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Beacon looks to \$50M Long Dock

Project tied to ferries, Hudson ecology

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Beacon – Riding with the Newburgh-Beacon ferry when it's restored next spring will be hopes for the \$50 million Long Dock Beacon project.

Project boosters dream of ferries carrying people to and from what state officials call a one-of-a-kind project that ties a 90-room, eco-friendly-built hotel to trails, trolleys and two other river attractions: Dia:Beacon, the huge modern art museum that's drawn more than 40,000 visitors since it opened May 18, and Gov. George Pataki's proposed Rivers and Estuaries Center, an ecological think tank, on the Hudson River.

With a 14-acre public park and shoreline trail around some of the most scenic spots of the Hudson Highlands, Long Dock's getting rave reviews for being like no other project on the Hudson River.

This, even though it's far from even seeing construction equipment – the hotel's opening is expected in 2007.

Long Dock's credentials are hard-core environmental.

It's owned and promoted by Poughkeepsie-based Scenic Hudson, the environmental group that saved Storm King Mountain from becoming a power plant more than 20 years ago.

Then there's that eco-friendly hotel, where management will leave the lights on for you but the bulbs will be lit by solar power.

Floors may be of cork, not synthetic materials.

And the three hotel complex restaurants (from white tablecloth to take-out) may pick their veggies from a garden on the roof of the hotel, which probably won't top two to four stories.

Plus, the hotel's small harbor won't allow powerboats.

Design details are now being worked out, following the selection Aug. 11 of a project developer – Foss Group Beacon.

The project's spin-offs – provided it succeeds – can't help but improve Newburgh, says city development chief Robert McKenna. "Will there be residual impact? Yes," he says.

And, noting Newburgh's restaurant row, McKenna adds, "It'll work both ways."

Another Long Dock wrinkle: Scenic Hudson is holding community meetings on the design, as it has since it bought the 23 acres for \$3 million in 1996 to save it from intensive residential development. A 400-plus town house project had been proposed for the peninsula in the early 1990s.

While those meetings continue with serious suggestions – like the trolley link with downtown Beacon and fantasies like a ball field over a parking garage – Foss has some financial hurdles to clear to sell the green innovations to investors.

"We have to establish for lenders and investors that this will function financially," says Foss partner Matthew Rudikoff. "The test is to make it green and financially feasible, but we're very confident of this happening."

Making it financially viable was always a deliberate part of the plan, says Scenic Hudson Land Trust Executive Director Steve Rosenberg. He calls it "environmentally sensible development fulfilling environmental goals."

In other words, hug trees and make a fair enough profit. And if you do that, you set a model for developers up and down the Hudson, says Carmella Mantello, executive director of the Hudson Valley Greenway Communities Council, a state-sponsored planning organization.

From Scenic Hudson's end of the deal, there's more than \$1 million over the life of the 10-acre hotel project's 99-year lease to Foss. The nonprofit has to plow that back into its programs. The overall cost of the project, \$50 million, may include some profit to Foss, but Rudikoff wouldn't disclose details of Foss's financing. That recently benefited from Pataki plopping Long Dock into the Poughkeepsie-Dutchess Empire Zone for tax breaks.

Fittingly for a project tied to the art, history (Washington's troops landed supplies here) and the environment, the only tangible construction on the small Long Dock peninsula is a living work of art, officially part of Dia:Beacon's collection.

It's the 33 metal piling caps and timbers of a dock and boardwalk out on the peninsula's tip and shoreline. The art will swirl the Hudson's water under the public's feet while offering good fishing and erosion control.

Long Dock observer and folk singer Pete Seeger, a member of the Beacon Sloop Club, which is helping plan a community boat building space in an old paint and pesticide store that Scenic Hudson renovated, said he's "optimistic."

"But I've been overoptimistic all my life," added Seeger, 84.

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