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The Detroit News

Published 3:14 p.m. ET Dec. 22, 2023 | Updated 3:48 p.m. ET Dec. 22, 2023

## Plans moving forward on hotel to connect to Huntington Place

Plans are moving forward for a proposed Detroit hotel next to the Huntington Place convention center as the first community benefits meeting for the project is scheduled to take place next month.

The 25-story, 600-room project called Hotel at Water Square will sit along the city's riverfront near the former Joe Louis Arena site. Its developer, Atwater and Second Associates LLC, includes Detroit-based Sterling Group, which is completing work on a nearby residential project, The Residences at Water Square, set to open for tenants in February 2024.



The hotel will have five podium floors and will include a ground floor restaurant, lobby bar, two ballrooms and 50,000 square feet of meeting rooms, according to the city. Other amenities will include a swimming pool, spa and fitness area.

A pedestrian bridge will connect the hotel with Huntington Place Convention Center over the future 2nd Avenue, according to project information posted on the city's web site.

“This important feature will enhance accessibility and convenience for convention-goers and guests alike and allow for truly connected access to the convention center,” the project description read.

The hotel will help the city attract more large-scale events, said Claude Molinari, board chairman of the Detroit Regional Convention Facility Authority and CEO of Visit Detroit. He said the city's roughly 5,000 hotel rooms have put the city at a competitive disadvantage among other cities that have thousands of rooms connected to convention centers.

“One of the challenges that we're dealing with is that our competition — Indianapolis, Chicago, Cleveland, Columbus, Houston, Texas — they have huge numbers of hotel rooms 2,000 3,000,” he said. “Even Cleveland has 600 hotel rooms attached to their convention center.

“Right now, we currently have zero rooms connected to our convention center. So from an economic impact standpoint, having 600 rooms connected to our convention center will be a huge benefit to the taxpayers of Southeast Michigan. We're going to be able to attract so many more events.”

The authority, which manages Huntington Place, would own part of the bridge connecting to the hotel, Molinari said, while Sterling Group would own the rest.

The developer hopes to begin construction on the hotel in the second quarter of 2024, according to the city. Sterling Group was not immediately available for comment.

The Detroit Regional Convention Facility Authority is preparing to connect 2nd Avenue from Congress Street to the Riverfront. Molinari said his goal would be to break ground on that project at the end of the first quarter of 2024 or the beginning of the second quarter.

"Right now there's no connection there and that's going to be important to unlock that Joe Louis Arena site, which is now going to be called Water Square," he said. "And it's also going to be a major benefit for the citizens of Detroit who will now be able to access the river from Congress Street."

The first community benefits meeting is scheduled to take place at 6 p.m. Jan. 9 remotely and in person at Huntington Place Convention Center.

The meetings will 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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