

# Newest Columbus hotel to be a Hilton

*Convention center building due to open by December 2012*

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The city's new 500-room convention hotel will be a Hilton.

The choice of brand for the hotel, which will be across High Street from the Greater Columbus Convention Center, was announced at yesterday's Franklin County Convention Facilities Authority board meeting.

The board also formally approved issuing \$160 million in bonds to finance construction. Plans for the hotel were announced by the convention authority, county and city officials in March, with the property expected to be completed by December 2012.

"Once we issue these, there's no going back," joked John Christie, chairman of the convention facility board, before the vote on the bonds. The board spent several years working on plans for the hotel, which local tourism leaders say is badly needed to continue to attract and retain conventions.

The county is guaranteeing the bonds. For its contribution, the city will set aside \$1.4 million in new parking revenue to put toward the project as needed and will forgo the bed taxes it normally would receive from the hotel once it's opened.

Hilton was chosen over three other finalists, including Marriott; Starwood, which operates the Sheraton brand; and White Lodging, which develops and operates hotels under various major brands. The only two full-service Hilton hotels in the Columbus area are at Easton and Polaris.

Designs for the hotel are still in development. Todd Halamka of HOK, which was chosen as the project's architect, presented some basic schematic designs that are under development. Halamka said a large atrium in the lobby featuring a skylight will give an "indoor-outdoor" feel to the space, while the facade likely will be a combination of brick and glass.

Whether the hotel will be connected to the convention center is still being studied, he said. Renderings should be available by the end of the year, he added.

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