architectural Review members, including Robert DeMarco (left), about the proposed cruise ship terminal at Union Pier. The BAR gave initial approval to the design.



Rendering provided by South Carolina State Ports Authority

The State Ports Authority unveiled plans for its new cruise ship terminal last week as part of its broader redevelopment of the Union Pier property.

### Passenger terminal site plan

Charleston's Board of Architectural Review gave conceptual approval to the cruise terminal plan, but most of the voting BAR members said they think the parking area is too large, and would prefer to see a parking garage built.



One suggestion the Ports Authority has signaled it's unlikely to embrace is the idea that a parking garage would be preferable to the acres of asphalt at the site. Members of the public made the same suggestion during design forums for the new cruise terminal.

The SPA has said there may come a time, as the redevelopment of Union Pier proceeds, when a parking garage would make sense, but for now it's logical to use the asphalt parking area that's already there. The parking area had been a staging area for BMW automobiles and other equipment awaiting shipment.

"I have to join in with those who have said a parking garage would be much better," BAR member Robert DeMarco said.

DeMarco, Erika Harrison, Christian Schmitt and Edward Fava voted 4-0 to grant initial approval to the cruise terminal design. Three of the seven BAR members recused themselves from voting; Craig Bennett because his firm is involved with the project, and Phyllis Ewing and Sheila Wertimer because they are members of the Coastal Conservation League.

The league, the Historic Ansonborough Neighborhood Association, the Charlestowne Neighborhood Association, and the Preservation Society of Charleston together sued Carnival Cruise Lines in June.

They allege that Carnival's use of Union Pier, where the current cruise terminal is located and where the new cruise terminal is planned, is illegal under city zoning.

Representatives of the league and the Preservation Society were among the minority who criticized the new terminal's design Wednesday. "It doesn't look like a building that has substance," said Robert Gurley of the Preservation Society.

Katie Zimmerman of the Coastal Conservation League said the terminal should have solar panels on the roof.

Fran Clasby, president of the Wagener Terrace Neighborhood Association, offered the sharpest critique. He called the plan a \$30 million exercise in putting lipstick on a pig.

The "pig" would be the industrial warehouse at the north end of Union Pier that the SPA plans to spend \$35 million transforming into a modern cruise ship terminal. It's part of a broader plan for the pier that involves extending city streets through the property, creating small parks, removing chain-link fencing, and landscaping the parking area.

Mayor Joe Riley spoke in support of the terminal design, saying it will be "a beautiful part of a new public realm."

"This building, I believe, fits Charleston," he said.

Others who spoke at the meeting also supported the design, as did all those who wrote letters to the BAR.

The four BAR members who approved the plan each said they would like to see some additional work on various facades of the building, but they mostly applauded the plan.

"They have actually done a very nice job," said Fava.

Schmitt described the plan as "an incredible adaptive re-use of a warehouse building."

The next and more detailed BAR review of the plan has not yet been scheduled.

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### **What happened?**

The State Ports Authority voluntarily submitted design plans for a new cruise ship terminal at Union Pier to Charleston's Board of Architectural Review, which granted conceptual approval Wednesday. The \$35 million plan calls for extensively renovating an existing warehouse.

### **What's next?**

Two more rounds of BAR review of the cruise terminal plan, as yet unscheduled, will follow. Design plans related to the appearance of the building could change to reflect BAR recommendations. The State Ports Authority has said it plans to begin construction later this year.

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