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# No Headline.

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**By Dave Alexander**  
**CHRONICLE BUSINESS EDITOR**

The owners of Muskegon's most important waterfront property have plans to build a 172-slip marina in the heart of the city's downtown.

It would be the first time West Michigan Dock & Market Corp. known as the Mart Dock has had any use other than a commercial port facility since it was built in 1933.

Mart Dock officials have applied for environmental permits to construct a 172-slip marina on its "Third Street dock" on the east end of the property that once was the berth of the Aquarama cruise ship.

The planned marina will be another important step forward as Muskegon's downtown waterfront is reinvented. Over the past 15 years, vacant or little-used industrial sites have been turned into parks, marinas and educational facilities; yet to come is a proposed business park along with residences and hotels.

But Mart Dock officials will not discuss their marina plans or how the marina would fit into an overall redevelopment plan for the 35-acre downtown site. The company has given no timetable for when the marina would be built; the federal permits would not expire for two or three years depending on the type of permit.

"The application speaks for itself," said Ben Bifos, vice president and general manager of West Michigan Dock and Market Corp. The Chronicle was unable to reach West Michigan Dock President Max McKee for comment.

When the Mart Dock marina is built, it will be the

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fourth largest marina on Muskegon Lake. After a rush of marinas built in the late 1980s and early 1990s, no major marina has been proposed for Muskegon Lake for several years. However, owners of the popular 270-slip Great Lakes Marina in Lakeside this summer had a waiting list of more than 100.

The proposed marina seems to complement the Mart Dock's boat storage business the past few winters. The old Mart Dock auditorium, built in 1933 as an ice rink and exhibition center, was used in later years as a frozen storage building. A second floor built for storage was removed recently and a new two-story door put on the east side of the building to allow for boat and recreational vehicle storage.

While a marina would fit well with some aspects of Mart Dock's business, a marina conflicts with one major part of the operation. Stone has been piled on the east side of the property in recent years and would be adjacent to the new marina. However, there is room on the Mart Dock site to move the stone shipping operations.

The marina proposal

Details of the marina plans were in a joint public notice of the U.S. Army Corps of Engineers and the Michigan Department of Environmental Quality published this week. The marina details were prepared by the engineering consultants Abonmarche Group of Benton Harbor.

West Michigan Dock and Market Corp. plans to excavate 37,025 cubic yards from the existing shoreline and inlet to form a 360-foot-by-220-foot boat basin for the marina.

The marina would need 1,636 lineal feet of metal seawall and a 597-foot wave-protection pier to create the boat basin. The pier expands the protected boat basin out into Muskegon Lake north of the current shoreline.

The 172-slips would be created with approximately 70 floating main and finger piers. The marina also would have a floating service dock for fueling and holding-tank pumping, a hoist basin for dry storage boat service and a bathhouse, according to permit application documents.

The Army Corps of Engineers has set a comment

period on the West Michigan Dock marina permit application through Dec. 30. Written comments are being accepted in the Army Corps Detroit District office. Anyone may request a public hearing on the project.

#### Still room for a ferry dock

The marina project does not interfere with Mart Dock plans for a new cross-lake ferry facility and an historic naval ship display, both activities that have been discussed for the site in the past year.

West Michigan Dock is talking to the city of Muskegon and a Milwaukee investment firm for a cross-lake ferry dock on the west end of the property. West Michigan Dock also has an agreement with the USS Silversides for the historic ship group to restore the Mart's old Highway 16 back into the LST 393, displaying it with the World War II submarine in a bay on the property's west side.

City of Muskegon officials said they are under the impression that the Mart Dock would be redeveloped with mixed uses. With no specific master plan presented to the city, the Mart Dock owners appear to want to keep their options open for how the redevelopment would take shape, city officials said.

"We have been talking with them on the cross-lake ferry and those discussions continue," said Cathy Brubaker-Clarke, the city's director of community development. "Certainly, the marina plan fits in with what we believe will be the long-term use of the property."

#### In the center of change

McKee's grandfather, Max B. McKee Jr., built the Mart Dock in 1933 as Muskegon's only commercial port facility. The Mart Dock was the cross-lake ferry terminal for the Milwaukee Clipper from 1941 to 1970.

Mainly, the Mart Dock has been used for the shipment of goods in and out of Muskegon; at times it also offered warehousing and a major ice-making operation. It hasn't changed much over the past six decades.

However, the Mart Dock is in the heart of a changing Muskegon Lake waterfront.

To the east of the proposed marina is the Terrace Point development, which includes the Terrace Point Marina, Rafferty's Dockside Restaurant, the SPX Corp. headquarters building and the Shoreline Inn & Suites a new 10-story hotel under construction.

To the west of the Mart Dock is the Lake Michigan Center, home of the Grand Valley State University Annis Water Resources Institute. A bit farther west is Muskegon County's Heritage Landing, which has become the community's waterfront summer festival grounds.

Across Shoreline Drive from the Mart Dock, the Amazon Building is going through a \$16 million renovation to convert the five-story woolen mill into 124 apartment units.

If granted the needed marina permits by the federal and state governments, Mart Dock officials would still need to go before the city of Muskegon prior to constructing the new marina, according to city officials. The Mart Dock is zoned for "waterfront marine," which allows for marina construction.

However, the marina plans would need site-plan approval from the Muskegon Planning Commission. Such approval has not yet been sought, Brubaker-Clarke said.

Plans offered the Army Corps shows a gravel parking lot on the east side of the marina. Brubaker-Clarke said city zoning ordinances would call for a paved parking area.

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