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L.B. Port proposes expansion

160-acre Pier S would be built over former oil wells.

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While it's been nearly five years since the Port of Long Beach approved any new terminals or shipyard expansions, the lull doesn't mean all new projects are off.

Judging by the aggressive schedule for proposed expansion this year, it may just be that port authorities were waiting for 2007.

Since the Pier T project was completed in early 2002, port commissioners have been juggling public concerns about increased traffic and air pollution with the interests of the port industry, which needs space to expand.

In the meantime, cargo growth at the port soared from 4.5 million 20-foot equivalents (TEUs) in 2002 to 7.3 million last year.

So far, terminal operators have coped with the influx by stacking containers ever higher, expanding hours of operation and hiring more workers, but the solutions don't solve the growing need for space.

With the Clean Air Action Plan now in place to mitigate environmental concerns, port authorities are again looking to increase their capacity.

Their first goal is a new 160-acre terminal on Pier S.

In coming weeks, port authorities will roll out a proposal for the Pier S project, which represents the port's last large undeveloped property.

The proposed container terminal covers 160 acres of land on the northeast corner of Terminal Island, north of Ocean Boulevard and east of Henry Ford Avenue.

Formerly occupied by oil wells and a petroleum disposal site known as a "bug farm," the site now sits vacant, surrounded by busy container terminals and overshadowed by the Gerald Desmond Bridge.

The proposal calls for dredging and widening of the Cerritos Channel to allow for larger ships, wharf reconstruction and new roads.

Environmental cleanup of the defunct oil fields and disposal sites is already complete.

Public forums for the community to provide input are scheduled for 7 p.m. Feb. 12 at Cesar Chavez Park, 401 Golden Ave. and at 6:30 p.m. Feb. 22 at Long Beach City Hall, 333 W. Ocean Blvd.