

Minutes for Pillar Point Harbor Public Meeting Update: Improvements to existing facilities and future developments including Perched Beach

Date of Meeting: 10/3/2011

Place of Meeting: HMB Yacht Club, Princeton

Present for Harbor District: Harbor Commission President Pietro Parravano, Vice-President Jim Tucker, General Manager Peter Grenell

Introduction by President Parravano:

Pillar Point Harbor has grown and changed since the time it was solely a fishing community without breakwaters, piers, docks or any infrastructure. Pillar Point became a Harbor of Refuge for the fishing fleet and other vessels, and it is growing and changing. Changes to and in the fishing industry, fishermen and farmers working together as part of efforts in the County to educate the public about improved nutrition, and the importance of seafood and the marine ecosystem, have impacts on the harbor.

It is now a site not only for commercial and sport fishing but for education, boating venues, events, search and rescue, restaurants and stores. There are several changes in the harbor because our society, needs, and our environment have changed, including, for example, the increase in frequency of visitors to the harbor. Now, the Gulf of the Farallones National Marine Sanctuary would like to have a visitors' interpretive center there. Also, revenue sources the Harbor District relies on are not the same as they were thirty years ago.

Change is inevitable. What would regular harbor users, and the general public, like to see in the harbor? The Harbor District is not only a place for the community; it is also an attraction to people outside the community. How can we balance everything out?

So, we want to hear what you want to see happen with and in the harbor.

The Harbor District is a steward of sovereign lands of the people of California at Pillar Point, and built Pillar Point Harbor under a tidelands grant from the State of California. That is important to keep in mind as we look for future activities and events we would like to have at the harbor.

GM Grenell: There are two concurrent outlooks for the Harbor District:

1. Immediate: Operating and maintaining the facility, keeping it safe, usable, and exciting, a source of revenue, and a place for learning and enjoyment. Revenue needs to be diversified to lower the burden on existing users and rate payers.
2. Future: There is a shrinking of the revenue base due to the changes in fisheries. How do we address this challenge? The harbor needs to respond to the growing and expanding needs for increased revenues, educational opportunities and ocean research and make it a welcoming venue for new marine-oriented waterfront activities.

In parallel with ongoing maintenance of our facility, we are looking for new activities that are compatible with the harbor and which generate new revenue. We are looking at a possible new development at Perched Beach. It extends the opportunity for community-oriented marine recreation (non-motorized), and a possible community center. We have made initial contacts with Federal and State agencies that are ocean or marine-related. We see the coastal trail passing through the harbor. We are looking to grant funds from the Coastal Conservancy and it looks positive. We need to hear from the community what is most important, urgent, desirable, beneficial, and necessary as we look forward to this project.

We have some long term items as well. Romeo Pier needs to be replaced. It represents an opportunity. If we were to remove it we could get mitigation credit from the Coastal Commission if and when the District builds a new pier.

In the past year and a half we had 55 requests for use of the harbor for events, which have had little if anything to do with the harbor; and we are currently in the process of putting together an events policy to address this situation.

The Harbor District pays rent of about \$100,000 to rent offices in South San Francisco. We need to have a building of our own so we can stop paying rent and have been saving for that. We want to be at Pillar Point. We are looking at Perched Beach, an artificial beach that belongs to the District, to locate those offices. We did not want to spend scarce funds to buy land in Princeton or next to Pillar Point. Other agencies have expressed interest in coming to Pillar Point as well.

Comr. Tucker: Gave a brief outline of the Perched Beach concept, including a protective bulkhead, coastal trail link, a marine sanctuary visitor center, a community center focused on public marine recreation activities, expanded beach access, a new District office, and other compatible revenue-generating uses.

At this point we want to bring it back to the community and ask for your input. What do you want to see happening? This is the second in a series of meetings on this topic. This is just the beginning of the process; nothing is set in concrete.

Now we will open it for questions.

Q. What was the plan that was brought to you?

A. Tucker: It was conceptual. It had several buildings and the center was a community center. It had two or three outside buildings; one was for the Kayak Company. We might build an ADA-compliant bathroom and make a nice beach area to put the kayaks in. We don't know yet. We are still in the planning stages.

Q. What about parking? Is Perched Beach going to be filled in as a parking area?

A. Tucker: We have to make provisions for parking. We have to look into County codes and ordinance provisions. This is all in the planning stage.

Q. You have mentioned that there are agencies interested in leasing space from the District. Are there any letters of intent? I have heard that the Gulf of the Farallones Marine Sanctuary is not interested.

A. Grenell: No, there are no letters. What you heard was incorrect about that agency not being interested. Commissioner Parravano was a member of working group of local citizens that was called together by the Farallones Sanctuary for an entire year trying to conceptualize what the San Mateo County Coast Visitor and Interpretive Center might be, what it would be doing, how it would attract and educate the people along the coast about the ocean environment. Then that group looked at various options and concluded that the preferred site would be Pillar Point Harbor. They are not interested in building their own building; if they could rent that would be optimal.

Q. Have you thought about having the Coast Guard stationed at Pillar Point? It could bring in Federal monies and help with the silting problem.

A. Grenell: In the 1970's there was an initial plan to have the Coast Guard here, but that never happened. Most recently we have considered having a Coast Guard presence at the harbor. As most of you know, the Pillar Point Harbor Patrol has done outstanding work for decades in search and rescue activities. We are the first responders on the San Mateo County Coast. We would not see the Coast Guard replacing the Harbor Patrol; they would complement each other's services with their operations.

Q. What would be the square footage and height for the building?

A. Grenell: County zoning height limit is 28 feet, but we just met with the Coastal Commission staff and learned that the Coastal Commission has permit jurisdiction.

Q. How many square feet do you need for your offices?

A. Grenell: We are looking at including a Harbor Commission meeting room that might double as a harbor patrol training room, so it would be roughly 5,000 square feet.

Comment: Perched Beach is the last place to put a canoe or kayak in the water. It is a great idea about bringing other venues to the harbor. Maybe there could be a high school rowing camp or a kid's camp. Please leave as much of the beach as you can.

Response: Perched beach is a tremendous asset and we want to maintain as much of it as possible and we are looking to extend that beach access and make sure that kind of access is there.

Comment: The biggest concern is having the Administrative offices on the beach. Driving to work there is less and less of Half Moon Bay with the buildings and trees. What brings people out to HMB? It is the working fisherman. It is a working port. The building does not serve the fisherman. Keep water and fishing-related activities in Princeton. Princeton has to stay a fishing port.

Response: Grenell: We couldn't agree with you more. There are other multiple compatible uses that will enable us to carry out the intent and focus of the working harbor. The State Dept. of Boating and Waterways is interested in principle in having a Northern California harbor patrol training center at Pillar Point Harbor, in a building we have built in which they can rent a space. Also, the State Department of Fish and Game could set up an incident command center in the event of an oil spill. There would be a cost share component to this.

Q. Couldn't some of this be done on the green pier (Romeo Pier)?

A. Grenell: The green pier is deteriorated and unusable. More than 25% of the pilings don't reach the bottom. Its remaining value to the Harbor District is a mitigation credit if and when we demolish it. We would then have credits to build a new pier. That is a long term project and we are not in position to wait for that. We put the pier replacement on hold due to finances. It would be much more costly than the development on Perched Beach.

Q. Who is going to rent space at the Coast? How will you determine if it is viable before you start?

A. Grenell: We have information from the Farallones Marine Sanctuary indicating a very strong interest in renting space for their visitor center. Anything developed outside of Pillar Point Harbor would be more expensive because we'd have to buy land.

Q. In looking at the harbor where is the maintenance? Is there a haul out?

A. Grenell: There was a haul out many years ago. The Harbor District was leasing the property for a haul out and it was a financial nightmare. The fleet was not supporting the boat yard activity. The District is looking at the idea of a small emergency haul out in the harbor.

Comment: People come to the harbor because of the beauty of it. It is on a post card. If you put an office building on it the postcard would change. Demolish the current building and put a new building up. It would not block a view and the postcard would remain the same.

Response: Grenell: We are not looking to put a monolithic building on Perched Beach. This is just the type of comment we need to hear. We are only in the planning stages and welcome your views.

Comment: There is extremely limited space there and the fishermen need the space. Why not do it in Princeton? There is a down market and a good deal could be picked up.

Q. What is plan B? Is the District working with Boating and Waterways to come up with a solution other than creating parking on Perched Beach? There is a lot of parking in the harbor.

A. Grenell: We must look at plan B whatever it is. We are considering alternatives.

Comment: The parking lot behind the Ketch is a good place for a building. There is about 20,000 square feet there. Leave Perched Beach alone and maybe add picnic areas and make it more inviting for people to come and sit and relax.

Comment: The hotel blocked out 1/3 of the view off Highway 1 and the trees in the RV park are blocking a view. If you build anything that you can see from the seat in your car then it will not be built. What's going on with the vacant office space at PPH now? The shops can be 2-story buildings, and the current Harbor Master office can be demolished. Whatever is done should not block the view. The Harbor District needs to check its whole pricing scheme. There is a citation from harbor code.

Response: Grenell: Please get us the citation number.

Comment: Revenue is based on service. Some of the service from the Harbor Patrol needs some review. Low service equals lower revenues.

Closing: Parravano:

1. There is definitely a lot of community interest.
2. There is a real concern about the "postcard" and how we can make changes without changing the "postcard" image and views.
3. Question to pursue: What are the possibilities?
4. Question to pursue: What kinds of alternatives make more sense?

