

# Harbor Commission

## Regular Meeting Minutes

Tuesday, September 17, 2013  
5:30 p.m., City Hall Council Chambers  
South Haven City Hall



City of South Haven

### 1. Call to Order

Present: Pyle, Reineck, Silverman, Strong, Arnold  
Absent: Sullivan

### 2. Approval of Agenda

Motion by Strong, second by Silverman to approve the agenda as presented.

All in favor. Motion carried.

### 3. Approval of Minutes: August 20, 2013 Regular Meeting

Motion by Silverman, second by Pyle to approve the August 20, 2013 Regular Meeting Minutes 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; noted trends with Seasonal and Transient Marina Revenues and remarked that boat launching a little low this calendar year, VandenBosch suggested leaving the gate to the launch open during the off season, as there was not enough revenue to justify keeping it closed.

After questions from Stephens and Silverman regarding the dredging costs and the notes regarding operational expenses, staff was directed to request of the Finance Director a breakdown of operational expenses for the fiscal years 2012 and 2013, to be brought before the commission at the next regular meeting.

## **6. Marina Rates**

The board is being asked to decide whether the city should stay with the rates as they stand; staff has requested that we go to the Waterways rate schedule for transient rentals due to ease of using the state reservation system. It also would make the transient rates simpler. Moving to Column D of the Waterways rate schedule would mean an increase. Reineck questioned what affect this increase would have on revenues.

Staff's recommendation is to keep seasonal rates as they are.

Discussion ensued regarding the pros and cons of having two sets of rates, one for the North, South and Maritime Museum Marinas and another (lower) for Black River Park Marina due to it having less amenities. Reineck noted that the overall increase being suggested is about ten percent (10%). Pyle disagrees with what she feels is devaluing of the Black River Park Marina by decreasing the fees. Pyle feels that the product being marketed is the same; you are still at South Haven and can take part in all that is offered here. Strong pointed out the long dark walk across that parking lot to the restrooms and that the further up the river you are, the slips value goes down, whether you are renting or buying.

VandenBosch noted that he has also provided a Boat Launch fees comparison for commissioners' information although the staff recommendation is to keep boat launch fees the same. VandenBosch pointed out that John Marple, the Marina Manager, has suggested some discounts which are not included in the resolution. VandenBosch suggested that the commission look at the marketing plan before getting into the rate setting.

The commission skipped Item seven (7) at this time to discuss Item eight (8).

## **8. Marina Marketing Plan**

VandenBosch indicated Marple's memo regarding the marketing plans he would like to implement. Since slips are in the greatest demand from June 15 through August 15 the intent is to increase weekend rates during that period.

VandenBosch pointed out that timing is not an issue; this could be brought back to the next meeting. Discussion ensued regarding the pros and cons of specificity in wording of the resolution. It was suggested that a simple, flexible plan be created which allows the Marina Manager to act according to what is actually happening in the marinas regarding transient rentals.

Discussion of loyalty discounts and various ways to implement an awards program led to Marple pointing out such discounts as a very common technique used by hotels. Accountability (city manager approval) and flexibility (for the Marina Manager to react to the market as it comes along) are keys to a loyalty or award program. Marple suggested rewriting the paragraph in the resolution "market conditions" to allow for that flexibility.

Discussion of the rocky beginning of the season, minor issues with dredging and with opening of the new marina. Marple would like to have another year to get their feet on the ground before new rates are implemented. Wants to be sure everything is running well before increasing slip rates; Silverman supports maintaining the current rates, establishing what the value is and setting the rates accordingly.

Pyle reminded of the letter received at the last meeting with twenty (20) plus signatures regarding setting a senior rate for the boat launch and suggested "purchase a seasonal launch pass prior to March 1<sup>st</sup> and get the senior discount." Silverman asked whether there are people who are not coming because of the one hundred (100) dollar pass cost. Pyle said people are going to Saugatuck and St. Joseph to launch and suggested charging \$75.00 instead of \$100.00 to seniors purchasing early.

VandenBosch questioned whether there is support among the commission for the lowered seasonal rates, noting that City Council will ultimately make the decision. Reineck said he believes there is some value in that; our seasonal launch passes are higher than most other places.

VandenBosch asked if there is a standard for being a "senior". Pyle noted that for the Department of Natural Resources it is age sixty-five (65). Reineck suggested decreasing the launch pass cost across the board, "It is not just the seniors that struggle to meet those fees." Reineck believes the city needs to get their fees in line with other ports. The question of whether Black River Park Marina transient folks are paying their slip fee plus their launch fee. Discussion of whether there would be benefit in an across the board cut as suggested by Reineck.

Motion by Pyle to offer a senior discount for those sixty-five and over of twenty-five (25) dollars off the one hundred (100) dollar seasonal launch pass at Black River Park Marina. Second by Reineck.

Yeas: Pyle, Reineck, Stephens, Strong, Arnold.  
Nays: None  
Silverman abstained.

Motion carried.

Motion by Silverman to recommend to the City Council the adoption of a Resolution Setting the seasonal and transient slip rates at South Haven Municipal Marinas with the following changes:

- Resolution page 1. Amend the paragraph beginning "Now, therefore, be it resolved . . ." to read "Now, therefore, be it resolved that the South Haven Municipal Marina and Boat Launch Rates for 2014 be set as follows."

- Resolution page 2. Add Black River Park seasonal launch pass discounted to seniors age sixty-five (65) and over at \$75.
- Resolution page 2. Amend the first sentence of the paragraph above the heading Transient Slip Fees to read: "The marina manager may request in writing from the city manager special rates for slips to improve occupancy."
- Resolution page 3. Under the heading Commercial Use of Black River Park, amend the second sentence to read: "Commercial launching is defined as the launching of watercraft available for hire." and the last sentence to read: "Annual Rental License for Each Motorized Vessel: \$50."

Second by Stephens.

All in favor. Motion carried.

During discussion VandenBosch explained that the North Side Marina continues to be treated as seasonal and the South Side Marina as transient but if there are open slips available on the North Side staff can rent them as transient.

Marple said we have an excellent facility and excellent location. Suggested that the three (3) facilities that are downstream from the bridge be branded; South Haven has "location, location, location"; close to the lake, close to restaurants, bars and shops that everyone can walk to. "We need to tell that boater all the things that are within walking distance of the boat slips."

Marple said there is already a move toward branding of our facilities as a Maritime District; to incorporate our rich maritime heritage into marketing. Yachting Magazine named South Haven one of the top ten ports in the world. All of these need to be used to promote our marinas, according to Marple.

Marple contends that the names North Side and South Side Marinas are boring and suggests the facilities be renamed in conjunction with the branding of the Maritime District. Marple suggested "Donahue Docks, named for the lighthouse keeper, the one-legged guy, that's historical, that's exciting!" What the marinas are named is not the point; the city needs to create a comprehensive program, moving forward from today, according to Marple. Marple informed that the way to do the branding is to hire it out. He has a quote for seven hundred fifty dollars (\$750) to create the logo and decent prices for a good website and new brochures for the boat shows later this year.

Marple reiterated that the Marina Manager needs the flexibility to provide rates and discounts to fill those docks; show the value, give the boaters a loyalty program. Noted that transient boaters spend \$250 to \$350 per day when they are in town. While Marple does not have all the ideas or plans he stated that, "We need to move forward fairly quickly. We should have things in place before the boat shows."

Marple would like to try advertising for a year to *Scuttlebutt* magazine which is distributed free in marinas to see what kind of response we get from the boaters. Marple does not want to advertise until the branding and renaming have been done.

Regarding Black River Park boaters, Marple suggested providing a couple of picnic areas until such time as Harbor Commission and Planning Commission get their five year Master Plan in place. For a small investment in tables and grills the amenities at Black River Park could be improved. That will not please everybody but will show that the city is not ignoring the folks at Black River Park. Pyle noted it shows progress.

In response to a question regarding what the next step should be Marple thinks if it is the opinion of this board that staff should start a marketing program the board needs to give city staff some direction. Marple would like to come back with two (2) or three (3) proposals from professionals on what they would suggest to have an effective marketing program before the boat shows. Silverman supports securing those proposals and submitting them as early as possible for review. Maybe have a workshop meeting and take some real action for moving forward.

Pyle questioned whether Marple has gotten feedback. Marple said after the early glitches the majority of the Maritime Museum and North Side seasonal boaters are happy. What needs to be done is look after our facilities. When the Maritime Museum folks saw the new building down the street they felt their facilities need some work.

Marple said, "If you look at reviews for Old Harbor Inn you will see there are some complaints regarding rooms that have not been refurbished; those rooms are discounted."

Stephens asked whether Marple has been sending out the electronic survey as has been done in the past to which Marple replied yes.

Stephens asked if Marple is going to increase participation at boat shows. After suggestions from the board, Marple pointed out the problem with the August dates is obvious, but he does plan to attend the two shows he attended last year.

## **7. Marina Facility Rental**

VandenBosch looked into Zoning and liquor regarding renting out marina facilities for events.

VandenBosch sought information from an event planner and some of the suggestions are:

- Staffing events at the beginning and end. This provides for a welcome, and for a quick inspection at the end. If cleaning is needed the staff person may order that. Also may be a need for changes in the room set up/furnishings for different events.

- The planner's observation was that the weekend rate was very low - \$500 for Friday or Saturday event for North Side in the evening.
- Also noted that both the North and South marina facilities could be rented. Over time as word got out that we were renting that it could be rented quite a bit. Due to the shortage of facilities to rent and the beauty of the marinas the city has a very good combination to market.

VandenBosch considered having a city rental manager but pointed out that the city does not have a city department that could do that. Noted that having someone other than the Marina Manager could create conflicts thus the city is looking at having the Marina Manager do this over the winter. VandenBosch would like a chance to rewrite the policy and start negotiations with the Marina Manager to manage marina rentals.

Silverman thinks it would be very hard to discuss until we see recommended language. Silverman provided information with rental policies and procedures of other municipalities.

Motion by Silverman to table Marina Rental until next meeting and then look at a more specific plan. Second by Reineck. Arnold noted staff should feel free to begin negotiations with Marple.

All in favor. Motion carries.

## **9. Marina Capital Improvement Plan**

Marple listed off thirty-three issues which boaters have complained about and explained that a good number of the major issues have been addressed while others have been started.

Marple wants to develop a plan to continually maintain and upgrade our facilities.

- Some work has been done at the Maritime Museum Marina so would like to finish that and rehab the existing restrooms (takes care of several of the listed complaints).
- South Side Marina facility is a little dated and needs a new roof, better ventilation & heating in the bathrooms.
- North Side Marina: Dock Boxes. Flotation System at the far end on the where the steel sheeting is so boaters could use it for dinghies and jet skis.
- Wants to get a powerful internet system working for next year. Would solve another major complaint.

The costs of improvement Marple listed are what he can do the work for; going out for bid will cost more money. Black River Park is not in Marple's proposal due to the Master Plan that is

being developed. Continual improvement makes folks happy and provides a good source of income for the city, according to Marple.

VandenBosch will use this information to put a budget together to bring back to this board. Thinks the metal roof at the Southside may already be budgeted for 2014, which Marple feels will dramatically improve the looks of that facility.

Pyle questioned whether grants should start to be researched for the Maritime Museum. Marple noted that VandenBosch is the grant guy; Marple is just identifying the need. Marple said whether we get grants or not we need to move forward in improving the facilities. We got the gas line in, once we get those gas grills in and the kitchen, clean up those bathrooms and get a canopy system, they will be really happy. Would like to have it be like what the Maritime Museum has done.

Should do something about fencing at some point, needs some signage "boaters only" around the basin.

### **Member and Staff Comments**

VandenBosch gave an update on Black River Park's Master Plan. There is a need for a restroom near the docks/launch/river as well as a fish cleaning station.

Old Harbor Moorings came in and revised their request with no extension of docks or pilings and we followed the procedure and were able to issue a permit.

Pyle questioned how we could entertain the extension of the Nichol's dock area and this one is not allowed to extend. VandenBosch noted that the Nichols dock was not going to go over the city project lines, whereas the Old Harbor Moorings was already out too far and then wanted to extend further.

Update on the dredging. Silverman said the last dredgers left an area near the north of the Idler that is only 4' in places. The Army Corps does not communicate much but VandenBosch has heard them on the radio and Strong said they were working today. VandenBosch noted the area which Silverman indicated was not shallow before the city's dredger did his work. VandenBosch will check soundings and get back with the board.

Pyle asked when Grow America will be taking the bag system away. VandenBosch believes it will be in November or December. They do plan to come back and excavate on north and south sides there is some riprap that needs to be put back up. Black River Park marina will also be done with an excavator.

### **Adjourn**

Motion by Strong, second by Stephens to adjourn at 7:44 p.m.

September 17, 2013  
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All in favor. Motion carried.

RESPECTFULLY SUBMITTED,

Marsha Ransom  
Recording Secretary