

NEWPORT BEACH HARBOR COMMISSION REGULAR MEETING MINUTES
City Council Chambers – 100 Civic Center Drive, Newport Beach
Wednesday, May 14, 2025
5 p.m.

1. CALL MEETING TO ORDER

The meeting was called to order at 5:00 p.m.

2. ROLL CALL

PRESENT: Scott Cunningham, Chair
Ira Beer, Vice Chair
Marie Marston, Secretary
Steve Scully, Commissioner
Rudy Svrcek, Commissioner
Gary Williams, Commissioner

ABSENT: Don Yahn, Commissioner

Staff Members: Paul Blank, Harbormaster
Jennifer Biddle, Administrative Assistant
Chris Miller, Public Works Administrative Manager
Cynthia Shintaku, Administrative Assistant

3. PLEDGE OF ALLEGIANCE – Led by Commissioner Williams

4. PUBLIC COMMENTS (NON-AGENDA ITEMS)

Chair Cunningham opened public comments.

Pete Swift, a resident, addressed the Commission to discuss an invention called “tide stairs,” which was developed in response to the increasing number of homes raising their sea walls, which has resulted in gangways becoming too steep. He noted that the City currently requires gangways to be at least 24 feet long due to the 2.5:1 slope at low tide. He explained that his design features stairs that pivot, with a railing that keeps them level. He advised that this allows the stairs to remain level with the ground or sea level at any tide. He stated that he intends to return at a future meeting to request permission to construct a gangway shorter than 24 feet, as current building codes allow for a maximum slope of 32 degrees, which his design can accommodate. He emphasized that in West Newport, many homes currently have 20-foot gangways, and as those are replaced, the 24-foot requirement becomes impractical—it would extend too far and fail to reach the dock. Without an alternative, he would need to request a variance each time.

Mr. Swift believes his solution is safer and addresses resident concerns about the steepness of gangways resulting from rising sea walls. He explained that the design still uses the same wheels and hinge currently used, but the section view illustrates how the stairs rotate on a pivot. He noted it was an interesting mechanism. He noted that approximately 35 years ago, he had disassembled a similar structure made of plywood by an engineer. He explained that all of the components in the new design are made from stainless steel or aluminum, which should ensure a long lifespan. He pointed out that it features the same type of handrail and hinge unit currently in use on all gangways, emphasizing that the design is not a major departure from existing practice—except that, instead of a flat surface, it is a staircase. He noted that he plans to return within the next month to formally present the proposal.

Chair Cunningham inquired if Mr. Swift had built a prototype.

Mr. Swift responded that several installations already exist in the harbor, specifically on Lido Island. He confirmed that the concept works, although all current installations were required to be 24 feet in length.

Commissioner Svrcek inquired about regarding Americans with Disabilities Act (ADA) compliance.

Mr. Swift responded that the gangways are residential and he did not believe ADA compliance applied, noting that they are not intended for wheelchair use. Commissioner Scully clarified that the question was whether ADA compliance is required at all. Mr. Swift noted that they do not need to be ADA-compliant.

Vice Chair Beer inquired whether the design was a piece attached to the top of a gangway or if the entire gangway consisted of steps. Mr. Swift confirmed that the entire gangway is stepped. He explained that as the tide drops and the angle increases, the stairs adjust to stay level. He noted that at higher tides, the stair steps become shorter. He emphasized that the rise of the steps never exceeds seven inches, consistent with City building code requirements.

Vice Chair Beer expressed interest in seeing one of the installations, noting that the appearance of small steps at high tide was intriguing.

Chair Cunningham closed public comments.

5. APPROVAL OF MINUTES

1. Draft Minutes of the March 12, 2025 Harbor Commission Regular Meeting

Chair Cunningham opened public comments. Seeing none, Chair Cunningham closed public comments.

Vice Chair Beer moved to approve the March 12, 2025 Harbor Commission Regular Meeting minutes, as amended. Seconded by Commissioner Yahn. The motion carried by the following roll call vote:

Ayes: Marston, Scully, Svrcek, Yahn, Beer, Cunningham
Nays: None
Abstain: Williams
Absent: None

6. CURRENT BUSINESS

1. Recommendation on Objective Related to Day Use Moorings in Corona del Mar Cove Recommendation:

- 1) Determine this action is exempt from the California Environmental Quality Act (CEQA) pursuant to Sections 15060(c)(2) and 15060(c)(3) of the CEQA.
- 2) Consider a proposal from the subcommittee responsible for current Harbor Commission Objective 9 on establishing day-use moorings in Corona del Mar Cove; and if approved, direct Staff to forward the proposal to the City Council for approval and funding;
OR
- 3) Decide not to pursue establishing day-use moorings in Corona del Mar Cove and consider the objective to have been met.

Commissioner Scully addressed the Commission, noting that he had been advocating for this objective for nearly a year, as it had remained on the Commission's list of goals for an extended period. He explained that he had brought the topic to the forefront in previous meetings, where it had evolved over time in terms of what the moorings would entail and who would use them. He noted that the original concept had shifted toward the idea of providing mooring opportunities outside the breakwater. He advised that from his perspective there had been little discussion or enthusiasm surrounding the proposal. He noted that the topic had not generated much energy, passion, or momentum during Commission discussions.

Commissioner Scully stated that, subject to further discussion that evening, it was his personal opinion that the Commission should close out the objective and not move forward with it. He invited feedback from fellow commissioners and opened the floor for any disagreement or continued interest in pursuing the matter during the remainder of the year or at a future time.

Secretary Marson asked whether the mooring field was within the Commission's purview since it would be located outside the harbor. Commissioner Scully clarified that the area in question is a designated anchorage and does fall within the Harbor Department's jurisdiction.

Commissioner Scully moved to formally close out the objective as part of the Commission's annual objectives and to vote against establishing the proposed mooring field off Big Corona. Commissioner Svrcek seconded the motion.

Chair Cunningham acknowledged the motion and stated an intent to open the item for public comment. He noted that the Commission was approaching the end of its current term, with one remaining meeting before a new commission would be seated in July. He noted that if there was renewed interest or a compelling reason, the topic could be revisited in the future.

Vice Chair Beer remarked that the objective had been on the Commission's agenda for at least six years. He noted that although it had been revisited this year with more serious intent, a number of logistical, regulatory, and practical concerns had surfaced. He remarked that, while he liked the concept of moorings in that location—particularly if they could serve a broader range of vessels than just Harbor 20s—he supported Commissioner Scully's recommendation to close out the objective, given the unresolved challenges.

Chair Cunningham agreed, noting that he personally liked the idea of offshore moorings as well but acknowledged the complications involved and expressed support for the motion. He noted that, as he would not be returning to the Commission the following year, the decision to revisit the issue in the future would be entirely up to the new body.

Chair Cunningham opened public comments.

Adam Leverenz addressed the Commission and expressed support for removing the objective. He pointed out a discrepancy in the estimated project costs listed in the agenda materials. He explained that while the lower estimate of \$125,000 appeared accurate, he noted that the high-end estimate should be \$220,000—not \$170,000—as it includes \$55,000 for each of the four offshore moorings. He questioned whether this was an oversight and emphasized that the potential use of taxpayer dollars warranted serious consideration. He raised concerns about the likelihood of the project receiving approval from the California Coastal Commission, particularly due to issues related to obstructed views. He advised that many residents he had spoken with would object to the presence of additional mooring balls in the water, as they could interfere with scenic views and photographs. He further noted that, based on his review of satellite imagery, the area in question appeared to be sandy. He questioned whether anchor use in the area was causing significant environmental harm. He cautioned that converting a portion of the anchorage space from open access to day-use only would reduce public access, which he believed would be another concern for the Coastal Commission. Lastly, he stated that, given the financial costs and regulatory challenges, pursuing the project would be unwise and potentially a waste of public funds.

Jim Moser expressed support for the decision under consideration. He stated that the decision appeared to be the correct one and shared Secretary Marston's concern regarding whether the matter falls within the Harbor Commission's jurisdiction. He referenced the staff report, which cites a specific paragraph in Title 17. However, upon his review, he interpreted that paragraph as granting the harbor master authority to enforce a 72-hour anchoring time limit in the specified area. He questioned how that provision would authorize the Harbor Commission to establish a mooring field there.

Mr. Moser further noted that it remained unclear whether the City had ever tested its authority to enforce such a time limit in that location. In addition to the challenge of securing a Coastal Development Permit, he stated that one of the first conditions of such a permit would likely be obtaining authorization from the owner of the land where the development is proposed. He emphasized that, unlike the tidelands within the harbor, this offshore area has not been designated by the State as land managed by the City. This lack of designation, he argued, raises questions about the City's enforcement authority and its ability to proceed with development without prior approval.

Mr. Moser concluded by stating that the State Lands Commission would likely need to authorize any permanent installations in the area. He reminded the Commission that the State Lands Commission typically requires fair market compensation for the use of public tidelands, suggesting that the City might be required to pay for any such dedication.

Chair Cunningham closed public comments.

Commissioner Scully moved to formally close out the objective as part of the Commission's annual objectives and to vote against establishing the proposed mooring field off Big Corona, as amended. Seconded by Commissioner Svrcek. The motion carried by the following roll call vote:

Ayes: Marston, Scully, Svrcek, Yahn, Beer, Cunningham
Nays: None
Abstain: Williams
Absent: None

2. Ad Hoc Committee Updates

- 1) Find this action exempt from the California Environmental Quality Act (CEQA) pursuant to Sections 15060(c)(2) (the activity will not result in a direct or reasonably foreseeable indirect physical change in the environment) and 15060(c)(3) (the activity is not a project as defined in Section 15378) of the CEQA Guidelines, California Code of Regulations, Title 14, Division 6, Chapter 3, because it has no potential for resulting in physical change to the environment, directly or indirectly; and
- 2) Receive and file.

Balboa Ferry Ad Hoc – Commissioners Scully, Svrcek and Yahn (05-10-2023)

No update.

General Plan Harbor & Bay Element Update Ad Hoc – Commissioners Scully, Marston, and Yahn (10-09-2024)

Commissioner Scully provided an overview, explaining that the last meeting focused on reviewing the Harbor and Beaches component of the General Plan. He reiterated that the purpose of the Harbor, Bay, and Beaches Element is to preserve and enhance recreational and commercial water uses in Newport Bay, while also ensuring coordination with related elements such as natural resources, recreation, safety, and land use. He noted that the working group is currently developing key goals and policies related to land and water use, resilience to coastal hazards, tourism and the character of the harbor, support for harbor-related businesses, coastal infrastructure, harbor governance, channel navigation, and sediment management, harbor economics, and financial management, and public access to the coast. He noted that the content is extensive and complex, and the group is doing important work. He emphasized that the Harbor Commission will likely need to provide input as the update progresses and stated his own commitment to staying engaged in the process. He noted that he signed up for meeting alerts so that Mr. Moser would no longer need to remind him to attend.

Secretary Marston agreed with the summary and noted that the meeting was productive. She commented that while a draft document was shared, many elements are still under review, and the group is not yet ready to distribute a finalized version. She acknowledged that the process covers a wide range of topics and will require ongoing attention.

Public Dock Utilization Ad Hoc – Commissioners Beer, Svrcek, and Williams (04-10-2024)

No update.

Chair Cunningham opened public comments. Seeing none, Chair Cunningham closed public comments.

There was no further action taken on this item and it was received and filed unanimously.

3. Harbor Commission 2024 Objectives

- a) Find this action exempt from the California Environmental Quality Act (CEQA) pursuant to Sections 15060(c)(2) (the activity will not result in a direct or reasonably foreseeable indirect physical change in the environment) and 15060(c)(3) (the activity is not a project as defined in Section 15378) of the CEQA Guidelines, California Code of Regulations, Title 14, Division 6, Chapter 3, because it has no potential for resulting in physical change to the environment, directly or indirectly; and
- b) Receive and file.

Conduct annual review of Title 17 and recommend updates to City Council where necessary (Commissioner Yahn)

Harbor Master Blank reported that he has been working with Commissioner Yahn on a handful of suggestions related to updates that have been brought to his attention. He noted that Commissioner Yahn and his subcommittee are currently reviewing those suggestions.

Collaborate with the Water Quality/Coastal Tidelands Committee to partner on areas within the Harbor that both Commission/Committees intersect (Commissioners: Svrcek, Scully)

Commissioner Scully reported that he and Commissioner Svrcek have been attending meetings when their schedules permit. He noted that he attended the April 3rd meeting of the Water Quality/Coastal Tidelands Committee, which primarily included an update on the Trash Interceptor project, as well as a review of the Peninsula Point Dunes restoration. He acknowledged that he was unable to attend a more recent meeting, which he believed Commissioner Svrcek attended in his place.

Commissioner Svrcek confirmed his attendance and stated that the meeting focused primarily on efforts in San Clemente to restore its sandy beaches. He described the current shoreline as largely consisting of rocks and noted that the presentation was detailed, outlining the significant effort underway to rehabilitate the area. He commented that it highlighted how fortunate Newport Beach is to have the expansive and healthy beaches it currently enjoys. He added that, in comparison, Newport Beach has an abundance of high-quality sand—describing it as "liquid gold"—and suggested that the City could serve as a source of sand for other communities, should there be interest and funding. He referenced the now-defunct CAD (Confined Aquatic Disposal) facility project, which would have placed approximately 250,000 cubic yards of fine, beach-quality material that matched the grain envelope of local beaches. He emphasized that this same sand could likely meet the requirements of San Clemente's shoreline restoration efforts, where matching the grain size is one of the primary challenges aside from cost. He pointed out that, with the City planning to dredge and remove another one million cubic yards—most of which will be sent to LA-3 and some to Long Beach—there remains additional high-quality material that could potentially be utilized elsewhere. He suggested that the idea of developing a new CAD for sand export should remain under consideration, and encouraged the Commission to continue monitoring these opportunities.

Work with staff to identify opportunities to add additional Harbor Services (Restrooms, additional pump out stations, dock space, Shore Boat Service, Boat Launch Ramp, and development of the mobile app) (Commissioners: Marston, Yahn)

No updates.

Continue with the participation of businesses, nonprofits, and the Harbor Department with a Newport Harbor Safety Committee to promote best practices and address safety issues on the water (Commissioner: Scully).

Commissioner Scully reported on a meeting hosted by Harbormaster Blank and Deputy Harbormaster Matthew Cosylyon for harbor-based businesses on April 30, 2025. He noted that nearly all attendees held mooring assignment permits or shore-side permits. He reported that the discussion demonstrated a strong, professional working relationship between the Harbor Department and the business community; participants freely raised issues and expressed appreciation for the department's support. He advised that Harbormaster Blank allotted him approximately twelve minutes to speak about harbor safety. With assistance from representatives of the U.S. Coast Guard Auxiliary, he explained that the presentation covered employee training; customer safety briefings for paddleboards, kayaks, and electric-boat rentals; navigation rules, speed limits, and strategies for avoiding congested areas; coordination with sailboat races and sailing schools; safety considerations for pedal-craft rentals, charter vessels, and other commercial operations; night-time procedures; emergency readiness—including automated external defibrillator locations—and protocols for contacting the Harbor Department or the Orange County Sheriff's Harbor Patrol. He also emphasized compliance, routine safety inspections, and the importance of reporting unsafe behavior to foster a culture of safety and mutual respect among all operators. He concluded that the meeting was productive and that the topics addressed also advance Objective 7 of the Commission's work plan.

Review Harbor Department responsibilities, evaluate the Department's readiness and effectiveness to deliver Harbor services as necessary for normal operations and during emergencies and make recommendations as determined necessary (Commissioner: Scully, Williams).

Commissioner Scully noted that much of the discussion centered on the responsibilities of the Harbor Department. He reiterated the value of the open and constructive dialogue between rental operators, harbor businesses, and the Harbor Department. He emphasized the shared commitment to safety and to upholding the conditions outlined in the Mooring Assignment Policy (MAP), including matters such as insurance requirements and compliance with all policy provisions. He referenced discussions with Deputy Harbormaster Cosylyon regarding code enforcement within the harbor, noting that these conversations were productive and reflected a growing sense of accountability among all parties involved.

Chair Cunningham commended the Harbor Department for its efforts and remarked that this type of structured engagement was lacking in the past. He expressed confidence that, as these practices become more formalized, they will remain an integral part of day-to-day operations going forward.

Work with City Staff on an update of the market Rent to be charged for onshore and offshore moorings (Commissioner: Cunningham, Beer).
No update.

Support staff in all efforts related to the dredge completion of the Federal Navigation channels in addition to the upcoming agency renewals of Regional General Permit (RGP54) shallow water dredging permit. (Commissioners: Cunningham, Svrcek)

Chair Cunningham reported that the project is currently out to bid, with the solicitation process about a week and a half in. He advised that the bid period is scheduled to last 30 days, after which submissions will be reviewed and a contractor selected. He noted that it is anticipated that a selection will be made sometime in June, and the chosen vendor may be announced at the next Commission meeting. He reported that the start date for dredging will depend on the selected contractor and the location of their equipment. While work could begin as early as shortly after July 4, he noted that it is more likely to commence following Labor Day.

Chair Cunningham reported that the total volume of material to be dredged is approximately 1.2 million cubic yards, with a few hundred thousand cubic yards already removed. They advised that the project is

expected to span roughly one year. He explained that, once completed, the dredging will result in an estimated 221 million gallons of additional water flushing through the harbor every six hours. He concluded by expressing optimism about the long-term environmental benefits of the project, noting that the increased water circulation is expected to significantly improve water quality and support the continued expansion of wildlife in the harbor.

Commissioner Scully inquired about the status of federal funding for the dredging project, noting general concerns about potential uncertainty surrounding federal funds.

Chair Cunningham responded that there were no issues with the federal funding. He explained that in addition to federal support, the City of Newport Beach has committed up to \$10 million toward the project. He noted that a significant portion of that commitment was originally intended to address the handling of unsuitable material. However, he explained that the costs associated with that issue have since decreased substantially. He confirmed that the project is fully funded and ready to proceed. He emphasized that the project is effectively at the goal line, and preparations are in place to move forward. He reported that once completed, the harbor will be dredged back to its original design depth, consistent with the specifications established in 1936. He noted that during that era, the water quality was particularly high, and the project is expected to help restore similar conditions. He reported that a future item for another commission will be to explore the possibility of creating a large flushing system beneath the peninsula to improve water flow to the upper harbor.

Chair Cunningham opened public comments.

Mr. Moser addressed the Commission regarding Objective Number 2, which focuses on collaboration with the Water Quality and Coastal Tidelands Committee. He noted a possible slip of the tongue in an earlier report. He noted that while recent media coverage has highlighted beach erosion issues in San Clemente, the presentation discussed at the referenced meeting actually focused on the City of Oceanside. He explained that Oceanside attributed its beach loss to the construction of a harbor in the 1940s, just north of its beaches. He further explained that the creation of that harbor is believed to have altered natural sand movement, resulting in erosion to the south. He pointed out that transporting sand from Newport Beach to Oceanside would be even more costly than previously suggested. He also shared that another presentation at the same meeting addressed sediment retention behind the Prado Dam, which was built on the Santa Ana River. He reported that historically, the Santa Ana River transported sand to the ocean, contributing to the formation of the peninsula and, by extension, Newport Harbor. He explained that the dam now traps that sediment, and there is currently no viable recipient for the accumulating sand due to the high cost of overland transport. He reported that one potential solution discussed was the construction of a bypass system that could convey sand around the dam via a pipe and deliver it back into the river for natural flushing to the ocean. He noted that this approach could benefit Newport Beach's beaches and aligns with broader goals of sediment management and coastal restoration.

Chair Cunningham closed public comments.

There was no further action taken on this item and it was received and filed unanimously.

4. Harbormaster Update – March and April 2025 Activities

Recommendation:

- 1) Determine this action is exempt from the California Environmental Quality Act (CEQA) pursuant to Sections 15060(c)(2) and 15060(c)(3) of the CEQA Guidelines because this action will not result in a physical change to the environment, directly or indirectly; and
- 2) Receive and file.

Harbormaster Paul Blank reported that one of the more unusual operations involved the recovery of a large, ancient anchor that had been submerged in the Upper Bay and was posing a navigational hazard near the Newport Aquatic Center. He advised that it was successfully removed and transported to Marina

Park with the intention of repurposing it as an architectural relic. Unfortunately, he reported that the condition of the anchor rendered it unsuitable for display, and it was ultimately discarded.

Harbormaster Blank reported incidents of illegal dumping at two public docks. He explained that thanks to the use of surveillance equipment, the team was able to monitor, respond to, and enforce regulations effectively, which has helped curb this type of behavior. He advised that the department responded to numerous calls for dewatering activities, particularly during the severe weather events in March and April. He announced that data showed that the volume of dewatering in 2025 has been lower compared to the same period in 2024, despite perceptions of high activity. He reported that the department conducted a spill response training session in coordination with the Office of Spill Response from the California Department of Fish and Wildlife. He noted that the refresher exercise was well received, with officials expressing confidence in the Harbor Department's readiness and the condition of its response materials.

Harbormaster Blank advised that a liquid contaminant collection device was added to the front of the department's trash-collecting rover. He explained that the rover, which already operates autonomously to gather floating debris, can now be reconfigured in under 20 minutes to collect liquid contaminants from the water's surface. He noted that the staff team discovered the lifting limitations of their crane while attempting to move the anchor from the south barge to land with it providing to be too heavy despite the crane's 3-ton rating.

Harbormaster Blank showcased the department's line roller—a small, \$283 stainless steel and silicone device fabricated locally. He explained that the roller allows for easy deployment of sand lines without wetting or dirtying one's hands. He noted that the department owns three of these devices, which are used by staff and loaned to visiting mariners for cleaning or managing shore moorings. He advised that the devices took approximately two and a half years to acquire, and the department is pleased they are now in circulation.

Harbormaster Blank shared an encouraging update related to marine health in the harbor. He announced that, according to an expert from the Pacific Marine Mammal Center, domoic acid levels associated with recent algal blooms appear to be subsiding. He noted that fewer cases of marine animal sickness are anticipated as conditions improve, which is welcomed news for the harbor's ecosystem.

Harbormaster Blank reported that, following recent severe weather events, the Harbor Department required seven mooring permittees to upgrade their mooring equipment. He explained that, in accordance with the Municipal Code, if a mooring is displaced during severe weather, the permittee is required to increase the weight of their mooring anchors by at least 20% immediately. He announced that all contacted permittees complied, and staff expressed confidence that these upgraded moorings would be more secure in future storms. He reported that the department also prioritized berth navigation light (nav light) and personal flotation device (PFD) patrols throughout March and April. He advised that these efforts included multiple early-morning and late-night patrols to monitor vessel compliance and harbor safety.

Harbormaster Blank highlighted the growing popularity of the Harbor Department's new safety video series, which is specifically targeted at rental vessel customers. He noted that the videos have received over 200 views to date, and feedback has been overwhelmingly positive. He explained that the videos were the product of a broad collaboration involving Harbor Department personnel, the Recreation and Senior Services Department, and local harbor business owners. He noted that many familiar faces from the harbor community appear in the videos, which emphasize essential safety practices.

Harbormaster Blank reported that the Harbor Department also conducted additional joint training with the California National Guard Marine Command. He explained that these exercises continue to strengthen collaboration and improve response capabilities, with both organizations benefiting from shared resources and expertise.

Harbormaster Blank referenced the Harbor Safety Summit, previously mentioned by Commissioner Scully. He advised that the event featured Commissioner Scully speaking at the lectern. He noted that the summit was well attended and generated strong engagement and valuable suggestions. He announced that one of those suggestions would lead to the installation of new signage aimed at rental customers, emphasizing basic harbor rules and responsible vessel operation. He presented an image depicting an electric vessel that had been improperly berthed and extending beyond the end of its finger pier by more than its beam. He noted that this issue was identified during an early morning patrol and corrected the following day. While a few berthing violations were noted during these patrols, he confirmed that there were no widespread infractions. He presented another image of two paddleboarders who were rescued in the middle of the J Field. He noted that both individuals were cold, wet, and fatigued but safely transported back to their point of embarkation thanks to a prompt and effective response by Harbor Department staff.

Harbormaster Blank reported that the Harbor Department placed significant emphasis on noise and nuisance patrols during the early morning and late-night hours. He stated that several instances of noise and nuisance activity were addressed during this period. He noted that all cases were resolved without the need for additional citations or serious enforcement action, as individuals involved complied with staff directives. He highlighted one particular incident involving an electric vessel that had overstayed its time limit at the 15th Street pier. He expressed appreciation for the discretion exercised by harbor service workers on that occasion. He explained that the vessel in question, a Duffy boat, was there to pick up a newly married couple for a post-ceremony harbor tour. He further explained that due to the wedding ceremony running longer than scheduled, the boat remained at the dock beyond the permitted time. He elaborated that rather than impounding the vessel, harbor staff allowed the couple to proceed with their celebration. He remarked that it was fortunate the boat was not towed, as it would have left the couple without their intended getaway vessel. He commended the team for their thoughtful and measured response.

Harbormaster Blank reported that staff conducted numerous public education interactions throughout both months, all of which were positive and contributed to the safe and clean enjoyment of the harbor. He also noted that the department carried out one private party impound during the reporting period. He explained that while such impounds are not frequent, staff continue to refine and improve the process. He noted that in this particular case, the private property owner expressed satisfaction with the speed of the department's response and the overall outcome of the situation. He reported spending time heads down typing away many harbor event permits and many large vessel anchorage permits.

Harbormaster Blank shared that the Harbor Department has been actively collaborating with the Newport Beach Police Department. He explained that as part of this effort, three separate tours were conducted with uniformed police officers to familiarize them with harbor operations. He noted that these tours included an overview of the harbor's layout and a detailed orientation on accessing and operating Harbor Department vessels. He advised that officers were shown where keys are stored, how to start the vessels, and what procedures to follow in the event of an emergency when Harbor Department personnel are not present.

Harbormaster Blank emphasized that one condition he communicated clearly to the police chief is that officers must wear personal flotation devices (PFDs) when operating Harbor Department vessels. He explained that officers typically carry approximately 35 pounds of additional gear, however, this safety requirement was deemed essential. He noted that all participating officers agreed to and will comply with this directive. He reported that the department held an all-hands meeting on March 1 with the primary focus of the meeting being customer service, with an emphasis on improving the quality and consistency of service delivery across the team.

Harbormaster Blank noted that, for one special occasion and associated giveaways, the Harbor Department temporarily expanded its mission statement. He explained that in addition to the core objective of keeping the harbor clean, safe, and well-enjoyed, the department embraced a broader goal: anticipating and exceeding the expectations of harbor users. He noted that this revised mission was

highlighted during an all-hands meeting, which featured a presentation by Rory Emslie of the Lido House Hotel. He noted that the presentation focused on visitor service and collaboration, describing it as outstanding, particularly given Lido House's role as a prominent visitor-serving institution within the harbor. He also shared that the Harbor Department's surveillance system was recently instrumental in assisting the Newport Beach Police Department. He reported that a server at the Lighthouse Restaurant had her vehicle vandalized during a shift at Marina Park. He explained that after receiving the report the next morning, staff reviewed surveillance footage and identified the incident. He noted that the footage was provided to police investigators and is now part of an active investigation.

Harbormaster Blank recognized Cynthia Shintaku for her work in completing the latest round of SAVE (State Abandoned and Derelict Vessel Enforcement) grant applications. He reported that in previous grant cycles, the department was awarded \$175,000 for vessel abatement efforts. He noted that this time, based on the department's strong performance, the application requested \$250,000. He thanked Ms. Shintaku for submitting the application well ahead of the deadline and for her continued diligence in managing the grant process.

Harbormaster Blank concluded with a lighter anecdote, describing what he referred to as the "amusing call for service of the month." He reported that a concerned citizen contacted the department to report bird droppings in a road vehicle parking space allocated to the Galley Café at the Balboa Yacht Basin. He noted that although staff were unable to clean the space that same day, the issue was resolved by the following morning in time for business operations. Harbormaster Blank wryly remarked that when he accepted the position, he never expected to be responsible for removing bird guano from a parking space—but, nevertheless, he ensured it was taken care of.

Harbormaster Blank announced that this Friday is "Wear Your Life Jacket to Work Day," a national initiative designed to raise awareness about boating safety. He advised that, in celebration of the event and the kickoff of National Boating Safety Week, the Harbor Department coordinated a public service announcement (PSA) featuring Newport Beach Mayor Joe Stapleton.

Harbormaster Blank shared that the PSA was released via both the City's and the Mayor's social media channels and would be promoted further throughout the week. He noted that the message will also be included in the City Manager's weekly update scheduled for Friday morning. He commended Mayor Stapleton for being an enthusiastic participant, noting that the filming took place on a particularly blustery day. He confirmed that, despite challenging weather conditions, the audio quality came through well.

Harbormaster Blank transitioned to statistics reporting, noting that the Harbor Department responded to nearly 2,000 calls for service in March and slightly more than 2,000 in April. He explained that these calls were evenly distributed across the harbor, demonstrating consistent activity levels month over month.

Harbormaster Blank also shared an update on the usage of the harbor amenities map. He noted that with nearly three years of data collected, usage trends appear to be tracking consistently year over year. He reported that a QR code linking to the map will be featured on new signage targeted specifically at rental boat customers, with the goal of increasing engagement and usage. Lastly, he reported that pump-out station usage was significantly higher in April, following steady usage in January, February, and March. He advised that usage remained well distributed across the five pump-out locations monitored and maintained by the Harbor Department.

Harbormaster Blank reported that the Harbor Department recently received an "A" grade from the Bay Foundation, which conducts quarterly inspections of the department's equipment. He advised that all systems were found to be operating at or above required standards, and the department is very pleased with the results. He reported that the number of harbor event permits issued through May was slightly ahead of last year. He noted that marine activity permits were also significantly ahead of the 2024 figures. He reported that, in contrast, Rhine Wharf Park permits were substantially lower than the previous year. He attributed the decline to the Newport Beach International Boat Show, which in 2024 launched its temporary docks from the Rhine Wharf. He advised that in 2025, those operations shifted to the Dunes

launch ramp, which was considered a major improvement for all involved. He noted that the reduced use of the Rhine Wharf was welcomed by nearby residents, who have expressed appreciation for the decrease in activity.

Harbormaster Blank discussed anchorage utilization. He reported that in March, poor weather limited activity, though a few vessels did use the anchorage throughout the month. He noted that utilization increased significantly in April. He pointed out that vessels displayed in green on the utilization chart were successfully dye-tabbed, indicating compliance with harbor monitoring procedures. He noted that two vessels, represented by red bars, were not dye-tabbed. In these cases, the department either lacked the resources to perform the procedure or no one was aboard when multiple attempts were made. He reported that both vessels were present for two nights, but neither was successfully dye-tabbed.

Harbormaster Blank presented an overview of monthly operations data, presenting a comprehensive statistics chart. He humorously referred to it as the “traditional eye chart,” acknowledging the density of the information and joking that anyone able to read it must have better eyesight than he does. He concluded with what he called the “gratuitous image of the month.” He presented a photo featuring all four Harbor Department patrol boats on the water in formation, taken on a particularly photogenic day. He expressed pride in the image and was pleased to share it with the Commission.

Commissioner Scully about the illegal dumping incidents.

Harbormaster Blank provided an update on recent incidents of illegal dumping at public piers. He reported two separate cases—one at the 15th Street pier and another at the 19th Street pier. He noted that at the 15th Street location, Harbor Department personnel discovered an outboard engine and other debris that had been improperly discarded. He advised that at the 19th Street pier, the items included a marine battery along with additional refuse. He reported that, while using surveillance footage, the department identified the individual responsible for the 19th Street incident. He noted that although the dumping was linked to a vessel assigned to a permitted mooring, the individual involved was not the permit holder. He noted that the non-permit holder has since accepted full responsibility for the violation. He explained that the Harbor Department has initiated ongoing discussions with the permittee to address concerns regarding his continued association with the non-permit holder in light of the incident and its broader implications.

Commissioner Scully inquired if there was a fine issued.

Harbormaster Blank confirmed that code enforcement actions were taken. He advised that two citations were issued, each accompanied by financial penalties.

Commissioner Scully inquired if such conduct could result in revocation of a mooring permit.

Harbormaster Blank acknowledged that while such an action might have been possible, the department opted not to pursue it. He explained that because the illegal dumping was caused by the non-mooring permittee, the Harbor Department was not confident in taking such a step under current policy.

Harbormaster Blank indicated that Deputy Harbormaster Cosylion may soon recommend policy changes related to vessel assignments on moorings. He explained that there may be a proposal requiring that the title of any vessel assigned to a mooring match the name on the mooring permit, in order to ensure clear accountability and prevent future issues.

Commissioner Scully expressed strong disapproval of the illegal dumping, calling it a serious offense and advocating for a robust response to deter similar behavior in the future.

Vice Chair Beer acknowledged the success of this year’s boat show, noting a significantly larger turnout compared to previous years. He raised concerns, having received messages about dock issues and a vessel incident that generated some drama and requested clarification.

Harbormaster Blank discussed a pile failure that resulted in the displacement of three boats from the show. He advised that thanks to strong collaboration between the show producers and the Newport Beach Harbor Department, safe accommodations were quickly identified for those vessels. He noted that moving forward, the use of more helical anchor systems and fewer traditional piles is expected to mitigate similar failures.

Harbormaster Blank addressed the incendiary event that occurred on Sunday afternoon and attributed it to smoke from a battery that had been damaged. He noted that the vessel was not electrically propelled but was powered by a traditional diesel engine. He further clarified that the smoldering was an electrical issue, not an electric boat malfunction. He emphasized a critical point that the incident underscores is the importance of the City's special events permitting process. He reported that the response to the incident was swift, organized, and effective. He reported that the fire department knew exactly where to deploy, and once on site, personnel had a clear path to the affected area. He advised that support was provided by Newport Beach Lifeguards, the Orange County Sheriff's Harbor Department, and, most notably, the show's security team. He noted that the security team followed their rehearsed emergency protocol, which included safely disconnecting the vessel and pushing it into a fairway while leaving space for first responders to access the site efficiently.

Harbormaster Blank reported that all elements of the response were pre-planned, practiced, and implemented seamlessly because of the structured permitting process. He stressed that had the event taken place without such oversight, the situation could have ended very differently. He noted one gap in the response which was that firefighters lacked a means of accessing the vessel directly. He reported that a Good Samaritan intervened by offering their own vessel to transport the firefighters from the dock to the affected boat, allowing them to quickly address the smoldering issue. He noted that in response to that lesson, next year's permit will include a new requirement: a Newport Beach Harbor Department vessel will be stationed at the show around the clock for the duration of the event, ready to support fire, police, or any other emergency response agency as needed. He concluded by commending all parties involved—the fire department, fire prevention staff, event organizers, lifeguards, the sheriff's department, and event security—for their exemplary performance in managing the situation.

Chair Cunningham opened public comments.

Mr. Leverenz speaker inquired whether the SAVE grant is the source of funding for the Vessel Turn-In Program (VTIP). He requested clarification of the grant amount mentioned earlier. He also requested information on how many derelict vessels could potentially be removed under that funding and what the average cost is to process each one, expressing interest in gaining a better understanding of the scope and impact of the program.

Harbormaster Blank confirmed that the Harbor Department has applied for a SAVE grant in the amount of \$250,000. He noted that while the grant has not yet been awarded, the requested amount is \$75,000 more than what the department received during the previous funding cycle. He explained that the number of vessels that could be removed under the grant varies significantly based on vessel size and condition. He clarified that the SAVE program—short for Surrendered and Abandoned Vessel Exchange—replaced the earlier Vessel Turn-In Program (VTIP). He noted that under SAVE, vessel owners may voluntarily surrender boats they no longer want or are unable to maintain. He explained that the program also addresses abandoned vessels left in the harbor, which require impoundment and title transfer processes before removal.

Mr. Moser introduced himself as a member of the General Plan Advisory Committee, noting his particular interest in citywide noise issues. He explained that when the current General Plan was adopted in 2006, one of the major noise concerns in the harbor stemmed from party boats. He noted that while he is not a frequent harbor user himself, he acknowledged that the problem appears to have significantly diminished since that time. He noted that there had been a mention of an uptick in noise and nuisance complaints, particularly in the early morning hours. He requested further elaboration on the nature of those noise

issues, asking for clarification on what types of incidents were being reported during those early morning periods in the harbor.

Harbormaster Paul Blank confirmed that the recent noise and nuisance complaints referenced in his report were all related to early morning rowing programs operating in the harbor.

Chair Cunningham closed public comments.

There was no further action taken on this item and it was received and filed unanimously.

7. MOTION FOR RECONSIDERATION

None.

8. COMMISSIONER ANNOUNCEMENTS (NON-DISCUSSION ITEMS)

Secretary Marston announced that the Battle of the Bay water polo tournament between the varsity boys and girls teams from Newport Harbor High School and Corona del Mar High School will take place on Thursday, May 22nd. She noted that the girls' match is scheduled to begin at 3:30 p.m., followed by the boys' match.

Harbormaster Blank noted that the June meeting is currently projected to have a very full agenda. He noted that items expected to be included are an appeal regarding a dock application, a presentation on code enforcement activities and statistics, and a presentation by the permit technician regarding potential updates to the specifications for onshore moorings. He advised that these updates would apply only to onshore moorings, and the technician is seeking an opportunity to present proposed revisions for the Commission's consideration. He reported that Commissioner Yahn is expected to present a subcommittee report on the review of Title 17.

Vice Chair Beer announced that there may also be a discussion on mooring adjustment applications, as several are being received each month. He suggested a more in-depth discussion on how these applications are managed. Lastly, he advised that the agenda is expected to include outreach from Public Works Manager Chris Miller regarding plans for the dredging and reconstruction of the Balboa Yacht Basin. He recommended agendaizing the topic for a subsequent month.

9. MATTERS WHICH COMMISSIONERS WOULD LIKE PLACED ON A FUTURE AGENDA FOR DISCUSSION, ACTION, OR REPORT (NON-DISCUSSION ITEM)

None.

10. DATE AND TIME FOR NEXT MEETING:

The next regular meeting is scheduled for June 11, 2025 at 5:00 p.m.

11. ADJOURNMENT

There being no further business to come before the Harbor Commission, the meeting was adjourned at 6:30 p.m.