

Harbor Commission

Regular Meeting Minutes

Tuesday, December 16, 2014, 5:30 p.m.
Council Chambers, South Haven City Hall



City of South Haven

1. Call to Order by Jeff Arnold at 5:30 p. m.

Present: Sullivan, Pyle, Reineck (arrived 5:34 p.m.), Stegeman, Stephens, Arnold
Absent: Silverman

Also present: John Marple, Marina Manager

2. Approval of Agenda

Motion by Stegeman, second by Stephens to approve the December 16, 2014 Harbor Commission Agenda as written.

All in favor. Motion carried.

3. Approval of Minutes: **September 16, 2014 Regular Meeting** **September 30, 2014 Workshop Meeting**

Motion by Stephens, second by Pyle to approve the minutes of the September 16, 2014 regular meeting and the September 30, 2014 workshop meeting as written.

All in favor. Motion carried.

4. Interested Citizens in the Audience Will be Heard on Items Not on the Agenda

None at this time.

5. Marina Reports

VandenBosch reviewed the Marina Reports, noting record revenue for seasonal revenue since 2007.

Stephens questioned what VandenBosch attributed the record revenue to, the new marina building or having the billing done by the finance department. VandenBosch conceded the record revenue could be attributed to both, as well as increased marketing.

Stephens asked when the gate was removed from Black River Park this year to which VandenBosch responded it was in early November. VandenBosch noted that leaving the gate up longer the previous season did not seem to contribute much to revenue.

VandenBosch noted Lake Michigan levels are currently above average.

6. Strategic Plan

VandenBosch noted that the board made it almost all the way through the Strategic Plan in previous meetings and he hopes to get through this tonight so it can be rewritten and brought back to the board for review.

Beginning on page 32 with the Capital Improvement Plan, VandenBosch noted that three percent (3%) of revenues get transferred to the River Maintenance budget. VandenBosch would like to come back with a Capital Improvement Plan for dredging, noting that we estimated that dredging upstream from the bridge could be done for about \$50,000 per year. VandenBosch then pointed out that the last quote from the Army Corps (to dredge the approach to the harbor in Lake Michigan and the former federal channel) was \$360,000. While this was a rough estimate, according to VandenBosch, if the Harbor Commission were to add that responsibility (which we really don't want) if the Army Corps has given it up, that would change our Capital Improvement Plan quite a bit. VandenBosch stated that he does not think our municipal marinas can afford to give that much to River Maintenance. We have to maintain our structures, our docks and at the same time make them attractive to boaters, so there is a limit. So we need to come back and discuss a Capital Improvement Plan for Dredging. We can leave it at (three) 3 to six percent (6 %) for now but will need to discuss this again.

VandenBosch explained the Downtown Development Authority (DDA) capture along the river shoreline and the DDAs contribution to river maintenance.

In response to a question regarding special assessments and equity, VandenBosch stated that such assessments have been done in the past and before you can decide if it is equitable you need to look at what you are dredging and who benefits.

VandenBosch requested comments and concerns regarding dredging. Stegeman asked for clarification that VandenBosch is referring to dredging in the channel, not the slips themselves, to which VandenBosch responded that Stegeman is correct. Stegeman said, "Assuming dredging needs to be done in the channel, the slip owner has to dredge their slip, so it would be double the cost." VandenBosch stated that he had a slip dredging fee of four hundred dollars (\$400) for one dock, just as an example, and stated that it had to be dredged every two (2) to three (3) years. Stegeman asked whether the city facilitates individual slip owners to get their slips done at the same time. VandenBosch said the city did try to advertise the ability to do that, and some did, but not many, noting that the dredger this year was slow, so it was probably a good thing he did not do that many slips. The City was willing to take the spoil from private dredging; "We tried, but it was not very successful."

Stegeman asked about the spoils recently being placed the park which will eventually be a parking lot, and whether the city has identified a place to put spoils in the future. VandenBosch responded that the Army Corps can do beach replenishment or pump it out into Lake Michigan but the city cannot. So we do not have a dredge spoil site except for the hill on Blue Star Highway, which is starting to become a valuable piece of property, except it has been a landfill and a dredge spoil site. VandenBosch said he has been looking for a potential site but the city does not have the money and questioned whether the River Maintenance Fund could be used, since we are currently building up that fund.

Stephens asked, "At what point do we decide to do a special assessment? We aren't being crunched with the high water but we do need to build up the dredging fund." VandenBosch commented that talking about a capital improvement plan is one step toward building up the dredging fund. VandenBosch does not want to say we need a special assessment, but we do need money to do the dredging.

In response to a question by Stephens regarding what has prompted special assessments in the past, VandenBosch said we usually seem to be in an emergency situation and then we have to do a rapid response. "First you need a permit, which takes three (3) to six (6) months; then the dredging has to be bid out; and you need to have the money. In the past, according to VandenBosch, there have been problems with special assessments because the dredging projects were focused upriver so the boaters downriver were not particularly happy with being assessed.

Reinick asked if there is a point in time to expand the responsibility of assessments to other than boat and boat slip owners, to which VandenBosch responded that there is that fairness issue. VandenBosch explained that the DDA money does come from all properties along the river in the Downtown, which is not a lot, about \$10,000 per year. Reinick said, "\$10,000 doesn't seem that much compared to slip owners doing four (4) to five (5) hundred dollars each." Discussion ensued regarding the overall depth expected after a dredging with VandenBosch explaining that upriver of the bridge depth is limited by water and sewer mains. "After we dredge we should see seven (7) feet with the height of the water right now. When sediment starts coming back in, then we will see five (5) or even four (4) feet.

Stegeman asked about silt traps to which VandenBosch responded that there is one at the end of Kentucky Avenue and one just upstream of the boat launch. "We have not maintained those recently; we put our money toward major dredge projects. Commissioner Sullivan has reminded us about dredging the silt traps frequently, but the question is whether they are effective, and how effective, and we don't really know; we spent all our money on dredging."

Stegeman noted that at the special assessment hearings you get competition between sailboat and power boat owners regarding how deep to dredge.

Sullivan questioned the relevance of highlighted items in the strategic plan and VandenBosch noted that he highlighted ongoing items.

After a question from Stephens, VandenBosch noted that he will bring review of the Capital Improvement Plan on the next Harbor agenda.

Reviewing Harbor Budget Policies, which needs to be done annually, VandenBosch noted that all assessment categories should identify a budget and funding mechanism, then informed that it is not legal in Michigan to assess new development for their potential impact on the harbor, prompting him to amend the statement regarding future water developments, replacing the word assessed with the word reviewed.

Regarding Marketing and Communication, VandenBosch noted we have tried to contact marina owners, managers and users, but still attempting to develop ways to communicate safety information to boaters. VandenBosch thinks establishing an email list is almost impossible, but perhaps something where people can ask to be included on an email broadcast would work.

After a brief discussion of whether there is an app that could be used to encourage subscription to updates by boaters, VandenBosch noted that while bulletin boards have been installed at the North and South Marinas, he is not sure there is one at the Black River Park boat launch. Stephens commented that there is a bulletin board near the kayak launch. VandenBosch noted that there is also a public safety sign near the boat launch. Pyle believes it would be good to have upcoming events posted near the fish cleaning station so word of mouth can spread. VandenBosch will try to include a bulletin board in one of the grants coming up for Black River Park.

Discussing Marina Management, VandenBosch said a survey was done and he will have to bring the results to the board. Stegeman asked how communication was divided between transient and seasonal boaters. John Marple, Marina Manager, informed that transient boaters may fill out a comment card and when notices for seasonal boaters are sent out a customer satisfaction questionnaire is included.

Stegeman asked if ideas were identified from the input on the cards and questionnaires to which VandenBosch responded that we have in the past. "We've had a lot of changes at the Northside Marina, much of it based on those surveys," VandenBosch informed. Pyle asked if something could be included in the mailings to seasonal boaters about leaving the trailers in Black River Park, to which VandenBosch agreed.

Following a question about whether welcome packages are being distributed, VandenBosch said this has been done this very well; maps are provided with all the restaurants and gifts have been given to the boaters. VandenBosch noted that John Marple, Marina Manager, is going to talk about marketing ideas later in this meeting.

Stephens asked whether transient boaters are also getting such information to which Marple responded that the South Haven/Van Buren County Convention and Visitors Guide is made available which has the restaurants listed and the menus are also available on site. "One thing we want to do this year is to create an interactive map of our downtown shopping. The city has created a very good downtown map that we can use as the base for the interactive map. It's pretty, it's colorful! It's very easy to negotiate and view. This will be at all our marinas."

Stephens, thinking of customer service and repeat business, wondered if it would be reasonable to give the transient boaters a welcome packet, asking, "Is that something other marinas do?" Marple feels that the welcome packages in the past may not provide the value boaters want to see. "In the area of customer service, we can do a lot of stuff that boaters recognize as value, as opposed to a koozie and pencil." Marple's ideas are a little different than traditional views; in his business across the street certain techniques are used to show value, which cannot be done at the marinas, because of city rules.

Marple said he is planning, in branding the Maritime District, to create a Maritime Brew coffee package; a couple of coffee cups with a package of coffee would be a nice gift for the transient boater. We are finding that seasonal boaters, more than anything else, want the bathrooms to be absolutely spotless. Marple also noted that the Southside Marina needs a gas grill like is available at the Northside Marina, which Marple noted seems like it means more than the pencil or ball cap.

VandenBosch noted that staff training is an ongoing item, as is encouraging development of a marina and harbor marketing plan.

Annual meetings at the marinas to hear concerns and comments regarding improvement of services; currently plans are to have a party-like event with refreshments.

Concerning river stakeholders, VandenBosch noted that the Capital Improvement Plan calls for communication with the City and its boards and commissions, DEQ, DNR, the Drain Commission, farmers, and boaters to ensure we maintain a high quality harbor, including sedimentation, e-coli and other water quality issues.

VandenBosch also pointed out that the Capital Improvement plan indicates that the Clean Marina program should be promoted to harbor marinas and as a marketing approach. VandenBosch will find out exactly what that entails such as whether there is something that needs to be renewed.

VandenBosch does not believe that agendas have been posted at the marinas but that is something we can do that at least during the summer.

Stephens requested that boater survey results be brought to the Harbor Commission for their review.

VandenBosch will take these comments, rewrite a draft Strategic Plan and bring back to the Harbor Commission for review.

7. Black River Park Canoe/Kayak Launch Grant

VandenBosch said this item should have come to Harbor Commission first but staff only found out about it two (2) weeks before it was due and had to get City Council approval before it could be applied for. "This is a handicap accessible launch ramp with rollers," per VandenBosch, which allows anyone, not just a person with handicaps, an easier way to launch their watercraft and get it back out of the water without getting their feet wet." The

cost is \$113,000, which VandenBosch is hoping to convince the City Manager is a General Fund item as opposed to funds coming from the Black River Park fund. VandenBosch noted that there is a big push from the governor to create a water trail up and down the coast and in the rivers, such as the Black River, with high quality take-out and launch areas for paddle craft. "The city applied and we will see; maybe we will be able to do this in the fall." Reineck asked if this is totally state funded, to which VandenBosch responded that it is half state funded and we hope to get the match from the General Fund. Reineck thinks it should have an attendant, to which VandenBosch noted that it presumes the person using it knows their capabilities. VandenBosch said award of this grant would include some of the sidewalk that is included in the Black River Park Master Plan, so little by little the master plan is being pieced together.

8. Marketing Plan

VandenBosch said the main thing we are going to do instead of going to Strictly Sail and Grand Rapids boat shows is to brand the marina facilities and build the website, to use the money for that instead as soon as possible. VandenBosch credited Marple with putting together a marketing plan which he will be happy to present and take comments.

John Marple, Marina Manager: It is time to pause and look at the resource we have and brand it for a variety of reasons, noting that he is doing this for his motel as well. Currently going out for support for new interpretive signs; hopes Steelheaders will join us since one of the signs is theirs.

Various components necessary to take the next step forward: brand the marina facilities in South Haven; create a logo; come up with little funny terms to create a certain image that people will begin to understand is the South Haven Municipal Marina, in conjunction with funding which is where the Strategic Plan comes in.

Marple's concern is where the boating industry is going; it is changing dramatically and will change dramatically as time goes on. Marple feels the boating public is aging and the city needs to be ready and prepared to confront the future, which may be connected to kayaking and other non-motorized activities. "There is a need to improve our facilities and our value to the public. We've done some rebounding on our revenues in three years; we're in a really good spot to do the proper marketing for the marinas." Marple wants to have a fairly nice website in place for our boating public with reservation systems, interactive mapping, really great pictures.

Pyle asked if that map will include the Kal-Haven Trail and right through town to which Marple responded that we need to get the public out to the trail head. Pyle said her observation is that the public cannot get to the trailhead; they cannot find it from in front of their store. Pyle stressed, "Make sure that you include that information." Marple indicated that the city is going to have to increase the mapping and signage. Marple mentioned the asset the city has for mapping in the city's GIS Tech.

Reineck noted that this port has always been a very active fishery but this is changing. We may be facing a very serious decline. Marple asked if what we are facing is like what

happened twenty (20) years ago when the perch disappeared. Reineck shared that there is a big issue that is already starting in Lake Huron. There was a brief discussion regarding the alewives. Tim Stegeman sees it a little differently than Reineck does and it was noted that the next three (3) to four (4) years will be very telling.

Stegeman said you are talking about a focus on off-shore boaters. While Stegeman thinks our marina facilities are pretty good he noted that the Heritage Water Trail and the Two Rivers Coalition are entities that the city should make an effort to join as a community. "On a side note they have some really nice signs that are metal and they keep the river clean." The signs are about eighty dollars (\$80) apiece and Stegeman thinks the city should get some of those for down at the harbors.

Marple noted that a mile and a half down the river there is a transformation that occurs. While Marple's motel and the marinas are in a very vibrant part of the area, up to the city limits the vibe drastically changes. "It is beautiful up there; that is where these millennials want to be; the non-motorized water and bike trails is part of, a very vital part, of our future in this town. We do have to incorporate that in our whole plan."

VandenBosch encouraged commissioners, as they are out and about, to take notice of the Harbor Walk signage being redone by the Maritime Museum and others. They are working on replacing the signs which cost \$1,000 each and they are looking for sponsors. Marple noted there is a sign up by Old Harbor Inn that you can see. Marple is hoping to have twenty (20) total frames built this winter so we can have twelve (12) to fifteen (15) up in the spring. Pyle asked if sponsoring a sign is a one-time commitment or an ongoing one. Marple said based on his experience they maybe have to be replaced every twenty-five (25) years or so. Stephens asked what materials they are using. Marple said we have used the modern technology for the covering on the description so the signage will not fade. Marple said the photos, the new signs look very similar to the old ones – but the materials used to make them are supposed to be bullet-proof. Stephens asked what the brand is on the material. Marple suggested Stephens contact Deb Davison with the city and Patti Reinert at the Museum for that information.

9. Marina Audit

VandenBosch stated that this year the items identified during the audit are much smaller in magnitude and in some cases the problems have already been corrected. The DNR state system is kind of a moving target, according to VandenBosch, who noted that the state has made some changes again, which are probably going to work, but while we refer to a certain column in their table of slip prices, their reservation system is more complex than that so "I have to add some wording to explain that the city follows their system." Work needs to be done on the marina's refund-processing method. "Having people go to City Hall is probably the cleanest but not the most customer friendly way to do it. We need to give staff the ability to make some type of refund. We may have to talk about that one."

VandenBosch noted that auditors need more documentation included. "No transient discounts were provided so the auditors couldn't do the report they wanted to do." After

calling for any concerns or comments, VandenBosch stated he is pretty happy compared to last year and thinks this is a big improvement.

Stephens asked what reservation system is used at Black River Marina to which VandenBosch said it is a paper system, noting that the boat launch has staff at the gate that focus mostly on the gate but they use a paper system and we want to upgrade that. Stephens asked if staff is looking at an online system to which VandenBosch responded that he will be bringing something to the commission next month.

Member and Staff Comments

Pyle requested an update on the bridge project. VandenBosch noted there are detailed updates on the website. Pyle commented work is progressing almost around the clock. Arnold said the mayor said last night (at City Council) they are on schedule. VandenBosch informed that scouring was found in one of the bridge piers had sediment taken away fifteen (15) to seventeen (17) feet deep. A change order was made to fill it with debris/concrete due to the erosion issues.

Sullivan asked whether Kal-Haven Bikes has or is pursuing a (Department of Environmental Quality (DEQ) or Army Corps permit for a marina. VandenBosch said we have not gotten anything for a Zoning Permit. A drawing we have seen shows roughly thirty (30) slips across from Oak Harbor, right along the Kal-Haven Trail next to the Moose Lodge is Dave Nixon's campground. That may be coming before us.

Sullivan asked if it goes to Zoning first to which VandenBosch responded that when application is made for Zoning, the application comes to Harbor Commission first. VandenBosch commented that the access drive does not appear to be satisfactory for commercial business and there may be wetland/floodplain issues. The applicant had resolved most of the list VandenBosch had. Discussion ensued regarding obtaining the DEQ permit before the granting of a Zoning permit.

Stegeman thanked the Harbor Commission for supporting the project he spearheaded a year and one-half (1 ½) ago for the offshore buoy.

Stephens thanked Stegeman for spearheading that.

Sullivan echoed Stephens comment.

Adjourn

Motion by Stephens, second by Reineck to adjourn at 6:48 p.m.

All in favor. Motion carried.

RESPECTFULLY SUBMITTED,

December 12, 2014
Harbor Commission
Regular Meeting Minutes

Marsha Ransom
Recording Secretary