

**MINUTES  
HARBOR CAPACITY STUDY  
STEERING COMMITTEE MEETING  
WEDNESDAY, MARCH 24, 2021  
DESTIN CITY HALL ANNEX CHAMBERS  
5:30 PM**

**1. CALL TO ORDER/PLEDGE OF ALLEGIANCE**

The Harbor Capacity Study Steering Committee met in regular session with the following members and City staff present:

**2. ROLL CALL:**

**Members Present**

Jason Klosterman  
Mike Buckingham  
Michael Dombrowski  
John Stephens  
Eddie Morgan  
Capt. Jim Green  
Patrick Wilson  
Ian Blaise

**Staff Present**

Community Development Director Louis Zunguze  
City Planner/Floodplain Manager Traci Goodhart  
Principal Planner Lauren Witt  
City Planner Daniel Butler  
Code Compliance Manager Joey Forgione  
City Clerk Rey Bailey  
Land Use Attorney Kimberly Kopp (virtual)

**VISITOR**

Meredith LaDart, Project Manager, USACE (virtual)

**3. APPROVAL OF Minutes**

A) February 24, 2021

Committee member Buckingham moved for approval of February 24, 2021 meeting minutes; seconded by Committee member Klosterman. Motion passed 8-0.

**4. NEW BUSINESS**

A) Destin Harbor and Waterways Issues

City Planner Traci Goodhart noted that City staff is bringing forth their collective views of issues that have been brought to their attention. Staff identified issues and/or concerns that may be addressed under each goal and objectives, and that they are being presented to this committee to afford them the opportunity to comment on these issues/concerns and decide whether they need to be included in the harbor capacity study.

Community Development Director Louis Zunguze clarified that staff is simply providing their initial thoughts on these issues just to facilitate some discussions. The committee can delete or add to the list or create a completely new list of ideas they feel is critical to the study.

Ms. Meredith LaDart, Project Manager, US Army Corps of Engineers (USACE), facilitated the discussions on the following topics:

- The Harbor Capacity Study will, among other things, focus on the following three goals and objectives:
  - ❖ Protect the environmental health of the harbor and surrounding waterways
  - ❖ Promote safety and enjoyment on our local waters
  - ❖ Promote the economic viability of businesses operating on or along the harbor



- Goal: Protect Environmental Health of the Harbor and Surrounding Waterways
  - ❖ Boat Cleaning
  - ❖ Parking Lot Runoff
  - ❖ Litter
  - ❖ Pump out stations
  - ❖ Harbor pump efficiency
  - ❖ Shoreline erosion
  - ❖ Widening of the Navigational Channel

DISCUSSIONS:

Chairman Green noted that the boat cleaning issue and requiring permits to clean vessels on the harbor has previously been discussed. He stated that boat cleaning has been going on in the harbor for over a century. They do not seem to have a lot of long-term negative effect on the harbor. In most cases, mild detergents are being used. The State already has laws as to the type of detergents to be used on the waterways. Fishing boats are being cleaned on the way in and then freshwater rinsed on the way back into the harbor. He does not feel this is a top priority issue for the study at this point as compared to the other issues that are listed. He recommends removing this item from the list.

Committee member Morgan stated that the boat cleaning issue may be more about people cleaning and painting their boats on their upland property along the harbor, getting ready for the upcoming season; and that the runoff from these activities potentially going back into the harbor.

According to Ms. LaDart, this issue is related to upland boat cleaning.

Chairman Green withdrew his recommendation to remove this item from the list.

Committee member Buckingham asked whether they should consider adding boat fueling on this list.

Committee member Blaise stated there is already some congestions on fuel docks, a lot of which is private use, especially during the summertime. If there is a capacity study done to determine there is not sufficient amount of fuel docks, he is not sure how it would work mandating upland properties to start offering an extra pump.

According to Committee member Buckingham, this issue is more about people fueling their boats in places other than at certified locations, and fuel going into the waterways may be a cause of concerns for USACE, FDEP and other State entities. He added there are businesses using gas cans and other improper equipment to fuel their vessels, which also creates a fire hazard. He feels this issue needs to be addressed further.

Committee member Dombrowski stated that with the price of fuel continuing to increase, he has been noticing that a lot of people, mostly recreational boaters, are now going to service stations filling up 5-gallon gas cans, bringing them back and fueling their boats. He recommends having further discussion on fueling on the harbor waterways.

Chairman Green noted there seem to be a consensus to add “proper fueling on the harbor waterways” to the list.

Committee member Stephens recommends also adding “fuel contingency plan” which concerns having all the proper equipment.

Committee member Blaise noted there are a lot of oil changes going on in the harbor and would like to know exactly how people are disposing their dirty oil. He would like to see “proper oil containment” and “proper oil disposal” be added to the fuel discussion.

Chairman Green also stated that “shoreline erosion” may be an item they could delete from the list. He stated that a lot of people support their properties, and that there are a lot of seawalls already in place.

Committee member Buckingham agreed, stating that the last thing property owners want to happen is to lose any of their shoreline. They will do everything possible to protect their property.

There were no objections from other committee members on removing “shoreline erosion” from the list.

Committee member Dombrowski reported seeing fish carcasses floating in the waters on a daily basis, most of which are being dumped there by private boaters.

Chairman Green recommends adding “proper disposals of carcasses” to the list.

Committee member Buckingham wants to have more discussions about stormwater under the “parking lot runoff” issue.

Chairman Green agrees they should add “prohibiting stormwater runoff in the coastal waters” in their discussion.



➤ Goal: Promote safety and enjoyment of local waterways

- ❖ Number of Boats operating in and around the Destin Harbor
- ❖ Adequate parking and/or launch facilities
- ❖ Boat Operators familiarity with local conditions and/or boat operation
- ❖ Commercial and Recreational conflicts
- ❖ Lack of Wayfinding Signage (Upland & Waterward)

DISCUSSIONS:

Chairman Green stated that the above topics are extremely important, and that one thing he definitely hope to come out of the harbor capacity study is justification for widening the channel and potentially moving it into the middle of the harbor. This would enable them to create more slips and more infrastructure on the northern side of the gulf.

Committee member Klosterman noted that it goes hand in hand with having adequate parking. It is very important to determine the actual number and types of vessels operating in the harbor, the number of vessels coming from different areas, and whether there is adequate parking for these vessels.

According to Committee member Morgan, there is not enough parking for boats that are coming into the harbor. As a restaurant owner, he has had to contend with this problem daily all summer long.

Committee member Dombrowski expressed that safe operations and navigability within the harbor is critical, and it ties in with the number of boats and inadequate parking in the harbor. There should not be mooring allowed around Norriego Point, at least within the first 1500 feet from the end of the new channel as he had witnessed people swimming across the channel in the middle of summer. He also agrees with widening and relocating the channel. He also stated that they need more and better-defined channel markers, not only within the federal navigation channel on the northside of the harbor but also on the southside that goes by Destin Harbor Resort and along the East Pass Marina.

Committee member Buckingham noted that he has been working on trying to come up with a City marina which can accommodate more transient slips as well as fuel and pump out stations.

Chairman Green stated there are no items under the above goal that he could recommend removing as he feels they are all important.

Committee member Blaise commented that the item “boat operators’ familiarity with local conditions and/or boat operation” is such a daunting task, and that he does not see how it can be addressed by USACE.

Chairman Green stated that the result of the study may be able to justify the City investing some money and efforts in promoting safe operations in the harbor and waterways, which could also serve as educational tool once they are able to widen and move the channel.



➤ Goal: Promote of the economic viability of businesses operating on or along the Harbor

- ❖ Lack of vehicle parking
- ❖ Vehicle and Pedestrian Accessibility
- ❖ Lack of public/transient boat slips
- ❖ No support infrastructure for water dependent businesses (Dry Storage)
- ❖ Widening of the Navigational Channel
- ❖ Wayfinding Signage

Committee member Stephens commented that with regards to “lack of vehicle parking” along the harbor, there are vessels that pick-up passengers from upland properties; and that those parking spaces need to be the responsibility of the upland businesses.

Committee member Morgan stated that in that scenario, parking needs to be the responsibility of the upland businesses; however, a lot of times vessel operators pick up passengers from the upland businesses without the owners’ permission.

Committee member Buckingham stated that though it would be tough to enforce, the upland owner that is allowing it should be able to show they have enough parking in their master plan or they should be fined. Likewise, vessel operators that are picking up passengers from the upland businesses without the owners’ permission should be cited.

Chairman Green stated this could be one of their recommendations to the City Council based on the result of the study.

Next, Chairman Green stated that the item “no support infrastructure for water dependent business (dry storage)” should not be a big focus of the study because there is no place for a dry storage at this time due to congestion in the harbor.

Committee member Buckingham noted there had been some discussions about a private property owner possibly building a high-end dry storage harbor marina. In which case, it would have to go through a development order process. He recommends that item stays on the list.

According to Committee member Morgan, he is not aware of any properties on the harbor that would potentially be able to put up a large dry storage facility with enough parking.

There was a question as to whether making an assessment regarding this particular issue is the responsibility of the Harbor CRA Advisory Committee.

Chairman Green pointed out that the capacity study covers the east pass, harbor, the bay, and bayous, which is all inclusive of the Destin waterways.

Committee member Dombroski pointed out that the harbor channel was authorized by US Congress, and that it would require a congressional approval to modify it. He asked whether USACE has had any experience in changing congressionally authorized projects; and if so, what is involved in the process.

Ms. LaDart explained that the harbor channel is federally authorized channel, and USACE can perform a general reevaluation report. They could do a study to specifically look at widening and moving the channel. The key question is whether the current channel was constructed to the authorized depth and width or if there was a greater depth and width authorized, but the channel was only constructed to a smaller footprint. If it was constructed to a smaller footprint, and they want to construct it to the authorized depth and width, then they would need additional authorization from Congress, and they would need appropriation for a study. One of this committee's recommendation could be that they believe based on the amount of traffic they need the channel widen by a certain number of feet, and that they need the channel moved. She also stated that USACE provides cost sharing and operations and maintenance of federal channels; and so, if the City wants to move and widen the channel, they will certainly want USACE's construction dollars. She added that it could be a mid-term recommendation. It is not something that could happen within the next year or two. It would require a separate study to look at optimization of what the widening would be, and then appropriation for construction.

Chairman Green asked if this committee could recommend to Council to start this process immediately.

According to Ms. LaDart, they would need to see who the original non-federal sponsor was (City or County) and when the original channel was authorized and who participated in that project. They would also need funding for the feasibility study through the President's budget or Congressional "earmarking." She added that USACE could start working on the language for the study.

The Land Use Attorney stated that since this process is very time consuming, this committee could go ahead and recommend to the City Council to direct staff to initiate the process of gathering the necessary information for the application for widening and relocating the harbor channel.

**Chairman Green moved to recommend to the City Council to direct staff to initiate the process of gathering the necessary information for the application process for widening and relocating the harbor channel; seconded by Committee member Buckingham.**

According to Ms. LaDart, she will be able to pull the original authorizing language for the project, which is kept on file at USACE; and that they could at least provide the City the specifications, construction date, original sponsor, and cost.

**Motion passed 8-0.**

## **5. PUBLIC COMMENTS**

Mr. Claude Perry, a Destin resident, noted that the committee has not discussed US Hwy 98 runoff, which he considers the absolute biggest pollutant to the harbor. He urged the committee to consider putting this item on the list to be discussed and studied. He also stated that the other important matter was the pump out station. He found out that the Destin Water Users will not accept pump outs from boats. He asked the committee to explore this issue, adding that if they are to increase the number of boats, they would need more pump out stations.

Committee member Klosterman stated that this issue definitely needs to be addressed. He went to great length in finding a place where they could pump out and then work on their system. He contacted several different companies to come out and pump his vessel but was unsuccessful. He started contacting different facilities within the bay, and as far as Niceville, but they were all down.

Mr. Perry also noted that the City already has the authority to control the floating carcasses in the waterways, which was discussed earlier.

Code Compliance Manager Joey Forgione noted that they already have the regulations on the books, however, they also need to catch the offender in the act to be able to cite them.

Mr. Guy Tadlock, a Destin resident, stated that the harbor is obviously very important to this community. This committee could do a lot to improve the harbor, but they could also do things that could harm it. He pointed out that the number of boat slips have increased so much since he first arrived in this area in 1957. It was less than 30 then; and it is probably 1200 to 1500 now. He recommends the capacity study identifies the number of boat slips in the harbor and how much this number has increased since 1957; adding that satellite photos and Google Earth are great sources of information.

Mr. Tadlock also stated that widening and relocating the channel will be contradictory to what this committee has been assigned to do with regards to the harbor carrying capacity study. He continued that the main reason for relocating the channel is to build longer docks. Destin Yacht Club is currently the longest dock in the harbor at 400 feet long, while the rest are 200 feet or less. With regards to parking, they need at least 3 parking spaces for a boat slip, depending on the capacity of the vessel. He also stated that if they are dependent upon the harbor flushing pump and water quality, they are going down the wrong path. The pump is quite unreliable. It has not been running very much. Water quality is a big issue in the harbor. The City does water sampling throughout the harbor, but the big question is whether they are measuring the right materials. He recommends not moving the channel as it would be quite costly, and it could take quite a long time to do so. He added there are a lot of other things this committee could focus on that could solve the other problems they have in the harbor.

Chairman Green expressed that widening and moving the channel would create more transient slips to accommodate the traffic that comes through there through the waterways.

According to Mr. Tadlock, they need to determine the exact number of existing slips and how many are transient slips; adding they need to better utilize the slips they already have before moving forward.

## **6. MEMBERS REPORTS**

Committee member Buckingham commented that one of the major concerns is water quality. He stated that he has worked on the pump station for the City many times in the past. The pump station does not work like it should and it is very expensive to operate. He asked if it is possible to do directional boring and just have inlets where the water from the Gulf could naturally flow back and forth as the tides go.

Committee member Dombrowski noted that they looked at this issue about 20 years ago and determined there was not enough differential in the tides to drive up a flow through these pipes. They also looked at dredging out the shoal and putting that channel in the middle of the harbor. Based on their analysis, doing so could increase the flushing capacity of the harbor. He added there are environmental benefits to having a wider channel in the center of the harbor.

**7. NEXT SCHEDULED MEETING – April 28, 2021**

**ADJOURNMENT**

Having no further business at this time, the meeting was adjourned at 7:25 PM.



A handwritten signature in black ink, appearing to read 'Jim Green', is written over a horizontal line. The signature is stylized and cursive.

**Jim Green, Chairman**