

PORT OF NEWPORT
COMMERCIAL FISHING USERS GROUP COMMITTEE MINUTES

Thursday, April 30, 2020

This is not an exact transcript. The audio of the session is available on the Port’s website.

This meeting was held virtually by invitation only. The public was invited to view the live stream of this meeting on our YouTube Channel, Port of Newport Commission Meeting Audio. Live chat was not monitored. The public could submit comment through a form on our website no later than 4:00 pm on Wednesday, April 29th, to be read into the meeting at the appropriate time. No public comment was received.

Agenda Item

Audio
Time
0:00

Heather Mann welcomed General Manager Paula Miranda and invited her to introduce herself and give some introductory comments to the Committee. Miranda said she look forward to working with the Committee. She said she would look at the input from the Committee with respect, and the Port would try to address everything the best it can. She asked that the Committee members give an opportunity to talk with staff and allow the Port staff to deliberate and respond. She said that Bretz and the operations staff listen to what the Port’s customers say. Miranda added she has full confidence in what operations staff does and what they bring. She invited Committee members to stop by and say hello once the health crisis has passed. Mann spoke about the role of the Committee.

I. CALL TO ORDER.....

7:04

Committee Chair Heather Mann called the Meeting of the Port of Newport Commercial Fishing Users Group Committee to order at 1:50 pm.

Committee Members Present: Mike Pettis (Pos. #2); Mark Newell (Pos. #3); Heather Mann (Pos. #5); Gene Law (Pos. #7); Bob Eder (Pos. #9), and Dave Thalman (Pos. #10).

Alternates Present: Cari Brandberg (Pos. #4).

Committee Members Absent: Clint Funderburg (Pos. #1); Ernie Phillips (Pos. #4); Ted Gibson (Pos. #6); Bob Aue (Pos. #8); and David Jincks (Pos. #11).

Port Commission Liaisons: Jim Burke and Jeff Lackey

Management and Staff: Paula Miranda, General Manager; Aaron Bretz, Director of Operations; Mark Brown, Director of Finance and Business Services; Kent Gibson, Commercial Marina Harbormaster; and Karen Hewitt, Administrative Supervisor.

Members of the Public and Media: Rebecca Austen, Lincoln County Health & Human Services.

II. CHANGES TO THE AGENDA

7:16

There were no changes to the agenda.

III. PUBLIC COMMENT

7:30

There was no public comment submitted.

IV. APPROVE MINUTES

7:46

- 1. December 20, 2018
- 2. March 7, 2019
- 3. April 18, 2019

A motion was made by Newell and seconded by Pettis to approve the minutes as presented. The motion passed 6 – 0.

V. BEST PRACTICES FOR FISHING VESSELS/PLANTS ACROSS THE PORT DURING COVID-19

9:18

Mann commented that she was struck by the differences in the requirements in Alaska v. locally. She mentioned some of the concerns she has heard around the Port. Mann wanted to include a discussion of best practices, and introduced Rebecca Austen, Lincoln County Health & Human Services. Mann said she had been working with Austen on a pilot test program for the hake boats that could become a model. Austen advised that she had provided documents related to Alaska’s guidelines which would be forwarded to the Committee members after the meeting. She reviewed some of the recommendations: wash hands well, observe 6’ social distancing, use staggered schedules and meals, don’t touch your face, wear face masks in common areas, avoid crowded places, keep the flow moving, and most important, sick people stay home. The virus can be transmitted even if you don’t know you’re infected, so get tested even with minor symptoms. There is upcoming testing scheduled for trawler crews. Symptoms may include flu like symptoms, headache, digestive issues, and loss of taste or smell. She suggested sharing information about where testing is available for those without insurance, and advised everyone to establish care with a provider. Austen said there are some big differences between the Alaska and Lincoln County guidelines. There are some sections in the Alaska guidelines that captains will want to look at. Austen said she has been working with Mann on getting the trawler crews tested. Mann said it has been a learning experience regarding emergency protocols. She added they would like to expand beyond the hake crews for those who are interested. Mann said the Alaska guidelines are strict as they face limited supplies and vulnerable populations. There are also vulnerable people on the coast. She commented she saw a lot of activity at the Terminal, and asked if something more needed to be done.

Law said he found everyone was paying attention in the community. Brandberg said that they had taken measures at the crab shack regarding social distancing with customers and crew. Eder commented that his vessel was currently out of the water on a project, and said he was glad to hear testing was loosening up. He said it was hard to stay away from each other on a boat. He would like to see a situation where people get tested before they are ill to assure they don’t become incubators on boats. Austen says testing is opening up, but it is still complicated. They need permission to test and a way to communicate the results. Getting through the first wave with trawlers will help work out kinks and make the process as smooth as possible. Mann commented that the turnaround time was pretty good, but it is important to follow best practices. The hake boats crews will be tested May 8 – 11. The season opens May 15th so that will give time to replace crew if needed. She had heard some complaints at the Terminal that some fisherman were not taking the virus risk seriously and could be putting someone else in danger. Mann said she sent emails to the people she works for reminding them to take it seriously. Miranda said the Port was trying to implement all the measures possible. If people don’t abide by them, it will be hard to stay open. The Port would like to continue providing services to the essential fishing industry, but also has to be concerned with keeping Port staff safe.

Mann asked if the boats were having trouble getting supplies. She mentioned that she had started to draft a document regarding best practices. Austen suggested getting the poster out for prevention, and

implementing cleaning guidelines from the Alaska document. She offered to develop a one page advisory. Mann said that would be great, and to include some tips on social distancing on vessels. Austen suggested it could include more on cleaning procedures and the use of facial masks if social distancing isn't possible. Bretz commented that vessel crews could be wearing masks 24 hours a day. The situation may be more similar to how families social distance. Mann said they are trying with testing, then self-isolation before getting on a boat, and when to stay on the boat. Brandberg added that for her crew it wasn't always possible to stay on the boat, and recommended calling in if a person feels even a little sick. She has heard that a lot of the small boats are doing the same.

Eder asked about the advisory from the Port regarding squid boats, asking them to side tie to one another so they didn't have to walk next to local boats. Miranda said she has heard some concerns, and it is difficult when people arrive in the middle of the night. It is intended that boats who want to side tie confer with the other boat to get approval. Miranda said it is prohibited to side tie without first getting permission from the other boat or the Port.

VI. UPDATE ON PORT FINANCES: REVENUE GENERATED AT THE TERMINAL AND COMMERCIAL MARINA

44:04

Mann mentioned that Brown was the new Director of Finance at the Port, and she wanted to know if there was a downturn in business because of COVID-19. She remarked that some fee increases last year were targeted for electrical upgrade work. Brown referred to the documents included in the Meeting Packet. He said he did some digging into sales, specifically at the Commercial Marina. The hoist dock was down a bit, but moorage was up about \$76K. Overall, the Port was taking a small hit with COVID-19, primarily in the recreational area. The budget plan for FY 2020-2021 includes money for engineering for the electrical upgrades project. Brown said he had done some calculations on the break-even point for semi-annual and annual moorage. By length, the break-even point for annual moorage is 86', and for semi-annual it's 55'. He said there was more about the electrical upgrades in the Port Dock 5 update report.

Mann said she listened to the Port Commission meeting on Tuesday, and heard there were some issues around the halibut fishery reopening. Miranda said this does not affect the commercial vessels, and the Port has been working with ODFW on the recreational opening. She said ODFW may not have realized the issues recreational ports would face with the tentative opening date of May 14th. The Port received calls every day about the recreational boat ramp closure. The decisions have more to do with being a good partner with the City and County to prevent tourists flooding the area. Miranda added it will be difficult to manage people breaking the rules. She brought this issue up in the Regional Solutions meetings. Other ports are also concerned about the halibut dates. Right now the tentative opener is May 14th, but ODFW has assured Miranda they want to work with the Port. Miranda had a meeting scheduled with the County on Friday and with local ports next Wednesday. She said she told the County it would be difficult to keep the boat ramp closed if halibut opens. As she has been saying, any decision will not make everyone happy. Pettis commented that when halibut opened last year, the recreational marina parking lot was jammed, with people spilling out to park along the road. People were crowded elbow to elbow at the file tables.

Pettis said, for the commercial fleet, with restaurants closed, the price of product has plummeted and the interest from buyers was down. Some boats were looking at a limited income source, so this might not be the best time for fee increases. Mann said she is working with Senator Merkley and others trying to calculate the impact of COVID-19. There is \$300MM in the CARES act to be distributed to fisheries, but the amount is not a lot for the entire nation. She asked to speak with Paula regarding any grants that may be available for fisheries related issues. Miranda said she is working with Representative Schrader on trying to bring funds for ports. She does not know if these funds would be able to be passed on to fisheries. Up until now, there has been no money provided for ports. The Port of Newport is doing okay for now, but that picture may change in the coming weeks. As to Pettis's comments about the file tables,

Miranda said Bretz has started to remove hoses from the centers of the tables, hopefully to get some separation between users. Hopefully the Port will have a bit more control. Regarding the fee schedule, Eder said there may be a small alteration. He added that most of the crab fleet has sold at least part of the time over Port facilities. There was some discussion about the minimum charges at the hoist dock. Eder said if boats sell over the dock, fees are covered by live buyers. When loading bait, the boats are charged for an hour minimum even if it only takes 5 minutes. He suggested a fee of \$20 for services less than 15 minutes. Brown said there have been some adjustments to the fees; he will work with Bretz on that. Brandberg said this affected a lot of the boats, and the fees can compound. She said she appreciated the Port trying to address this. Bretz said the minimum charge was a change, and it was the recommendation from the CFUG Committee to make the one hour minimum. He added that those with those charges to bring their bills into the office. Law commented he also saw more people using wheelbarrows to load bait. Miranda said she wanted it understood that the Port is not interested in getting revenue from services that are not provided, and staff should not be providing services for free since all customers need to be treated equally. She said the Port will keep working on these issues to make sure charges are fair. Mann said they could continue to look at this in the budget cycle.

VII. UPDATE ON PORT DOCK 5 WORK

1:12:21

Bretz introduced the Staff Report included in the Meeting Packet. He talked about some of the challenges for the Port to find funding and the choice to use the phrase “fishing infrastructure” in order to communicate with those outside of the industry. The increase to moorage fees in order to fund electrical upgrades was made in part because moorage is a small percentage of a user’s costs. The Port is trying to make some changes port wide that will benefit the Port but don’t over charge individual boats. He reviewed the initial steps currently being taken on the EDA grant and what will be in place before sending out for a project management and construction bid. The plan is to begin work November 1st. Bretz said the first step for the electrical work is getting the engineering done so that the project can be put out for bid and permits can be pulled. He advised that the proposed budget includes money for engineering at Port Dock 5 and equipment at Port Dock 3. For Port Dock 7, the Port put in a 107 cap request to establish a federal channel into the marina at a 20’ depth to accommodate larger boats. This was approved by the Army Corps of Engineers: this project would support the number one industry in the region, modernize infrastructure, and increase both maneuverability and safety. The ACOE needs to make sure this rises to federal interest, draw up the project scope, and then present a feasibility study to the Port. The Port and the ACOE will share these costs 50/50. For the dredging, the Port will contribute 10% of the cost, which could include in-kind compensation. Bretz said he had met with permitting agencies in February, and received favorable responses to the Port Dock 7 project. Right now it’s conceptual, but more specifics would be required before permitting. Bretz estimates this is a five year project. Project planning was included in the proposed budget for next year. Eder asked about dredging around Swede’s Dock. Bretz said this was more marina dredging rather than the channel. The Port needs to define the problem and solution, which will happen a lot sooner than the channel dredging.

Pettis commented on the limitations of the area inside the sea wall, and asked the Port to look at other areas where an additional commercial marina could be built or whether the sea wall could be moved. Bretz said the Port needs to get Port Dock 7 functional before looking to add space. Miranda said the Port would need to demonstrate the need to grow before getting funding, which means maximizing use of the current area first. Mann commented that she heard the Port was turning boats away. If the fishing boats didn’t have access to the Terminal there will a massive problem at Port Docks 5 and 7. Mann said she appreciated the comments about infrastructure. She said with COVID-19 businesses were suffering and there may be ways to make connections by thinking outside of the box. Newport is a one-stop port. Miranda said she doesn’t dispute the need, but the Port needs address issues inside the box for the time being. When these issues are addressed, then the Port can look toward the future. Brandberg commented that consumers’ attitudes are changing and there could be increased demand for fish in the future. Mann

said she was on an earlier call with folks in Washington DC, and learned that USDA got approximately \$6 trillion in the CARES Act, almost all for terrestrial food production. Bretz asked about the possibility of a manual swing hoist available for smaller boats. A challenge would be how to build it in such a way to discourage use by larger boats who would degrade the hoist, perhaps in a shallower location. Brandberg said it could benefit smaller boats, perhaps installed at the shallow end of the current hoist dock area. Law agreed a shallower area would discourage larger boats. Pettis suggested it could possibly fit as an extension of the England Marine dock, but people will use it if they can fit. Bretz said he appreciated the feedback.

VIII. FUTURE CONSIDERATIONS

1:42:27

Heather posed discussion of a future meeting schedule and asked if the Commission desired the Committee to meet more frequently. She said the Committee was here to advise the Commission and provide recommendations and concerns. Burke said he knew the Committee met as needed, but a year between meetings was too much. He suggested checking in biannually, and then as needed beyond that. It was good for the Commission to stay in touch with the largest group of Port users. Lackey said the budget process was a real nexus for the fishing industry. He suggested meeting with the Committee on the front end of the budget process regarding projects, issues, rates and fees. Then on the back end the Commission could provide communication to the Committee on what was decided. Lackey said twice a year would be a good schedule; communication both ways around the budget was important. Mann agreed that the Committee would provide a benefit by meeting around the budget. Miranda agreed that meeting twice a year and other times as issues arose would be a good schedule. It was valuable for the Port to hear what was important to the fishing industry, and inform the Committee about projects. Mann said she appreciated the Port's Facebook posts and website information updates. Miranda gave Angela Nebel kudos for staying on top of that. Continuing this relationship was in the proposed budget. Mann said it was good to see positive stuff highlighted. Lackey suggested that the Committee meet this year around the Port Dock 5 project.

IX. ADJOURNMENT

1:50:19

Mann thanked Hewitt for organizing the meeting. She commented she has heard great things about Brown and Miranda. Having no further business, the meeting adjourned at 3:35 pm.

ATTESTED:

Heather Mann, Committee Chair

Bob Eder, Committee Vice-Chair