

Boblo Boat could dock in St. Clair

The Boblo boat SS Ste. Claire today



A tour of the Boblo boat Ste. Claire by Owner Ron Kattoo, who hopes to restore it. Kimberly P. Mitchell/Detroit Free Press

[Nicole Hayden](#), Times Herald 7:52 p.m. EDT August 31, 2016



(Photo: Submitted)

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The SS. Ste. Claire, more widely known as one of the Boblo Boats, could dock in St. Clair permanently.

The passenger steamer was decommissioned in 1991. The ship ran for 81 years, carrying passengers between Detroit and the Boblo Island amusement park near Windsor.

Its sister ship SS Columbia found a home in Buffalo, New York, last year. Kevin Mayer, co-owner and general manager of the Ste. Claire, said the Columbia will be steaming up and down the Hudson River next year.

Mayer wants to see a similar future for the Ste. Claire after its ongoing restoration.

“There still is a lot of work to be done,” Mayer said. “It would be two years at the most to finish the work, but we are looking for a permanent site for her.”

Mayer said St. Clair is at the top of his list, with Wyandotte close behind. The ship's owners currently are not considering any other cities.



A historic photo of the SS Ste. Claire (Photo: Submitted)

“It had a strong connection to Wyandotte since it used to stop there, but also a strong connection to the Port Huron area since once a year the ship would take an excursion up to Port Huron to let people shop for the day and then come home,” he said.

Mayer said no official plans have been made and discussions with St. Clair City Council are needed. A special meeting is proposed for October. The date is still pending.

St. Clair Mayor Bill Cedar said all he knows so far is that the owners of the ship are interested in St. Clair.

Cedar said there are a lot of details that need to be worked out.

St. Clair Councilman Mitch Kuffa said while there hasn't been a formal meeting about the possibility, the preliminary discussion was the first step.

Kuffa said council will have to approve the use of city property allowing the boat to dock at and possibly lease seawall space from the city.

“This is a learning experience and there are plenty of steps involved,” Kuffa said. “In my opinion, bringing the Boblo Boat to St. Clair is the final puzzle piece to make this a destination place for people all around.”

Kuffa said he expected the boat would attract thousands of visitors.



The current condition of the SS Ste. Claire (Photo: Submitted)

“This couldn’t have been presented at a better time with the re-opening of the St. Clair Inn,” Kuffa said. “It’s unique because you go up and down Michigan, all along the coast you see lighthouses and little historic towns, but you never see a ship like this.”

“We haven’t been up (to St. Clair), but looked at Google earth and it looks like a beautiful location,” Mayer said. “It would be great to have it docked near the St. Clair Inn. We still have to look at other areas once it gets closer to that point, but St. Clair is at the top of the list.”

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Mayer said he feels St. Clair is a good fit for the ship. He imagines hosting weddings on the steamer, with the guests staying overnight at the St. Clair Inn. The boat will be a year-round attraction, completely decked out for Christmas, featuring a chance to meet Santa Claus on the boat, and a festive New Year’s Eve celebration as well.

While the boat is currently slated to just be only a dock-side attraction for now, Mayer hopes eventually seeing it sail again.

But the boat need a lot of work before that point.



Crews working to restore the interior of the SS Ste. Claire (Photo: Submitted)

“Our welders have worked all summer long and we have new architect drawings and we need more poles and beams to make it more secure,” Mayer said. “They are about three-quarters the way finished below deck, however now we are trying to make the boat more cosmetically appealing.”

“We want to make her as beautiful as possible,” Mayer said. “No one wants a dilapidated boat in (St. Clair), so we are trying our hardest to get her back to her glory.”

The boat currently sits in the Rouge River near Zug Island in Detroit.

But it is currently looking for a new home to allow the crew to continue restoring her before finding a long-lasting permanent home to dock.

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