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THE TRIBECA TRIB

More Time, Money Needed Before Opening of Old Pier A

BY JESSICA TERRELL

Years of neglect have taken their toll on historic Pier A, the 126-year-old landmark that lies between Battery Park City and Battery Park. The ravages of time and weather, made worse by broken gutters and a leaky roof, are the legacy of a stalled restoration in the 1990s.

Battery Park City Authority officials say damage is far worse and \$6 million more costly to repair than expected when the agency took over the development of the pier in 2008.

"We've encountered a number of things that were surprises," Gwen Dawson, the Authority's senior vice president of asset management, told Community Board 1's Battery Park City Committee last month. "There was a great deal more rot and structural deterioration than we had anticipated."

Those conditions have delayed the expected opening of the pier, with restaurants, a visitor center and wide vistas of the harbor, until the spring of 2013.

"The building suffered because there were efforts that didn't get finished, things that were left open that did not get completed," Dawson said. "Some things were completed but not completed properly. It's kind of a sore topic."

Much of the western end of the pier was left open to the elements for years, Dawson said. The promenade needed structural reinforcement and the roof has to be replaced. As the siding is removed, more rot and damage appear. Several interior columns that were repaired in the 1990s are splitting because of poor installation, a portion of the foundation's east end was missing, and water had come gushing into the building due to broken gutters.

Dawson and Authority President Gayle Horwitz, along with the Pier A construction team and representatives of Pier A's leaseholder, appeared before the community board after its members raised concerns that the site was being improperly cared for.

The open windows, a particular source of those concerns, were intentional, according to Kevin Harney, president of Stalco Construction, the project's general contractor. He said that it would allow the interior wood to dry out slowly and naturally, part of the painstaking restoration process. The wood needs to be brought to a very specific level of moisture, Harney said. Wood that is waterlogged is susceptible to mold, fungus and dry rot. However, he noted, wood that dries too quickly can twist and split.

Once rebuilt, the pier's exterior is expected to look much as it did before it was taken over by the Fire Department as a headquarters for its marine division. Hugh Hardy, whose firm H3 Hardy Collaboration Architecture is designing the restored pier, said he is confident that its decrepit condition will not stand in the way of a faithful transformation.

"Some pieces were missing when we started all this. The whole west end wasn't there, and some pieces will have to be refabricated, but mercifully we can do it in materials that are exactly the same. I was nervous about that—would we be able to duplicate the material? And the answer is yes, fortunately."

Horwitz said the additional \$6 million, authorized by the BPCA board, would come from the agency's capital budget and would not affect its day-to-day operations.

After the Authority is finished with its work, the group leasing the pier will spend eight to nine months and an estimated \$18 million to build restaurants, an event venue, visitors center, and outdoor seating areas, said Drew Spitzer of the Dermot Company, which is partnering with Harry and Peter Poulakakos to develop the pier.

Last March, the group signed a 25-year lease on the structure.

"We would like to be open for the spring season in 2013," Spitzer said. "We are fully funded, so we can't wait to get started."