

DETROIT

Tunnel, Sky Bridge proposed to connect Huntington Place to future hotel



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A conceptual site plan for proposed expansion plans to Detroit's Huntington Place include a Sky Bridge that would connect the convention center to a future hotel. *Detroit Regional Convention Facility Authority*

The authority that runs Detroit's Huntington Place convention center has unveiled plans to build a tunnel and Sky Bridge to connect the facility to a future hotel, along with a multi-level parking facility and pedestrian pathways.

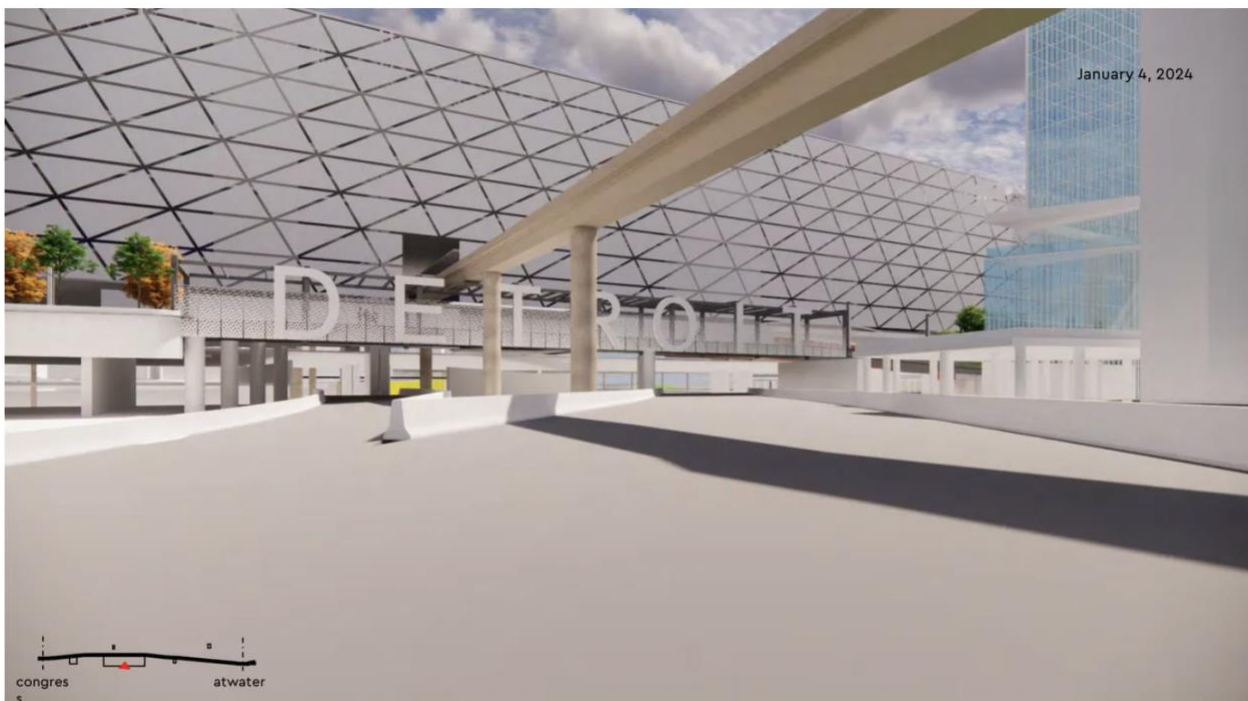
The \$65-70 million project by the Detroit Regional Convention Facility Authority and presented to the Detroit Planning Commission during its meeting Thursday would be done in at least two phases and include constructing roadways from Atwater to Congress streets across the Lodge Freeway, while extending Second Avenue to the riverfront to give pedestrians, cyclists and motorists access between properties.

A conceptual site plan also includes building a parking structure that would include 1,000 spaces.

"Where we're at now on this project is we've completed 30% design for the Second Avenue extension across the Lodge Freeway, and we submitted those to Michigan Department of Transportation in November," said Gordon Wilson with Anderson, Eckstein and Westrick, a Shelby Township-based engineering and architectural firm, which presented the conceptual plan on behalf of the convention authority.

"We're anticipating clear direction from them as to what needs to be done to meet their needs," he said, adding that his group plans to meet with MDOT on Jan. 12.

The proposed tunnel would connect the lowest ground floor of Huntington Place to a planned 600-room hotel near the convention center. The proposed pedestrian bridge, meanwhile, also would connect the hotel with Huntington Place Convention Center but over the future Second Avenue, according to project information posted on the city's website.



A rendering shows some of the improvements planned as part of an expansion at Huntington Place. *Detroit Regional Convention Facility Authority*

Construction is expected to begin later this year on the 25-story Hotel at Water Square. It's slated to sit along the city's riverfront near the former Joe Louis Arena site, according to project information posted on the city's web site.

The hotel's developers, Atwater and Second Associates LLC, which includes Detroit-based Sterling Group as the principal, are completing work on a nearby residential project, The Residences at Water Square, set to open for tenants in February 2024.



The proposed Hotel Water Square is shown in this rendering. Provided by the City of Detroit *City Of Detroit*

City Planning Commission Chairperson Donovan Smith described the ambitions of the conceptual site plan as "exciting," but pushed for greater engagement and collaboration with local agencies and communities near the site.

Wilson said the site would feature "pedestrian experiences" such as walkways and lanes for cyclists for public accessibility. But he said the Detroit Riverfront Conservancy, a nonprofit group that runs the riverfront, and other agencies were not brought in on the phases and planning, citing "tight time frames."

"We are receptive to meeting with and engaging various involved or potential other users that could provide some insight as to what we'd like to do, but we have requirements ... (and) time frames for construction. So, we're trying to meet all the time frames as well as accommodate the needs of the area and the residents and the users of this, and creating a pedestrian experience," Wilson said.

Commissioners also raised concerns about Second Avenue extension and whether it would be a private or public road. Other commissioners made inquiries of infrastructure maintenance and foliage accessibility amid surrounding buildings, calling for "more green, less concrete."

"The intent right now is we're proceeding with it as private road, but the board of the DRCFA (Detroit Regional Convention Facility Authority) would like to turn it into a public road at sometime," Wilson said. He said the authority would maintain road maintenance and snow removal as they have "a need to keep the facilities of both east and west side open and moving."



A rendering shows the proposed Second Avenue extension between Congress and Atwater streets in Detroit. *Detroit Regional Convention Facility Authority*

The plan calls for several types of trees to flank pathways alongside the Second Avenue extension, although some commissioners worried the trees wouldn't get adequate sunlight away from the buildings.

Huntington Place is owned by the city of Detroit, but in 2009, it was leased to the Detroit Regional Convention Facility Authority to operate the property for 33 years, its website said.

An in-person and virtual meeting for the first community benefits meeting is scheduled to take place at 6 p.m. Jan. 9 at Huntington Place Convention Center.

The meetings come nearly a year after the board of the Detroit Regional Convention Facility Authority voted to enter an agreement with Sterling Group that would bring improvements to the event center and build an attached hotel.

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