

# The Post and Courier

## Cruise project's great promise

Sunday, October 11, 2009

State Ports Authority leaders and Charleston city officials are brimming with enthusiasm about plans to replace the inefficient and unattractive passenger ship terminal and develop 15 waterfront acres surrounding it and the stately Custom House.

Their enthusiasm is understandable. The plan would turn an aging eyesore into a premier area of downtown Charleston, add new businesses, give the public more access to a spectacular waterfront and enhance port security, efficiency and profitability.

The State Ports Authority announced last week that it has hired Jaque Robertson, whose local projects include the Waterfront Park, to coordinate the planning process. Mr. Robertson says that process will be shaped by a lot of public input, but that it is likely to include restaurants, shops, a new parking facility and residences. The terminal itself will be designed to serve multiple public uses -- not just to accommodate cruise ships. The overall plan for the waterfront is expected to dovetail with an overhaul of the old City Market, and its possible extension to Concord Street.

The final SPA plan should be ready in late January.

The team of national experts Mr. Robertson has assembled is impressive. That is a good thing, because Mr. Robertson concedes that this is a challenging public/private project unlike any he has seen.

Certainly one of the most difficult and important problems to address is traffic. The passenger terminal will be home to a Carnival Cruise ship making 70 trips a year, each with a maximum of 3,450 passengers on board.

Even without Carnival, traffic is a problem in the area, so a more thoughtful plan to move and park cars will be a welcome change in general.

Mayor Joseph P. Riley Jr., who has been involved with the SPA on this project, said the terminal will not accommodate larger ships that would be out of scale on that section of the Charleston waterfront.

Other cruise lines with comparably sized ships could add Charleston to their routes, but only one ship at a time.

In 2004, a city task force estimated that each cruise ship contributes some \$2.5 million to the economy of the city from which it embarks. We can expect that passengers will spend money in Charleston, too, and those new dollars sound very appealing.

It will be important that Mr. Robertson and his team not only factor in the impact of increased vehicular traffic and parking needs, but also the several thousand passengers who will be walking around downtown Charleston before and after their voyages.

Charleston's waterfront is one of its greatest assets. Its harbor is beautiful and rich with history. Its port is one of the most significant elements of the state and local economy.

A plan that is sensitive to the city's scale and architecture, to its residents and their quality of life, will add energy to and enhance the beauty of this underused and deteriorating part of the waterfront.

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