Newport on the Levee reveals $10M Ferris wheel plan

Newport on the Levee, the city of Newport and a St. Louis-based company have reached a deal to add a SkyWheel attraction at the riverfront destination.

Koch Development expects to spend more than $10 million to build the Ferris wheel and begin operating it in summer 2017. The company estimates the Levee attraction could draw about 500,000 riders annually.

The region’s newest entertainment attraction could sit more than 235 feet or roughly 21 stories higher than the Ohio River and offer panoramic views of Ohio and Kentucky communities.

Koch Development expects to begin SkyWheel Newport construction after it obtains final approval of the construction plan from the U.S. Army Corps of Engineers. The federal agency has to regulate the project because the wheel is being built on top of the earthen levee along the Ohio River.

“We are very excited to work with Koch Development to bring SkyWheel to Newport on the Levee,” said Levee General Manager Harold Dull. “The SkyWheel will be a world-class attraction for the entire region.”

SkyWheel Newport will feature 30 fully enclosed, climate-controlled gondolas. The gondolas will be handicap accessible and seat up to six adults, according to Koch Development.

Passengers will take three to four rotations on the ride, which will last about 10 to 12 minutes. The SkyWheel is expected to operate year-round on the plaza level adjacent the Newport Aquarium. At night, the SkyWheel will be illuminated with LED lighting.

“A Ferris wheel resonates with the public,” said Matthew Stack, managing director of Koch Development. “It sparks a feeling of nostalgia. People know what it is. They are drawn to it.”

The new Ferris wheel is part of a suite of developments being pursued by the Levee's manager and its owner, the Price Group, to bring to the nearly 15-year-old site.

The Levee features office tenants, retailers and more than a dozen restaurants and bars and entertainment attractions such as the Newport Aquarium. Last week, Dull said the riverfront destination has to add more dining and entertainment options to remain competitive with others such as The Banks and Oakley Station.

The Enquirer reported last year that long-range goals for the Levee include repurposing the vacant Imax theater property, developing an 18,800-square-foot "pad" on Third Street, analyzing the potential of waterfront development and developing a contingency plan if Barnes & Noble were to exit its nearly 27,000-square-foot space.

The project development team includes wheel equipment manufacturer Dutch Wheels, designer planner Bruce D. Robinson Design Group, geotechnical engineer Thelen Associates Inc. and engineer and architect Woolpert.

In 2011, Koch Development developed SkyWheel Myrtle Beach, the first observation wheel of its kind in the United States, in Myrtle Beach, South Carolina. The company is planning to open a similar observation wheel next year in Panama City Beach, Florida.

The proposal has also captured the interest and support from the Newport Aquarium and Northern Kentucky Convention and Visitors Bureau.

“The SkyWheel is going to be iconic,” Newport City Manager Tom Fromme said. “It will be a tremendous attraction that will draw families and visitors to Newport and the Ohio Riverfront. We are anxious to continue working with Koch Development to make this exciting project a reality.”

Details about prices for the new attraction were not immediately available. The SkyWheel in Myrtle Beach costs $9 for children ages 3 to 11 and $14 for adults.
people age 12 and older. VIP tickets cost $35 or $50.

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