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HUDSON



Robert Ragani/Hudson Valley Newspaper

Spirit of Hudson cruise ship owners Lee Bombard, left, and Guy Falkenheimer, background, meet with Hudson River Navigator Vinny Tamagna in Hudson Tuesday on the dock the boat was tied to before it sank on Monday.

Leaders meet to discuss sunken 'Spirit'

By Luke O'Neill
Hudson Valley Newspapers

Owners of the Spirit of Hudson, the cruise ship which currently sits at the bottom of the Hudson River, met with officials Tuesday to discuss options for getting the vessel remediated and voyage-ready as quickly as possible.

Also discussed was the possible upgrade of the bulkhead where the boat was docked. The bulkhead is being pegged, along with unusually high winds and the tide, as the possible cause of the ship's sinking Monday morning.

Mayor Rick Scalera, Hudson Business Alliance President Richard Sena, Hudson Community Development and Planning Agency Executive Director Peter Markou, and Hudson River Navigator Vinny Tamagna discussed with Lee Bombard and Guy Falkenheimer, owners of the ship, what actions need to be taken to both avoid a similar accident in the future and ensure the long-term success of their project.

Tamagna was the featured guest in some respects. Established in 1997 when

President Bill Clinton approved the American Heritage River Initiative, designating 14 rivers as historical waterways, the navigator position is designed to assist communities at the grassroots level steer through bureaucracy, identify funding sources for promoting economic vitality and protect natural resources. His role at Tuesday's meeting was to find out more about the Spirit of Hudson, its sinking, and its impact on the local community.

In terms of Monday morning's accident, when the docked Spirit of Hudson plummeted to the bottom of the river at approximately 7:30 a.m., the dock itself was identified as a source of significant concern. While the facts are ambiguous, and will likely remain so at least until the boat is removed from the river and examined, the current theory of the vessel's sinking identifies the bulkhead as a likely cause of the boat's descent.

Lt. Joseph Esmerado of the U.S. Coast Guard said Monday it appeared the starboard side of the ship may have become caught on the pier. Because it is a

Salvage plan sails forward

By Luke O'Neill
Hudson Valley Newspapers

Spirit of Hudson co-owner Lee Bombard said Tuesday the remediation process for the cruise ship may be slightly longer than he had initially hoped. While he had expressed optimism Monday that the boat would be raised by Wednesday, developments Tuesday pushed back that timetable somewhat.

Still, Bombard and co-owner Guy Falkenheimer received tentative approval from the U.S. Coast Guard Tuesday for their salvage plan. On Wednesday, divers will survey the condition of the boat to assess to best way to raise it. Based on their observations, the salvage plan could be amended or stay constant.

Bombard, who on Monday said there would be no problems with the boat once it was removed from the depths of the Hudson, sounded some-

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fixed bulkhead as opposed to a floating dock, it doesn't raise and lower with the tides, meaning that if part of the ship was indeed caught on top of it, the opposite side of the vessel would begin to tip once the tide went out.

When the tide lowered, Bombard and Esmerado said they think the ship's keel may also have been caught on the existing pylons, or tall wooden poles used for docking purposes. If so, the ship would have dipped even more to port side, taking on water over the gunnel, or upper edge of the vessel.

Although this is still a theory, the stationary bulkhead was labeled a problematic feature of the waterfront regardless of the role it played in the Spirit of Hudson's sinking.

"Do I want to put my boat back on something that may be a problem?" asked Bombard.

Sena, Scalera and Markou

conveyed to Tamagna the extent to which the Spirit of Hudson was representative of efforts towards revitalization of the city over the past several years.

Markou said that in just half a season last year the ship had begun to become a regional economic engine. Many groups and businesses took their members on chartered cruises on the vessel, and many bed-and-breakfast establishments and resorts in both Columbia and Greene counties featured Spirit of Hudson cruises as highlighted activities.

"The resorts in Greene County jumped on it as something for their people to do," he said.

Tamagna said he would call the office of U.S. Rep. John Sweeney, R,C-Halfmoon, and his contacts in the federal government to immediately begin seeking funding for a revitalization of the bulkhead.

"Certainly this has an impact on your community and has an impact far beyond Hudson. The bulkhead is something we have to work to improve right away," he said.

But funds to help Bombard and Falkenheimer get their business back on its feet may be harder to come by.

"It's very difficult to spend public money on a private business venture. Not impossible, but difficult," Tamagna said.

That's where the private sector would likely come into play. Sena said his organization would do what it could to ensure the longevity of the Spirit of Hudson cruises, not only to help a local business but for what the project has come to represent.

"The HBA understands the importance of this project and its linkage to the continued development of Hudson," said Sena.

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what less optimistic Tuesday that the boat would emerge structurally unscathed.

"We're looking at it as a salvage at this point. We're hoping it's a salvage," he said.

Troy Town Docks will wait for the divers' observations before determining what kind of ship they will send to raise the boat. Several options are possible, including a standard ship or a crane barge.

The Hudson River shipping channel will have to be closed

while the boat is raised, likely with either a crane or floatation devices that displace water once inflated and, ideally, allow to boat to float back to the surface.

On Monday, the boat lay basically upright, listing 20 degrees to port, according to Jeff Bullock of Professional Diving Services Inc. of Galway, Saratoga County. Current estimates peg the depth of the boat at 38 feet. Depending on the tide, wind and resulting choppiness of the water, both the depth of the vessel and its posi-

tioning may have changed.

Once the boat is raised, it must be inspected by the U.S. Coast Guard before receiving approval to operate.

While he sounded less confident than on Monday, Bombard nonetheless remained hopeful that the steel-hulled boat would be afloat and operational in short time.

"We're optimistic at this point. That's a good boat on the bottom of the water," he said.