

## Developers envision a waterfront jump-start

### Convention center's expansion plan could boost stalled projects

By Casey Ross  
GLOBE STAFF

The proposed expansion of the Boston Convention & Exhibition Center has a built-in cheering section: local developers who hope a larger convention hall will jump-start building in a waterfront neighborhood struggling through the recession.

Construction in the area around the South Boston convention center has slowed dramatically over the past two years, with tight credit markets leaving some builders unable to advance developments that were expected to transform the area into an economic juggernaut.

But the Massachusetts Convention Center Authority's announcement that it wants to double the size of the center offers a new glimmer of hope. Developers of nearby projects said the expansion would result in an influx of business travelers and tourists, whose spending would help support additional hotels, restaurants, and retail shops.

"The trick is getting people down here," said John Hynes, who had proposed building Seaport Square, a 23-acre development of residences, hotels, and stores. "Expanding the convention center is not a panacea for our capital woes, but it is going to be a help."

Overall, the city has approved more than 3 million square feet of development on the South Boston Waterfront, where Mayor Thomas M. Menino wants to see a modern mixed-use community on land once covered by industrial yards, warehouses, and fish piers.

Many of those new building plans originated during the construction of the first convention center facility, which was completed in 2004.

The authority's expansion plan calls for another exhibit hall, a new

ballroom, a 5,000-seat auditorium, and a 1,000-room hotel.

The expansion, which could cost up to \$1 billion, is a long way from starting. Officials acknowledged that if approved it may take from five to 15 years to finish.

Despite the time frame, neighboring developers said that just the unveiling of the center's expansion plan **CONVENTION CENTER, Page B9**

will make it easier for them to pitch their projects to potential lenders and would-be tenants.

"There is no question the convention center has been a major catalyst for Boston," said developer Joseph Fallon, who is building Fan Pier, a 21-acre, \$2.5 billion complex of stores, a hotel, residences, and a marina on the waterfront. Construction has been slowed by the recession, but Fallon said new facilities at the convention hall could mean millions of new visitors strolling the streets around a finished Fan Pier.

Developer Ed Nardi, who is building Liberty Wharf, a development of offices and a new flagship restaurant for Legal Sea Foods at the site of the former Jimmy's Harborside, said the convention center plans promise street-level improvements that would make the neighborhood easier to navigate.

"It seems to break down the uses and incorporate them into the neighborhood, so it's not just another huge addition onto the convention center," he said.

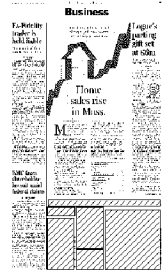
Gregory Bialecki, Governor Deval Patrick's top development aide, said the state is counting on the success of Nardi's projects and other developments to help pay for the expan-

sion.

"For a facility like this, the first thing you want to look at is the degree to which you can recapture some of the dollars that are being created by the economic activity associated with it," he said.

"We really do believe that this attracts people not only down to the South Boston Waterfront, but all around the city and all around the state."

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**An office building designed by Elkus Manfredi Architects on Fan Pier, where the recession has stalled construction of a \$2.5 billion complex.**