

Harbor Commission

Workshop Minutes Harbor Coordination Meeting Emergency Services

Tuesday, June 21, 2016, 5:30 p.m.
539 Phoenix Street, Council Chambers
South Haven, Michigan



City of South Haven

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

2. Roll Call

Present: Ashley Deming, Cathy Pyle, Tim Reineck, Steve Schlack, Tim Stegeman, Greg Sullivan

Absent: Nick Fazio

Also present: Fire Chief Ron Wise, South Haven Area Emergency Services (SHAES); Fire Marshal Tony Marsala, SHAES Fire Marshall; John Marple, South Haven Marina Manager; Ben Plachta, U.S. Coast Guard Auxiliary; Petty Officer Lopez, U. S. Coast Guard; Stephen Wagner, U. S. Coast Guard; Brigitte Baskin, U. S. Coast Guard; Conservation Officer Matt Page, Michigan Department of Natural Resources

Motion by Stegeman, second by Schlack to open the workshop.

All in favor. Motion carried.

3. Coordinating emergency services in the harbor.

Agency Roles in South Haven Harbor
Emergency Response Coordination
Dredging Update
Weather Buoy
Fire, Collision, Drowning
Direct Fueling
Fuel Spill Response
Other Issues

Ron Wise explained SHAES would take the lead in case of an emergency in the harbor followed by the Sheriff's Department if there were a death. Ben Plachta noted that the Coast Guard in Grand Haven will sometimes get involved.

Hosier asked how often the South Haven Coast Guard Auxiliary is manned to which Plachta responded that it is supposed to be manned every Saturday and Sunday. Plachta noted that they have been having difficulty keeping the boats up and running.

Matt Page stated that the Department of Natural Resources would be there to assist with emergencies, but as far as the report, that would be done by whoever takes the lead. Page stated that the DNR does not have a Lake Michigan boat in the harbor now; a new boat is supposed to be here in September. In response to a question by Reineck, Page stated that he is in this area along with another officer.

Sullivan asked how calls come in through 911 and Ron Wise explained the protocol: "On a big spill we call the National Response Center; which sends it out on ticker tape, and the various agencies get it, and they call us to get the information they need." Wise noted that SHAES now has "socks" that can be used to contain a spill.

In response to a question by Sullivan regarding whether the designated fueling stations in the harbor are required to have boom material on site, Wise stated that the city has some at the marinas and SHAES will be buying some supplies every year to get a stock built up. Wise explained that when there is gasoline on the water, SHAES cannot do much. "We aren't allowed to do what we used to do, which is to pour dish soap on it, which made it go to the bottom. The environmentalists don't want us to do that."

Hosier stated, "On the issue of fueling, everyone should know that direct fueling should not be done." Tony Marsala responded that it is illegal to fuel a boat other than at the South Haven Yacht Club and All Seasons Marina. It was noted that Jensen's can fuel at their dock because they're a commercial dock. Wise noted that Marsala sends out a letter every couple of years and provided a copy of the 2016 letter for the record.

Wise said last year was the quietest year for complaints about fueling. Hosier asked what to do if someone observes direct fueling. The correct thing to do is to call the non-emergency number (637-5151) because direct fueling is against city ordinance.

Hosier asked whether people that have a portable fuel tank may fill those at any gas station. Marsala noted that it cannot be a gas can, it has to be a fuel tank with a pump. Refueling cannot be done on city property. So you can't pull your boat out of the water and refuel in Black River parking lot. It was noted that the condo slip owners and private beach owners can do it.

Regarding the fire boat, Wise explained that the manufacturer of the boat went out of business after the boat was purchased so it has been difficult to get parts to maintain it. "We

have been in contact with a gentleman in California who is able to help us with some repairs and retrofit some things about the design to make the boat safer to operate.”

Plachta asked, “In case of an emergency, can we get in contact with SHAES instead of calling 911?” Wise noted sometimes there is no one at the station, because everyone is out on a call. Marsala said in an emergency call 911; if it’s not an emergency you can call the office.

In response to a question about what the Coast Guard considers a “big spill” that they would want to be notified about, Petty Officer Lopez said any gas spill that is noticeable by the eye is considered by the Coast Guard as something to investigate or report.

Lopez said the Coast Guard would like to meet with all municipalities, get involved with a multi-agency drill, noting that a large incident ends up being a communication nightmare when various agencies are on different frequencies. “We need to get with your police department and fire station and coordinate and plan; we want to respond immediately if we have someone in the water. We want to send an asset, and a helo.”

Discussion ensued regarding the Incident Commander being the highest ranking on scene; would coordinate with local enforcement; contact the Coast Guard and work with them. Wise stated that SHAES portable radios have all been updated with the marine channels and also utilize the state. Lopez said we are now up to speed on those, too. Wise agreed that the biggest problem with multi-agency response is communication.

In response to a question about response to a boat collision/drowning event, Wise said our typical response is ambulance and rescue with dive team backup; we also utilize the Van Buren County dive team. Mostly incidents are off the beach or near the pier heads; although sometimes someone slips off their boat and no one notices for a couple of hours and usually when that happens it is an easy find at that point. Wise addressed what would need to be done right away in the case of a boat collision is to get a marker down. Lopez said the Coast Guard will drop a datum which can be used to project current, environment, which way the body may drift.

In response to a question about whether people are permitted to cook on the back of their boat, Wise stated that anything with an open flame is not allowed. After further questioning, Wise stated that hanging a grill off the back of the boat using propane, charcoal or wood would all be considered an open flame and not permitted. That needs to be on the grass across the sidewalk from the slips, according to the ordinance. Wise stated that once one boat is on fire we will be lucky to keep it to three. Hosier noted that grills are not permitted on the docks at the city marinas; grills have to be on the grass or pavement.

Schlack said it would be nice to have some of these main ordinances that are common sense out there, to be in one spot. Discussion ensued about putting them on the Harbor Commission web page; Plachta said the Coast Guard Auxiliary has the ordinances under glass at the station.

During discussion about the city having some dockage in the township they are responsible for Hosier stated SHAES is a multi-jurisdictional agency. Stegeman said when the City Council approves something, because SHAES is multi-jurisdictional, the townships have to approve the same language. Wise noted that the three townships do approve some together but there are some differences that happen with the various municipalities, some are looser and some tighter – cities and townships are different.

Hosier noted we do not have a dredge situation this year; we are dealing mostly with erosion and stated, “We do have (dredge) permits in place in case that changes.”

Wise updated everyone about the North Pier, which the city and SHAES have been monitoring, noting that some sections of concrete have sunk as much as two feet. This is caused by erosion from the waves; the north pier is worst but some is happening on the south pier. Hosier said the city has been monitoring it, noting, “We’ve taken pictures and sent them off to the Army Corps of Engineers and they were out last weekend looking at it. The deeper sink holes are in the last third of the pier; we have about 3 months of time-lapse pictures showing the progression and it is a concern.” Wise noted that in some places the concrete is breaking, and has exposed rebar, which makes him think about broken ankles and other injuries. Hosier said with the high water levels, the piers have been deluged and damage is showing.

Wise said a 14 mph wind slapped enough water across the pier, so if we have too much wind we won’t be having fireworks. Wise also noted that beach access will limit us getting up and down the beaches; there is a lot less beach due to the high water. “We’ve moved our flagpoles back. We have numbered the flags with #1 at Newcome working south. We are also getting some larger flags that will be visible from the water and the pole numbers will be able to be seen on the beach. Hoping that will help in locating a site where there’s an emergency.” Wise noted we have also numbered the blue boxes and throw rings to help locate people.

Plachta asked about teaching people to throw the rings to which Marsala responded that SHAES teaches a class every year at the yacht club. Plachta suggested putting that kind of stuff on the screen at the marina office. It was noted that Great Lake Surf Rescue has some good materials, but we haven’t gotten many people showing up for the classes.

Pyle suggested getting together with the school to teach the kids about pier safety, etc.

Schlack asked for update on fire boat. Wise said he went down to Covert to assist with a dune fire; the impeller sucked up rocks and was damaged and is currently out of service. The impeller was shipped to California and they got it Tuesday; the place in California is going to give us a new one, and when we get the broken one back SHAES will have two impellers again.

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Schlack asked if the fire boat is ever left in the water. Wise answered that because UV deteriorates the inflatable part of the boat SHAES has managed to keep the boat in usable condition for a long time by not storing it in the water. "We hope to get a fiberglass boat eventually, which sits low in the water to make transferring victims easier." It was noted that funding will have to be found for a new boat.

Discussion ensued regarding the Coast Guard Auxiliary's role in the harbor, with a boat needing to be extricated from a situation in which it becomes a salvage operation. Plachta pointed out that the Coast Guard is not in the salvage business. Lopez noted that the Coast Guard does not want to compete with salvage companies.

Lopez asked what the Coast Guard can do for your community, noting that the Coast Guard could possibly do some training. "We do a lot of Facebook, work with radio stations; we like to believe that goes toward less people drowning. We teach the children in the schools how to throw the life rings. We would like to do a water rescue with you guys because you will quickly find the deficiencies; that way we're not responding in the middle of chaos and learn we just don't jibe. Our goal is to build a partnership because it is good public relations for the public to see the city doing this. We have helicopter operations days; it helps to build proficiency." Wise said when you come up to events like the triathlon; we could work out frequencies ahead of time. It was noted that doing this type of exercise helps with vectoring for search and rescues and it helps to work ahead of time on communication. Discussion ensued regarding CO2 poisoning.

Hosier thinks planning for a disaster drill is a great idea. Lopez said the details can be worked out by email. Lopez noted that the Coast Guard will tell you what we do and why we do what we do.

Hosier said there is no weather buoy update; we are looking for funding. We would love to have helicopter training days. Lopez noted that they like to work different areas, but would rather train the first time.

Stegeman updated the board regarding a couple of Steelheaders events. The Salute to Veterans in August and in the fall, at one of our membership meetings we are going to do fire extinguishers/flares with the Coast Guard and give people a chance to try that out.

4. Adjourn

Motion by Schlack, second by Stegeman to adjourn at 6:18 p.m.

All in favor. Motion carried.

RESPECTFULLY SUBMITTED,
Marsha Ransom
Recording Secretary