

Cobo Center to spend \$8.8M to add more parking

Christine Ferretti, The Detroit News 6:19 p.m. EDT August 10, 2016



(Photo: Lauren Abdel-Razzaq / The Detroit News)

Detroit — Cobo Center operators are planning \$8.8 million in projects to add about 425 more spaces at two parking garages.

Patrick Bero, CEO and CFO of the Detroit Regional Convention Facility Authority, said the first of the two projects could be completed late this year and will help meet growing demands.

"We have been getting increasing requests from the city and new companies seeking to lease spaces from us," Bero said. "We are right now at our maximum."

Of its nearly 2,200 parking spaces, Bero said about half are currently leased for monthly parking.

"With increasing parking demand and the level of activity, we can use more spots," he said.

One project calls for a \$1.4 million expansion that would add 77 spaces at the Washington Boulevard Garage under Cobo. Officials have completed designs and are securing approvals for the project that they hope to have completed before next year's North American International Auto Show.

Separately, the authority estimates it would cost another \$7.4 million to redevelop the old Cobo Arena garage on Atwater, adding another 346 spots. Bero said officials hope to begin demolition by the fall and have the spaces available as soon as fall 2017.

The authority assumed control of arena garage in 2010. The structurally unsafe facility was shut down the same day. Officials tried several times to work out a rehabilitation scenario for the facility, but fell short, Bero said.

The authority took over operations of Cobo Center from the city at the end of 2009. Last summer, it completed a \$279 million renovation project.

The center, which at one time was a \$21 million drain annually on city finances, has fought back to near profitability and is attracting large conventions.

Bero said the center expects to host 400 events and about 1.3 million attendees this fiscal year. Annual visitor numbers have ranged from 1.2 million to 1.4 million since the authority took over.

"The day all of those spots open we could literally lease every single spot at Cobo Center and we would still have a waiting list," Bero said. "We've had a lot of discussions with the city. In general, they are supportive of the concept of what we are trying to do. Nothing is final yet. We still have to get our approvals."

Currently, there are 1,200 parking spaces on the Cobo roof, 585 in the Washington garage and 406 spaces in the garage it operates on Congress Street garage.