

Newburyport Harbor Commission

Online Meeting

February 3, 2021

Minutes

1. Call to Order

Chair Andrew Casson called an on-line meeting of the Newburyport Harbor Commission to order at 7:00 p.m. In attendance were Andrew Casson, Bob Dow, Justin Dutcher, Jamie Knapp, George Sass, Adam Armstrong, Chris Kealey and Ron Thurlow. Jay Lesynski was absent. Harbormaster Paul Hogg was also in attendance.

2. Minutes

Justin Dutcher moved to approve the minutes of the January 6, 2021, meeting as submitted. Bob Dow seconded the motion. The motion was approved by a 7-0 vote (Ron Thurlow, yes; Andrew Casson, yes; Bob Dow, yes; Justin Dutcher, yes; Jamie Knapp, yes; Adam Armstrong, yes; George Sass, yes; Chris Kealey, abstain).

3. Ordinance and Fees

Ron Thurlow presented the draft amendment to the Ordinance that would regulate kayaking in the river. The item has been proposed in response to the increased number of incidences involving kayaks. The goal of the Commission is to reduce risks to kayakers while still allowing them to use the river. The river can be hazardous due to the strength of the tides, the large number of boaters and the presence of docks and moorings. Under the proposal, the use of the central waterfront would be restricted for kayakers during certain months. Waterskiing, windsurfing and paddle boarding is already prohibited in this area. An effort would be made to improve parking in the areas that have been designated for the launching of kayaks. Paul Hogg said that safety is a priority and the proposed amendment would be a means to manage risk. He said that last year there were 15 saves in front of the office and fuel dock and the Coast Guard pulled eight kayakers out of the water.

The meeting was opened to comments from the public. Ken Taylor of Plum Island Kayak said the change to the ordinance would negatively impact his business. In his opinion, the area is easy to manage and he believes the Commission is overreacting. He said his groups pass through the central waterfront area several times a day and not many of his kayakers have hit the docks over the years. He said he believes launching from Cashman Park is dangerous. The proposal would force kayakers to the Salisbury side of the river, which would be more hazardous. He said while guided tours usually make up 80% of his business, last year rentals were 90% of his business. It was his busiest year, and yet there were no incidents.

Susan Bernard said an alternative should be found to prohibiting kayaking in the central waterfront. She said the fuel dock is an area that is dangerous and should be better managed. Nat Coughlin said that mitigation and education should be explored as a first step. He said that boaters have different levels of skills and education and banning a class of users would not be the solution. Brad Johnson said permits are issued for the docks and moorings, which are obstacles that limit the fundamental right to navigate the river. The proposal would

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further restrict this right. Ken Taylor said the responsibility for safety should lie with those that have placed the obstacles in the river. For example, safe passage behind docks should be provided. He will work with a subcommittee of the Harbor Commission to address the concerns expressed during the meeting. Attendees of the meeting who did not wish to speak were invited to send their comments by email.

4. Committee Reports

A) Coast Guard City

- Andrew Casson will speak with the Senior Chief about a location at the Coast Guard Station for a library of books with a nautical theme.
- The committee must prepare for the renewal of the Coast Guard City designation. The application materials must be submitted by June 30.
- Jamie Knapp will ask Representative Kelcourse about his progress with contacting MassDOT regarding a Coast Guard City highway sign.

B) Dredging

Paul Hogg said \$7.3 million has been guaranteed for the dredging of the mouth of the river. The work is expected to take place in the fall. The Army Corp will only dredge the federal navigation channel. It would be beneficial to also dredge along the north jetty, which is the preferred route for boaters and is dangerous. The scope of work could be expanded to include this area but funding from a private source would be necessary. In order to obtain an estimate of the cost of the additional dredging, the amount of sand to be removed must be determined from the survey. The permitting and funding must be coordinated with the Salisbury Harbor Commission.

A main topic of conversation at the January 29 MRBA meeting was the placement of the dredged material on the beach. The sandbags that had been placed along the dune near Reservation Terrace were washed during the recent storm. Adam Armstrong said it is expected that 300,00 cubic yards of material would be dredged and 220,000 cubic yards of this would be split between Newburyport and Salisbury. With additional funding it might be possible to place more of the dredged sand on the beach. Material from the dredging of the Piscataqua River, which is a glacial till rather than sand, is to be placed off shore.

C) Waterfront Trust

No update.

D) Public Relations/Community Outreach/Marketing

The committee will continue to work on the revisions to the website and a proposal should be ready for presentation at the next meeting.

5. Harbormaster's Report

Paul Hogg reported:

- The #2 channel marker was washed up on the beach during the recent storm.
- The Waterways Permits will be sent out on March 25.

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- He is providing updated information to Dockwa. The first reservations will be available for May 24.
- He has a meeting scheduled with Mayor Holaday to review the budget. One topic for discussion will be the hiring of lifeguards. He would like at a minimum to have coverage for the sand bar. Several Commission members spoke in favor of having lifeguards on duty this year. Factors to be considered in the decision include the budget, the distribution of vaccines and the availability of candidates.
- He is considering replacing the Whaler that capsized with either a SAFE or Metal Shark 23-foot center console. The cost of a new boat would be approximately \$225,000, of which \$85,000 would come from the insurance on the Whaler. He is looking for grants and other funding to cover the difference.

6. Other Business

A) Ordinance Review

Ron Thurlow is a member of a committee tasked with the reviewing the City ordinances. The Commission members were in agreement with the revisions he intends to propose.

B) Kayaking Class

Ron Thurlow distributed the slides he prepared for the class on safe kayaking that will be held through the Newburyport Adult Education program. The slides could be incorporated into a video on the safe navigation of the river.

7. Adjournment

Bow Dow moved to adjourn the meeting at 8:25 p.m. George Sass seconded the motion. The motion was unanimously approved. The next meeting of the Harbor Commission will be scheduled for March 3, 2021.