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Wide range of ideas presented for pier

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A cruise ship berth. A platform for repairing ocean vessels. A college for naval engineering. A transportation center. A museum.

These are some of the ideas the public offered up Wednesday at a city forum on the future of the **Maine State**

All of the best ideas share a common obstacle, said panelist Charles Colgan of the University of Southern Maine's Public Service.

"The horrible thing about this is that the things you most want to do are the things you can least afford to do," Colgan said. "It's an easy way around it."

Officials say they believe the city-owned, 87-year-old pier is a community asset that needs to be preserved for future generations. After two failed efforts to redevelop the pier, which needs as much as \$26 million in repairs, officials are asking the public for ideas as they figure out what to do next.

Wednesday's meeting, which focused on the marine economy, was the second of four forums designed to stimulate and generate ideas.

The city will hold another forum tonight at 7 at the Ocean Gateway Terminal. It will examine competing needs for the pier. The final forum, on April 11, will be a four-hour design workshop starting at 9 a.m. It also will be at Ocean Gateway.

The results will be given to the City Council on April 29.

Colgan said Wednesday that tourism and recreation are the fastest-growing segments of the marine economy, but that transportation and industry are either stagnant or in decline.

For cities in North America that have redeveloped their waterfronts, the key has been tourism and recreation, he said.

The issue that Portland faces, he said, is the scale of development. On one extreme is a high-rise tower; on the other is a public park that juts into the harbor.

Resident Steven Scharf said he wants the pier developed as much as possible - even building a high-rise condo building that would generate tax revenue for the city. As it is, he said, Ocean Gateway and the International Marine Terminal don't generate enough income to pay for themselves.

"Whatever you do there needs to pay for itself," he told the panelists. "I could care less what goes there."

Susan Davis, executive director of the Maine Narrow Gauge Railroad Co. & Museum, noted that the railroad's tracks are located outside the pier's development area. Light rail could follow the railroad's right-of-way to go around the peninsula, provide service to Amtrak's Downeaster service, and possibly cross the Back Cove bridge for commuter service to areas north of Portland.

Phil Lee said the pier's deepwater berth is a valuable asset, and any development should be flexible enough to accommodate a variety of uses, such as repairing ocean vessels.

"Marine transportation is critical," he said. "I hate to think that it would be turned into recreational or retail use

One of Wednesday's panelists, Morris Fisher of Boulos Property Management, noted that there are at least 17 sites that are well-suited for office or hotel development.

The pier does not have to be highly developed to be valuable, he said. If it becomes a "signature" attraction to the city, it will foster economic development in the area.

"The Maine State Pier does not need to be a revenue-generator," he said. "It would be great if it were, but it can't do everything around it."

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