



Renovation and Redevelopment of Navy Pier® the “People’s Pier” Overview of Urban Land Institute Recommendations November 2010

OVERVIEW

The Metropolitan Pier and Exposition Authority (MPEA) commissioned the Urban Land Institute (ULI) earlier this year to help create a new vision for Navy Pier and recommend specific actions to achieve that vision through financially-sustainable renovation, redevelopment and reprogramming. ULI experts visited Chicago in February and August with a goal of developing near-term recommendations and a long-term vision for what it calls “the People’s Pier.” Before beginning a redevelopment program, the ULI recommended that MPEA address the following issues, all of which are currently underway:

- Reaffirm the purpose and mission of Navy Pier to provide a sense of direction, guide decision-making and provide a framework for strategic planning.
- Revise the Pier’s governance structure to create a governing body whose function is to serve as an advocate solely for Navy Pier, to be its “champion.”
- Develop a strategic plan providing a framework for evaluation of ULI and other recommendations from the perspectives of fulfilling the Pier’s vision, financial sustainability, the ability to be implemented and other factors.

ULI also recommended five priorities for capital investments on Navy Pier as public or private funds become available, and weighed in on a variety of additional issues such as accommodating pedestrian and vehicle traffic, future use of the Crystal Garden, and others.

PURPOSE AND MISSION

Critical to moving forward, ULI called for the MPEA to reaffirm the purpose and mission of Navy Pier as a means of providing a sense of direction and goals for the Pier’s redevelopment. ULI recommended the following language as the foundation for a purpose and mission statement:

“Navy Pier’s mission is to celebrate the vitality of Chicago by fostering a public place to serve the people of Chicago and present its cultural fabric to the world. The Pier will be an eclectic mix of retail, cultural, recreational, entertainment and other appropriate uses organized in a self-sustaining business framework.”

GOVERNANCE

ULI recommends that Navy Pier have its own board -- "a champion ... speaking and advocating only for Navy Pier." This new governing body could include civic and public leaders serving on a separate, non-profit entity or an independent subsidiary of the MPEA and focus exclusively on what is best for the Pier. The new Navy Pier board, according to ULI, should be more than a "mere advisory board" and should have a "clear mandate of responsibility and authority to carry out the mission."

COMPREHENSIVE LONG-TERM STRATEGIC PLAN

While Navy Pier has been successful, "it could be more successful, provide a better experience and a more dynamic front door to Chicago," writes ULI. In order to achieve that, MPEA should develop a financially self-sustaining, long-term strategic plan that can evolve as Navy Pier's governing body and staff responds to market changes or opportunities. The plan cannot be merely a typical physical master plan for land uses and facilities, but must include "broad-ranging components" such as:

- Purpose and mission
- Business objectives
- A vision that "operationalizes" the mission
- Business plan and business case
- Redevelopment program plan
- Master land use and infrastructure plan
- Self-sustaining financial plan and capital budget

CAPITAL INVESTMENT PRIORITIES

ULI recommends that as part of its strategic planning process, MPEA evaluate in greater detail five capital projects for consideration in the near-term, subject to availability of public or private funding sources.

- **Deferred maintenance, facility updating and landscaping** to refresh parts of the Pier that appear "old and dated" and to create a more park-like feel -- an important element in making the space the "People's Pier, a place for relaxation, enjoyment and access to Lake Michigan."

ULI says this is particularly true of the Family Pavilion, which it describes as a prime candidate for refurbishment to make the space more inviting and capitalize on new trends in dining and product merchandising.

- **A children's "anchor"** to replace the Chicago Children's Museum, which plans to move to Daley Bi-Centennial Plaza. ULI believes that "an interactive, year-round, child- or family-oriented attraction is a very important anchor for the Navy Pier experience," driving off-season traffic and guest spending on food, retail and parking. Possibilities might include Kidzania or Legoland's Discovery Centre.

- Construction of **The Great Chicago Wheel** as an iconic, year-round attraction. ULI “believes very strongly that Navy Pier should be represented by a spectacular wheel,” especially as Chicago was the birthplace of the Ferris wheel. The giant wheel would replace the existing Navy Pier Ferris wheel, and feature enclosed, temperature-controlled cabins offering stunning views of the Chicago skyline and lakefront throughout the year.
- **Expansion of the Chicago Shakespeare Theater**, “an important element in the overall cultural fabric of Navy Pier and Chicago.” ULI recommends that MPEA consider the possibility of funding some portion of the Theater’s planned new 950-seat theater, to further strengthen what has become one of the Pier’s most important tenants. ULI projects that expanding the Shakespeare Theater could add approximately 300 new events a year on the Pier, attracting 200,000 to 300,000 additional visitors.
- **Redevelopment of the 170,000-square-foot Festival Hall** on the eastern half of Navy Pier to attract concerts and family-oriented activities. ULI estimates that re-purposing Festival Hall space with 150 to 200 days of events per year would drive foot traffic and create demand for additional food, beverage and retail locations on the east end of the Pier. ULI recommends that MPEA consider alternative uses such as a 4,000-seat performance venue for concerts, ice skating rinks that would add to the winter appeal of the Pier or a sports facility with changeable flooring and the ability to integrate the uses and events that have typically taken place in Festival Hall.

OTHER ISSUES

The ULI raises other issues for consideration in Navy Pier’s long-term strategic planning, although it does not view them as critical as the "call to action" items and the top five capital projects recommended in its report.

- Improve traffic flow and guest safety by revising circulation patterns to remove conflicts between vehicular and pedestrian traffic.
- Create ways to bring people closer to the water by creating water-level platforms that could include small green spaces to give visitors a "more intimate relationship with the water and support the mission of Navy Pier as 'the People's Pier.' "
- Reprogram uses of the Crystal Garden as a locale for special events, though the panel notes that its reuse cannot be decided without the MPEA resolving the critical issues of the Family Pavilion and its anchor tenant, the Chicago Children’s Museum.
- Explore development of a 200-to-400-room boutique hotel, which, ULI believes, would "increase usage of the Grand Ballroom, create an on-site market and provide a strong year-round, day and night use for Navy Pier." ULI notes, however, that it is “not convinced of the viability of a hotel as a business at the Pier.”

The ULI report also includes findings about specific aspects of the Pier it feels should be addressed as the Pier moves forward with its strategic plan, including the following:

- Although the Head House and Grand Ballroom have “been properly recognized as excellent architectural bookends ... reflecting Chicago’s longstanding commitment to high-quality design,” the Pier’s other architectural elements are “somewhat uninspired,” creating “a hodgepodge of disparate concepts” with no “overarching theme.”
- A lack of good north-south travel paths inhibits “a strong pedestrian experience.”
- Most of the Pier’s interior elements face inward, away from the Lake, impeding the visitor’s connection to the water. Interior space “lacks an airy, open feel.”
- Navy Pier is a sensational attraction. While hugely popular in the summer months, there are opportunities to enhance its attractiveness in the fall, winter and early spring.