

Bed-and-breakfast idea revived for Pittsburg waterfront

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Pittsburg is once again looking to build a bed-and-breakfast at its waterfront after the idea was put on the shelf for more than three years.

Gone is the extravagant getaway concept first envisioned by city leaders.

The project, now called a Marina Activity Center, would still include lodging for guests and the amenities of a bed-and-breakfast. However, City Manager Marc Grisham explained, the building also would serve as a gathering place for visitors and as a training ground for those interested in hospitality industry careers.

"The building is an important part of making the marina come together," Grisham said.

About \$20 million has been dedicated to the marina area over the past decade for improved docks, a new 25-foot-wide promenade, landscaping and a new building with city offices and amenities for boaters.

"We want to be able to tell people from all around they can boat up to Pittsburg and have a good experience," Grisham said, adding that few cities have the opportunity Pittsburg does to capitalize on its downtown's accessibility to the waterfront and create a "really cool environment."

The B&B could be an attractive draw for those who use Pittsburg's 30 guest docks but don't want to stay on crowded boats overnight.

The center also provides a "focal point" where people can meet for breakfast before embarking on a day on the water, he said.

Based on the early success of 615 Restaurant — a recently opened bistro and culinary academy on Railroad Avenue — city officials decided to expand the

idea to the center and make it a training ground for those trying to work in hospitality.

"They can practice their craft and learn how to handle working in a bed-and-breakfast environment, how to take reservations and learn the nuances of the hospitality side," Grisham said.

The concept of the building is not changing dramatically, though many cost-saving measures are being explored for the design, said Jim Miller of JMA Architecture. The bottom-floor design would be geared toward a classroom for the hospitality students, he said. The other two floors would still have eight rooms and views of the river, though the amenities wouldn't be as plush, he said.

Late last year, Pittsburg leaders created a long-term plan for future redevelopment projects that included putting \$5.8 million toward creation of the three-story center. The project has not been brought before the City Council for approval to go out to bid.

Other projects in Old Town — like completing the Vidrio mixed-use project, expanding the New Mecca restaurant and starting renovation on the historic California Theater — are higher priorities, Grisham said. Grisham hopes to have the Marina Activity Center built by 2011.

Lynn Fogleman, a downtown property owner and resident, heard about the project last week for the first time.

"I think if the culinary school is working, this could work, too," she said, adding there were some doubts about whether the community was ready for the initial bed-and-breakfast concept.

"Because of the boating, it might bring people here to the community. I think maybe this idea now is a better fit for the economy," she said. "The concept is great, but we have to get more people to come here first."