

# Concepts presented for Bader Field, Gardner's Basin

By JOHN V. SANTORE, Staff Writer | Posted: Tuesday, March 17, 2015 6:15 am

A vision for the future of Bader Field and Gardner's Basin, often held up as among the city's most valuable yet underdeveloped properties, was presented to a standing-room-only crowd at City Hall Monday.

The concept plans, put together by engineering firm Maser Consulting using a Hurricane Sandy recovery grant, applied a different approach to each site.

For Bader, which was in decline as an airport long before its official closing in 2006, the first goal should be to "reactive" the property, according to Gerald DeFelicis, a project manager with Maser.

## Bader Field Development Plan

Bader Field Development Plan, as presented by Maser Consulting on March 16, 2015.

That could begin with the construction of sports fields, he said, a temporary use that would hopefully attract youth tournaments and, with them, families.

Over time and as market demands call for it, the fields could gradually yield to, or mix with, residential, commercial, boating, retail and community spaces, DeFelicis said.

Atlantic City Mayor Don Guardian said the city passed on a chance to sell the property for \$900 million about a decade ago. Considering that it's now likely worth closer to \$150 million, Guardian described a phased development approach that would gradually increase its value as "logical."

Any development on Bader would also be accompanied by infrastructure improvements to both the site and along Albany Avenue, DeFelicis said. New regulations from the Federal Emergency Management Agency require the field to be raised by about six feet, he said, while the roadway could be raised and widened to better accommodate traffic and prevent flooding.

Dave Roberts, another Maser staffer, said new and improved crossings would link the Chelsea Heights neighborhood to Bader and the city should encourage alternative ways of getting there, such



AC Development Attorney James O'Malley explains planning concepts during the meeting at City Hall in Atlantic City. Monday March 16 2015 (The Press of Atlantic City / Ben Fogletto)

as by public transportation, walking or by bike.

“The more we can keep people out of their cars, the better,” he said.

The city has already issued a request for proposal for the site with an April 14 deadline. Glenn Straub, the Florida developer still attempting to close on the former Revel Casino and Hotel, said Monday he’s interested in submitting a proposal for the property, but with the primary goal of opening its shuttered landing strips to planes carrying wealthy regional clients.

Straub described the incremental plan suggested by the city as “boring.”

“It’s not going to put money in anybody’s pocket,” Straub said. “One high roller’s worth a lot more than one more bus trip.”

## **Gardner's Basin Development Plan**

Gardner's Basin Redevelopment Plan, as presented by Maser Consulting on March 16, 2015.

By contrast, an RFP has yet to be issued for Gardner’s Basin. Maser’s proposal called for the construction of new retail businesses and restaurants, as well as refurbished green spaces and a large outdoor amphitheater situated next to an expanded Atlantic City Aquarium. Parking would be pushed away from the shoreline, allowing for a new fishing pier.

Guardian said the city should respect the Basin’s existing businesses, allowing them to stay at least until rents are raised by future developers. At that point, he said, they would hopefully have seen a jump in sales and would be able to afford new rental rates.

Several of the property’s current tenants expressed support for the city’s proposals.

“I’d like to think that more development in Gardner’s Basin would bring more families, residents and tourists to ride the boat and enjoy the beautiful waterways of Atlantic City,” said Jeff George, the owner of Atlantic City Cruises, Inc.

Denise Stamat, who owns Gilchrist Restaurant, said what she’s heard is “great” and that she’ll benefit from anything that brings new family-oriented attractions to the area.

The Basin has been managed for nearly 40 years by a nonprofit, The Atlantic City Historical Waterfront Foundation.

The organization's current contract lasts until 2026, but Executive Director Jack Keith said Monday its leadership has no interest in opposing the city’s plans.

“The Foundation is committed to cooperating with the city in any form to improve Gardner’s Basin,” he said. “The city wants to issue an RFP just to see what the potential is. Nothing like that has been attempted since the 1970s, so it’s time to do it.”

Guardian stressed that while Atlantic City residents often say “other people are planning our future,” the concept plans presented factored in public comments. The mayor also urged residents to continue making their voices heard as development plans take shape.

Elizabeth Terenik, the city’s planning director, struck the same chord.

“We’re here to seek your input,” she said, adding that Maser’s work will “influence and inform, but not dictate, what is built.”

City Council President Frank Gilliam said the resort’s elected officials have been “working very diligently, going door to door to developers to spark interest in our city.”

And he applauded the meeting’s turnout.

“The room tells me that people care and want to see something happen in Atlantic City,” Gilliam said.

The questions asked of the presenters revealed a mixture of skepticism and support among those assembled, and a sense of urgency permeated the room, perhaps best captured by William K. Cheatham, a lifelong Atlantic City resident.

“I’m 85 years old, and I don’t want to wait too long,” he said to applause. “This little old man wants something done now.”

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