

# RXR to convert mothballed ocean liner to dockside hotel, entertainment venue



RXR Realty plans a \$500 million renovation and conversion of the SS United States, currently docked in Philadelphia. Credit: Chris Ware

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Special to Newsday

Updated March 10, 2020 6:17 PM

A prominent Long Island development firm has agreed to renovate the mothballed ocean liner United States to convert it into a dockside hotel, museum and entertainment and cultural center.

Uniondale-based RXR Realty announced its plans Tuesday in conjunction with the SS United States Conservancy. That nonprofit organization since 2011 has owned “America’s Flagship,” which has been docked and deteriorating in Philadelphia since 1996 after being retired in 1969 because of competition from air travel.

RXR began studying the feasibility of renovating and converting the 990-foot ship with 600,000 square feet of developable space into a floating attraction in late 2018.

The company has agreed to proceed on what it estimates will be a \$500 million conversion done over two years in a shipyard followed by six months of work at its new homeport. In the meantime, RXR will continue to pay the more than \$60,000 a month for dockage fees and other costs to keep the United States afloat, while moving on to the next major step: finding a city interested in having the ship as a permanent attraction.



*Conceptual rendering of a revitalized SS United States, which is planned to include a hotel, museum and entertainment space. Credit: RXR Realty*

The firm says it is reaching out to officials in New York, the vessel's homeport during its years of operation, as well as Philadelphia, Boston, Miami, Seattle, San Francisco, Los Angeles, and San Diego.

RXR estimates the project will generate more than 1,000 jobs and become a major economic force for whichever city becomes the ship's permanent berth.

“The SSUS is an iconic piece of American engineering and design and we’re committed to finding a permanent home and restoring this one-of-a-kind luxury ocean liner into a vibrant, mixed-use destination,” Scott Rechler, chairman and CEO of RXR Realty said in a statement Tuesday.

Susan Gibbs, president of the SS United States Conservancy and granddaughter of the ship’s designer, the late William Francis Gibbs, a part-time Locust Valley resident, said “the SS United States has waited a long time for this opportunity. It is a significant step toward finally realizing our goal of saving America's Flagship. RXR’s outstanding team understands the historic importance and economic potential of this enduring symbol of national pride and innovation.”

RXR has a track record of adapting and updating historic buildings, including Manhattan's Helmsley Building, 75 Rockefeller Plaza and Pier 57, which now houses Google offices. It is also a partner with JetBlue on a new terminal at JFK Airport and undertook the redevelopment of the Nassau Coliseum.

For the SS United States project, RXR has assembled an architectural and engineering team that includes Perkins Eastman Architects, HLW and Gibbs & Cox, the naval architectural firm that originally designed the vessel.

On its maiden voyage in 1952, the United States broke the record for the fastest ocean liner to ever cross the Atlantic. It was the largest liner ever built in America, 100 feet longer than the RMS Titanic.

In 2016, the Conservancy and high-end cruise ship operator Crystal Cruises announced that Crystal would evaluate buying the ship to return it to passenger service. But a \$1-million feasibility study determined there were too many problems to overcome.

If the RXR plan is a success, the United States would join the Queen Mary in Long Beach, California; the Queen Elizabeth 2 in Dubai; and the Rotterdam in its namesake city in the Netherlands as permanent floating attractions.