

Planned \$110 million Fort Benning Army Lodge will boast 860 rooms

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With design already under way on a \$110 million hotel, Fort Benning may soon be home to the area's largest lodging facility with 860 rooms.

"We are not increasing the number of rooms on the installation," said George Steuber, deputy garrison commander on post. "All we are doing is what amounts to a major upgrade of facilities for soldiers."

A mix of three- and four-story structures, the Fort Benning Army Lodge would be built on a field behind the Benning Conference Center off Ingersoll Street on main post. It would replace lodging that's now offered in Building 399, Olson Hall, through the Directorate of Family and Morale, Welfare and Recreation.

Soldiers using the post lodging now include those on temporary duty, attending training schools, family members moving to the post on permanent change of duty station and other visitors.

"All those are our normal customers," Steuber said. "It's just a much better facility when we are done."

Planning for the project is now in the design phase. Once the design is complete, planners must complete an environmental impact study. Officials don't expect any significant impact with the environmental assessment.

"Once we do that, then we can go forward with the bids for construction," Steuber said.

When the construction is completed, on-post lodging will be at 920 rooms but fewer than the 1993 level of 1,175 rooms. The post currently can provide 604 rooms. A reduction in the rooms will require some soldiers to seek off-post lodging.

Olson Hall will be renovated to house students in Officer Candidate School, the Noncommissioned Officer Academy and the Western Hemisphere Institute for Security Cooperation.

Peter Bowden, president and chief executive officer of the Columbus Convention & Visitors Bureau, said the hotel is needed and would benefit the civilian and military community.

"It will push some folks out into the civilian community to use hotels there," Bowden said. "I think it's going to be a win-win for the Columbus community, civilian community and the installation."

The hotel would be eight times larger than any other lodging facility in area.

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“On average, most hotels in Columbus are a little over 100 rooms or right around 100 rooms,” Bowden said.

The post has been in need of a new hotel for years. The new structure will meet all requirements of the Americans with Disabilities Act, Steuber said.

Glenn Davis, part owner of Hilton Garden Inn in Columbus, said people will go to a new hotel building that’s going to help the community.

“Anytime you bring a new product, people are going to tend to gravitate toward the new property,” Davis said. “They are just going to do that.”

No taxpayer money is going into the project. It’s being paid for with money generated from lodging on post, Steuber said.

“This is all nonappropriated funds,” Steuber said. “The profits the Army gets from the lodging, that is what’s building this hotel.”