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FOR IMMEDIATE RELEASE

November 18, 2020

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South Beach Marina to get electrical overhaul

What was planned to be a gradual replacement of the electrical infrastructure at the South Beach Marina got an extra jolt of energy on Tuesday, when Port of Newport Commissioners gave the nod to completing all of the work in this fiscal year.

The 500-plus slip marina, built in the late 1970s, is supported by nine power load centers that have become dated over time and can no longer support all of the demands created by recreational boaters at the popular facility.

Although the Port's Capital Improvement Plan outlined a three-year strategy and a \$600,000 budget for the project, General Manager Paula Miranda proposed a faster completion schedule that could ultimately reduce cost.

"The benefits of doing it all at once are time savings for staff, by not having to go through the process three times, and money savings by only mobilizing once," she explained in her written report.

Users of the South Beach Marina have seen an increase in fees in recent years, partly because of the need for infrastructure improvements like these.

"This is also a show of good faith by providing an immediate benefit to users based on recent rate increases," Miranda added.

An added benefit of completing all load centers at the same time is the certainty that all will utilize the same parts, making future maintenance more cost and time efficient, she noted.

Consideration of the accelerated timeline also prompted the recommendation of financing the project internally. Mark Brown, Director of Finance and Business Services, recommended that the Port borrow from its own NOAA capital reserve fund and then formalize a loan repayment program, including interest charges.

Port Commissioners were receptive to the plan, with Commissioner Walter Chuck explaining his support as one for "improving a revenue-creating area of the Port" and Commission President Jim Burke remarking that "it sends a nice message to the folks in South Beach and it is an efficient way to do the project."

A request for proposals is expected to go out by the end of the week. Director of Operations Aaron Bretz said the work will be staged so the entire marina isn't out of power at the same time. Like many infrastructure projects, this work will shore up the "behind the scenes" elements of the electrical system without changing the more visible parts, like the pedestals.

Bretz said the Port will likely award bids in January and have the work completed no later than the first week of May. The awarding of the bid will be one last opportunity for the Port Commissioners to weigh in on the project, but unanimous support for the project was indicated at Tuesday's meeting.

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