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DNR expects a million visitors a year to Detroit riverfront discovery center

*By John Gallagher
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The Michigan Department of Natural Resources said this morning it anticipates as many as a million visitors a year coming to its planned discovery center to be built in the historic Globe Building on Detroit's east riverfront.

Features will include a 60-foot climbing wall, an archery range, simulator rides demonstrating kayaking and other water sports, and classrooms to teach schoolchildren and other visitors outdoor safety as well as the science of natural resources and wetlands.

The details were revealed at this morning's meeting of the city's Economic Development Corp., a quasi-public board that holds title to the Globe building for the city.

Built in stages from the late 19th Century, the Globe was one of the city's most important industrial buildings in the pre-automotive era. A young Henry Ford worked there before starting his car company, and the building, which served as a dry dock, is a link to the city's past as a center of shipping. It has been mostly vacant for decades.

Under a deal approved this morning, the EDC will sell the building to local developer Roxbury Group for a dollar. Roxbury will then develop it to DNR's specs with the help of a \$11 million financing from the state's Natural Resources Trust Fund. DNR will eventually purchase the building when it's ready in fall 2013 for a total project cost of \$12.8 million.

About half of the historic building will come down, with the rest preserved and renovated for the DNR space, which is adjacent to the William Milliken State Park, as well as the Detroit RiverWalk.

"We envision that we could easily on the low side see a million visitors every year," Vicki Anthes, chief of the DNR's planning section, told the EDC board this morning.

EDC board member Conrad Mallet called the DNR plans a "fantastic opportunity" and a "great use of that building."

The DNR had initially planned a much smaller space inside the Globe Building, but scaled up the plans to about 50,000 square feet of "outdoor adventure" exhibits, activities, and classrooms, as well as office space for about 20 DNR staffers now based in Southfield.

"It was part of the vision for Milliken (state park) right from the get-go," Anthes said. "We had our eye on the Globe Building."

She added, "This has evolved to be a grander and really a more holistic approach to what we want our visitors to experience. We believe this is the right thing for us to do here."

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