

Fan Pier: Much Ado About Something

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“Thanks to our many years of planning, this will be a place all Bostonians can enjoy,” Mayor Thomas Menino proclaimed today at the ceremonial groundbreaking of Fan Pier, a 21-acre development on the South Boston waterfront. Then the mass of well-dressed attendees ate a well-catered meal while standing around a woman who was in a bathtub full of rose petals. Like the mayor said: A place for all!

But to be fair: The groundbreaking might be a ceremony of triumphant blather, but the project is worth celebrating. This waterfront land—currently the most scenic parking lot in Boston, between the Moakley Courthouse and ICA—is a rare, untapped goldmine. Eight new buildings are planned by developer Joe Fallon, with the first one, an office tower, slated for completion by early 2010. (Four should be under construction by next year.)

The final product will be nine city blocks of mixed use, with restaurants, shopping, and a waterfront park—an important connective thread for the rest of the waterfront, as well as an anchor for all the other developments planned for the area. That includes the 23-acre mixed-use development Seaport Square, a hotel/residential complex called Waterside Place, and a revamped (and potentially Anthony’s less) Pier 4.

In other words: The neighborhood will finally be worth going to, rising above the decades of politics and foot-dragging that had previously defined it. (Witness: Before various dignitaries dug their ceremonial shovels into a ceremonial mound of dirt, event MC Natalie Jacobson joked that the dirt pile might represent all the people who have passed away during Fan Pier’s evolution.)

It was previously owned by the Pritzker family of Chicago, and bought two years ago by Fallon. If he succeeds on land that has sat idle for this long, he really will deserve his own bath of rose petals. Just, uh, not while we’re having lunch.