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Port invests in modernizing commercial marina

What can only be described as a lengthy and costly process to establish a federal channel into the Port of Newport's commercial marina moved one step closer to fruition at the Port's October commission meeting.

Port Commissioners gave the nod to spending \$1.1 million on geotechnical exploration and sediment sampling, both of which are necessary steps in establishing the channel, as well as planning for a new Port Dock 7 capable of handling modern commercial vessels.

The channel work is part of a feasibility study currently underway by the U.S. Army Corps of Engineers (USACE), which started in 2020 in response to a Port request. The USACE first went through a federal determination process to address whether a channel into the marina should even be considered. If the USACE were to agree, it assumes responsibility for 90 percent of the cost of constructing the channel and all maintenance costs in the future.

In 2021, the Port was notified that the project had cleared the first hurdles and moved on to the feasibility study phase. The roughly \$950,000 to undertake the feasibility study was split by the Port and USACE. The sedimental sampling and geotechnical work is an additional part of the study, which added to the price tag.

The \$1.1 million approved by the Port Commission in October covers the work required for the feasibility study, as well as the sediment sampling that will be needed when the Port moves forward with Port Dock 7 reconstruction. There was an economic benefit to completing all sampling at once.

"The feasibility phase as it was originally scoped did not include sediment sampling, which would have been included in the construction phase," explained Director of Operations Aaron Bretz in a report to the commission earlier this year. "However, the presumed existence of a particular type of hard pan, and the fact that it has neither been confirmed nor tested for petroleum hydrocarbons, is causing the Army Corps' risk model for the budget of the project to go up," he added.

If the federal project moves successfully through the feasibility phase, the USACE will dredge the channel to 20 feet below MLW (mean low water) through the entire marina. It would also create a turning basin and provide a deeper channel to the hoist dock for larger boats. Port officials say it is critical to the future reconstruction of Port Dock 7 and the overall redesign of the commercial marina.

Executive Director Paula Miranda joined Bretz in urging the commission to commit the funds so sediment sampling can be achieved and likely followed by dredging of the federal channel and the commercial marina.

"Both of these are important and are going to have to be done if we want to replace Port Dock 7," she explained. "We are at a bit of a crossroads here."

Commissioners discussed funding options and other concerns with Port administration during the public meeting before voting unanimously to authorize Miranda to move forward with the work.

In other business, a much-discussed overhaul of the reservation policies at the RV Park in South Beach was approved by the commission. The three-year plan is meant to reduce the number of long-term guests, who currently receive a substantial discount, and free up more space for short-term visitors.

"During the busiest season (April to September) the Port RV Park and Marina turn away 10



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to 30 tourists per day, as the RV park is full of long-term guests,” explained Director of Finance Mark Brown. After researching the policies of other parks, completing a financial analysis on the impacts of the deeply-discounted stays, and considering the complaints received by the traveling public unable to access the park, Port administration recommended the phased approach to reducing the discounts and tightening up the policies.

Susan Taylor, an employee in the Port’s administrative offices, was also introduced as the new manager of the RV Park and has made the move over to South Beach.

Another employee also received a special introduction at the meeting. Jim Durkee was recognized for 20 years of service at the Port of Newport. The Port’s longest-serving employee has managed the NOAA facilities for the past 10 years and worked previously at the commercial marina and the international terminal.

“Jim has done an outstanding job,” said Bretz, his direct supervisor. “He is a highly motivated individual with great attention to detail. He has been extremely valuable to the Port for his entire time here. I appreciate him a great deal and want to say thank you to Jim.”

Durkee thanked commissioners and administrators for the acknowledgement and the accompanying anniversary gift before turning and saying a special thank you to his wife, Mary, who was seated in the audience.

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