

NEWPORT BEACH HARBOR COMMISSION REGULAR MEETING MINUTES
City Council Chambers – 100 Civic Center Drive, Newport Beach
Wednesday, July 8, 2026
5 p.m.

1. CALL MEETING TO ORDER

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

2. ROLL CALL

PRESENT: Marie Marston, Vice Chair
Steve Scully, Secretary
Sabrina Kerr, Commissioner
Thom McElroy, Commissioner
Bob Miller, Commissioner
Rudy Svrcek, Commissioner
Gary Williams, Commissioner

ABSENT: None

Staff Members: Paul Blank, Harbormaster
Chris Miller, Public Works Administration Manager
Cynthia Shintaku, Management Analyst

3. PLEDGE OF ALLEGIANCE – Commissioner Williams

Vice Chair Marie Marston welcomed newly appointed Commissioners Sabrina Kerr and Thom McElroy to the Harbor Commission and invited each to introduce themselves and share their interest in serving on the Commission.

Commissioner Kerr stated that she previously worked on the water and has experience in the maritime environment, including yacht operations, engine maintenance, navigation, and situational awareness. Although she now works in an office setting, she expressed her desire to remain connected to Newport Harbor and viewed service on the Harbor Commission as an opportunity to continue contributing to the waterfront community.

Commissioner McElroy shared that his connection to Newport Harbor began at age ten through boating and fishing. He explained that he is now an avid prone paddler and has paddled throughout every channel in the harbor, giving him a broad perspective on both its strengths and challenges. Encouraged by conversations with current and former Harbor Commissioners, he expressed enthusiasm for serving the City and helping support the harbor's continued success.

4. ELECTION OF OFFICERS

Recommendation:

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, Chapter 3, because it has no potential for resulting in physical change to the environment, directly or indirectly; and
2. Elect Chair; and
3. Elect Vice Chair; and
4. Elect Secretary.

Vice Chair Marston opened nominations for the position of Chair.

Secretary Steve Scully nominated Vice Chair Marston to serve as Chair. Seconded by Commission Williams. No additional nominations were received.

Ayes: Kerr, McElroy, Miller, Svrcek, Williams, Scully, Marston
Nays: None
Abstain: None
Absent: None

Chair Marston opened nominations for the position of Vice Chair.

Commissioner Miller nominated Secretary Scully to serve as Vice Chair. Seconded by Chair Marston. No additional nominations were received.

The motion carried by the following roll call vote:

Ayes: Kerr, McElroy, Miller, Svrcek, Williams, Scully, Marston
Nays: None
Abstain: None
Absent: None

Chair Marston opened nominations for the position of Secretary.

Vice Chair Scully nominated Commissioner Miller to serve as Secretary. Seconded by Chair Marston. No additional nominations were received.

Vice Chair Scully nominated Commissioner Miller to serve as Secretary. Seconded by Chair Marston.

The motion carried by the following roll call vote:

Ayes: Kerr, McElroy, Svrcek, Williams, Miller, Scully, Marston
Nays: None
Abstain: None
Absent: None

Chair Marston thanked the outgoing officers for their service, and congratulated the newly elected officers.

5. PUBLIC COMMENTS (NON-AGENDA ITEMS)

Chair Marston opened public comments.

Sandy Manich introduced herself as a legal liveaboard permit holder of more than 15 years, a school teacher in the Orange Unified School District, and an administrative credential candidate. She noted that she had applied to serve on the Harbor Commission and wished to share her perspective as a longtime harbor user. She discussed changes to harbor management beginning in 2017, stating that the transition from the Orange County Sheriff's Harbor Patrol to the City's current harbor management model resulted in the loss of a continuous armed law enforcement presence in the harbor. She expressed her view that the Sheriff's Harbor Patrol had provided highly trained personnel and enhanced harbor security.

Ms. Manich further stated that, as a liveaboard resident who had been encouraged to serve as the "eyes and ears" of the harbor, she has submitted more than 100 reports of code violations to City staff in an effort to improve harbor safety and appearance. She expressed disappointment that her reports had not

been well received and cited a deteriorated piling at the Washington Street Public Dock as an example of a maintenance concern she intended to document and share with the Commission.

Adam Leverenz referenced comments made at a previous Harbor Commission meeting regarding positive recognition the City had received from The Log maritime publication. He also presented editorial cartoons previously published by The Log that criticized past Harbor Commission actions related to the harbor mooring realignment program.

Mr. Leverenz encouraged the Commission, including its newly appointed members, to carefully consider factual information when evaluating future harbor issues. He expressed concern that significant public funds had been spent pursuing initiatives that were ultimately unsuccessful, noting that the California Coastal Commission denied the proposed mooring realignment. He stated that he hopes future discussions will be more collaborative and fact-driven and cautioned that future harbor policy decisions could have significant impacts on yacht clubs, affordable recreational boating, residential mooring permit holders, homeowners, and commercial boating interests. He concluded by encouraging the Commission to discuss these issues proactively in an effort to avoid unintended consequences.

Chair Marston closed public comments.

6. APPROVAL OF MINUTES

1. Draft Minutes of the June 10, 2026, Harbor Commission Regular Meeting

Chair Marston opened public comments.

Jim Mosher addressed the Commission regarding the draft minutes from the previous meeting. He explained that after leaving the prior meeting early to attend another event, he later reviewed the meeting minutes and noticed a reference to the Ben Carlson paddle crossing from Catalina Island to Newport Beach.

Mr. Mosher stated that the draft minutes identified former Mayor Will O'Neill as having completed the crossing with Commissioner McElroy. After reviewing the meeting video, he noted that the former Chair had referred only to a "former mayor" without identifying the individual by name. He suggested that, for accuracy, the minutes should either refer only to a "former mayor" or identify the individual as former Mayor Joe Stapleton, whom he believed was the person being referenced.

Chair Marston closed public comments.

Vice Chair Scully moved to approve the June 10, 2026 Harbor Commission Regular Meeting minutes, as amended. Seconded by Secretary Miller. The motion carried by the following roll call vote:

Ayes: Svrcek, Miller, Scully, Martson

Nays: None

Abstain: Kerr, McElroy, Williams

Absent: None

7. CURRENT BUSINESS

7.1 Progress Update - Small Vessel Rental Customer Safety Program: City-Produced Safety Video, Knowledge Quiz, and Certification Process

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; or

3. Provide direction to staff and/or the Newport Harbor Safety Committee regarding the implementation of the City-produced safety video, knowledge quiz, and certification process as a strong suggestion or potential requirement for all single-day small vessel rental concession operators and their customers in Newport Harbor.

Vice Chair Scully presented an update on the Safety Committee's proposed Water Rental Safety Program, which has been under development for more than a year. He explained that the proposal was developed in response to the exemption that allows single-day rental customers to operate rental vessels without obtaining a California Boater Safety Card. He noted that the program is intended to improve boater safety by providing renters with an online educational resource before arriving at a rental concession.

Vice Chair Scully demonstrated a prototype website featuring the City's existing harbor safety video followed by a 10-question online quiz. He explained that participants who achieve a passing score of 80 percent would receive a certificate that could be printed or emailed to both the renter and the rental concessionaire as verification of completion. He played the Safety Video for those in attendance.

Vice Chair Scully demonstrated how users would complete the proposed online safety training. He explained that the website could be accessed from a smartphone, tablet, or computer and completed before arriving at the rental concession, allowing participants to complete the training at their convenience without delaying the rental process. He walked the Commission through the ten-question safety quiz, which covers topics including life jacket requirements, the harbor speed limit, channel navigation, pre-rental safety briefings, vessel operation, emergency procedures, trash disposal, safe boating practices, and emergency response.

Vice Chair Scully demonstrated the quiz by answering each question, resulting in a perfect score. He explained that upon successful completion, users can enter their name and email address to receive a completion certificate electronically. He noted that the certificate may also be emailed directly to the rental concessionaire or printed and presented when picking up the rental vessel. He stated that the online training, quiz, and completion certificate together provide a convenient method for renters to complete the proposed safety education program before arriving at the rental facility.

Vice Chair Scully reported that preliminary discussions with several rental concessionaires had been generally positive. He noted that suggestions received included modifying the program to reflect that personal watercraft renters are required to wear life jackets at all times and considering separate educational tracks for powered and human-powered vessels. He recommended expanding outreach by meeting with all Marine Activities Permit holders to review the proposal, gather additional feedback, and discuss implementation strategies.

Commissioner Svrcek expressed strong support for the concept and stated that an educational program is needed to improve safety on Newport Harbor. He suggested identifying one individual as the responsible operator for each rental party, adding information about avoiding mooring fields to prevent propeller entanglements, providing clearer guidance on the location of public restrooms, and incorporating additional harbor operating rules into the educational materials so renters receive that information before arriving.

Commissioner Williams supported the proposal and recommended adding a drop-down list of approved rental concessionaires so users could easily identify the vendor receiving their completion certificate. He also suggested providing a downloadable map or graphic identifying public restrooms and businesses offering restroom access, and emphasized the importance of establishing a practical method for rental operators to verify that customers completed the training before receiving a vessel. Later in the discussion, he suggested offering incentives, such as a small rental discount, to encourage customers to provide feedback on the program and identify information that may have been missing from the training.

Secretary Miller complimented the Safety Committee's work and stated that the proposal was moving in the right direction. He recommended expanding the educational content to include additional "rules of the road" and navigation scenarios commonly encountered in Newport Harbor, such as interactions with sailing regattas. He also asked whether participation in the safety program could become a condition of Marine Activities Permits and inquired about vessel maintenance requirements in light of recent public comments concerning rental vessel safety. He suggested that renters who already possess a valid California Boater Safety Card should be permitted to satisfy the educational requirement without completing the online quiz.

Commissioner McElroy commended Vice Chair Scully for developing the program and stated that it would improve safety and cleanliness throughout the harbor. He recommended requiring the individual completing the quiz to verify their identity by uploading a driver's license or similar identification so rental operators could confirm that the certificate matched the person operating the vessel.

Commissioner Kerr expressed support for the proposal and asked why rental customers are exempt from the California Boater Safety Card requirement. After receiving clarification that the exemption is established by state law, she stated that she supported the recommendations offered by the other commissioners.

Secretary Miller asked whether individuals who already possess a California Boater Card could be allowed to bypass the online safety quiz, noting that they have already completed a state-approved boating safety course.

Vice Chair Scully agreed that presenting a valid California Boater Card would be an appropriate alternative to completing the proposed online training and quiz.

Chair Marston supported moving the proposal forward and suggested incorporating information about the City's harbor application.

Vice Chair Scully noted that there is a QR code system to help visitors locate public restrooms and public docks. He noted that the City was having difficulty with operators promoting the QR code in the boat.

Commissioner Svrcek suggested that, in addition to the QR code linking to the harbor map and safety information, rental vessels should also include a printed hard-copy map. He noted that having the map readily available in the vessel would make information such as restroom locations and other harbor amenities immediately accessible without requiring users to locate and scan a QR code.

Vice Chair Scully acknowledged the suggestion for consideration as the program continues to be refined.

Commissioner Williams noted that Newport Beach public restrooms are already listed in Apple Maps. He suggested that the proposed safety program include a reminder that users can locate nearby public restrooms by searching Apple Maps, providing an additional navigation option for visitors unfamiliar with the harbor.

Chair Marston supported meeting with the rental concessionaires to gather their feedback before finalizing the program. She noted that because most customers reserve rentals by phone or email, concessionaires could notify renters in advance about the safety training requirement. She explained that doing so would allow participants to complete the training before arriving, minimizing any impact on the rental process. She also recommended adding information regarding prevailing wind conditions, particularly for operators of human-powered watercraft, to reduce situations in which renters are unable to return safely.

Vice Chair Scully stated that the next step is to engage the rental concessionaires by holding a meeting to gather their feedback and encourage their participation in the proposed safety program. He acknowledged that new requirements may not initially be well received, but emphasized the importance of

explaining the program's purpose and its goal of improving safety throughout Newport Harbor. He indicated that the Commission's comments could be incorporated into the quiz, while noting that revisions to the instructional video would likely require additional production costs. He also expressed uncertainty about the extent to which participation in the program could be required under current law, observing that the existing proposal may need to begin as a voluntary program. He concluded that even voluntary participation would encourage renters to think more intentionally about safe boating practices before operating a rental vessel.

Secretary Bob Miller suggested incorporating a mechanism for collecting customer feedback after completion of the safety program. He proposed partnering with rental concessionaires to offer a small incentive, such as a discount on a future rental, in exchange for participant feedback. He noted that even experienced boaters can overlook important details and stated that feedback from first-time renters could help identify information that was missing or unclear, allowing the safety program to be refined over time.

Harbormaster Blank responded to several questions raised during the Commission's discussion. In response to Secretary Miller, he explained that Marine Activities Permits do not currently require rental operators to provide a formal safety briefing. He noted that the Commission could recommend adding such a requirement as a condition of future Marine Activities Permit issuance or renewal. Addressing additional questions regarding vessel maintenance and recent public comments, he stated that rental vessels are required to either maintain a valid U.S. Coast Guard Certificate of Inspection or comply with applicable manufacturer specifications. He explained that the City conducts inspections of vessels not subject to Coast Guard inspection requirements and noted that prior concerns involving additional battery systems on electric rental boats had been eliminated through the City's inspection and enforcement process.

In response to Commissioner Kerr's question regarding why single-day rental customers are exempt from obtaining a California Boater Safety Card, Harbormaster Blank explained that the exemption was established during the State's legislative process following advocacy by the California Chamber of Commerce, which argued that requiring a Boater Safety Card for one-day rentals would create an undue burden on rental operators. He noted that changing the exemption would require action at the state level.

Vice Chair Scully responded to comments regarding vessel maintenance by stating that the proposed rental safety program should remain focused on educating renters rather than addressing the condition or maintenance of rental vessels. He noted that vessel maintenance and inspection responsibilities are more appropriately addressed through the management of the Marine Activities Permit (MAP) program and the oversight of rental businesses, rather than as part of the renter education program.

Chair Marston opened public comments.

Ms. Manich, a liveaboard resident in Mooring Field A, expressed concern that the proposed program relies heavily on input from rental concessionaires. She stated that she has previously reported numerous code violations involving commercial rental operators, including more than 20 reports submitted to Code Enforcement. She described an incident in which she observed a commercial rental vessel backing a large vessel without providing the required horn signals, creating what she believed to be a dangerous situation. She questioned whether rental operators who do not consistently comply with existing harbor regulations should be relied upon to administer or oversee the proposed safety program.

An unknown speaker complimented the harbor safety video and suggested adding more basic navigation rules, including information on sailboat right-of-way.

Mr. Leverenz commended the Safety Committee for its work on the proposal and thanked Harbormaster Blank for explaining the legislative history behind the California Boater Safety Card exemption. He reiterated the importance of providing information about public restroom locations and recommended supplementing the safety video with simple educational materials explaining basic boating concepts unfamiliar to first-time operators. He cited examples such as the fact that boats do not have brakes, do

not maneuver like automobiles, and are affected by tides, currents, and wind. He encouraged the Commission to provide renters with practical guidance that would help improve safe vessel operation.

Bud Coomans expressed support for the proposed online safety training program and noted that he had previously suggested a similar concept based on the California Boater Safety Card. He stated that allowing renters to complete the training before arriving at the rental facility was a practical improvement that would reduce burdens on concessionaires. He questioned how last-minute renters would be accommodated and observed that rental operators may not have sufficient staff to administer lengthy in-person training sessions. He agreed with comments emphasizing the importance of teaching basic "rules of the road," particularly right-of-way and channel navigation, noting that he regularly observes rental boat operators who appear unfamiliar with safe boating practices around sailboats and youth sailing programs. He suggested placing greater emphasis on navigation rules within the educational materials while describing the existing video as a positive foundation for the program.

Chair Martson closed public comments.

Chair Marston asked the Commission to provide direction on the proposed rental safety program.

Vice Chair Scully recommended incorporating the comments received from both the Commission and the public into the proposed safety quiz where appropriate. He also recommended convening a meeting with the rental concessionaires to obtain their feedback and perspectives before finalizing the program. He noted that gathering input from all stakeholders would help strengthen the proposal and recommended returning the revised program to the Harbor Commission for further review and consideration following completion of that outreach.

There was no further action taken on this item.

7.2 Ad Hoc Committee Updates

Recommendation:

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 McElroy (05-10-2023)

Vice Chair Scully provided an update on the Balboa Ferry Ad Hoc Committee. He explained that although the Commission had previously discussed dissolving the committee, he recommended keeping it active because substantial work remains before electric ferries become operational. He reported that funding for the project appears secure, but progress has been slowed by delays in marine architectural design work and planning for the electrical charging infrastructure. He stated that he recently met with Joe Beek to discuss the project and facilitated a connection with Troy Heideman of the Balboa Bay Club to share experience with installing marina electrical infrastructure. He explained that once the marine architect completes the design, the project can proceed to a request for proposals for ferry construction. While optimistic that the project is moving forward, he cautioned that implementation remains several years away.

Chair Marston asked whether the electric ferries could be operational by 2027.

Vice Chair Scully responded that he did not believe that timeline was realistic given the design and construction process, and indicated that 2028 would be a more likely target, although the exact schedule remains uncertain.

Chair Marston noted that former Commissioner Don Yahn had previously served on the Balboa Ferry Ad Hoc Committee and asked whether the committee wished to appoint an additional commissioner to fill the vacancy or continue with its current membership.

Vice Chair Scully indicated he was comfortable either continuing with the existing membership or adding another commissioner if there was interest.

Chair Marston then invited interested commissioners to volunteer for the committee.

Commissioner McElroy volunteered to serve, and with no objections from the Commission, he was added to the Ad Hoc Committee.

Chair Marston opened public comments. Hearing none, Chair Marston closed public comments.

Before moving to the next agenda item, Harbormaster Blank noted that discussion had occurred regarding the possible formation of an additional ad hoc committee and suggested the topic be addressed while public comment could still be received.

Chair Marston proposed establishing a State Lands Ad Hoc Committee to review issues related to the City's use of State tidelands and the direction recently provided by the California State Lands Commission regarding harbor operations and compensation.

Vice Chair Scully supported the proposal, noting that recent correspondence between the City and the State Lands Commission specifically referenced the Harbor Commission. He recommended agendaizing formation of the committee for the next regular meeting so the Commission could better understand its role and begin addressing the issues raised by the State.

Commissioner Svrcek agreed with the proposal and supported moving forward with consideration of the new ad hoc committee.

Chair Marston opened public comments.

Ms. Manich encouraged the Commission to include a liveaboard resident in the State Lands Ad Hoc Committee, noting that representatives of the California State Lands Commission had encouraged collaboration with liveaboard residents during a previous public meeting. She stated that this was one of the reasons she had sought appointment to the Harbor Commission.

Mr. Leverenz expressed concern that an ad hoc committee composed solely of commissioners would limit public participation because such committees are not subject to the same public meeting requirements as larger bodies. He suggested the Commission consider a process that would allow greater public involvement while still addressing the issues identified by the California State Lands Commission within the required timeframe.

Chair Marston closed public comments.

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

7.3 Harbor Commission 2026 Objectives

Recommendation:

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.

Chair Marston announced that she would serve as chair for Functional Area 1 and invited commissioners to participate.

Commissioner Kerr volunteered to join the functional area.

Vice Chair Scully also offered to assist, particularly with Objective 1.2.

Chair Marston reported that there were no substantive updates for Functional Area 1 but stated that she had spoken with Harbormaster Blank about reviewing previously identified sections of Title 17 that have not been updated to determine whether amendments should be prioritized. She indicated that the group expects to meet within the next month to begin that review.

Vice Chair Scully, chair of Functional Area 2, invited commissioners to participate.

Commissioner Williams volunteered to participate, noting that there is significant overlap between Functional Areas 2 and 3.

Commissioner McElroy expressed interest in Objective 2.1.

Chair Marston asked whether future updates should be organized by the individual objectives (e.g., Objectives 2.1, 2.2, and 2.3) or presented as a single report for the entire functional area.

Vice Chair Scully explained that the original framework envisioned individual commissioners leading each functional area while collaborating on the associated objectives. He observed that the objectives, as currently written, are intentionally broad and suggested that the ad hoc committee develop more specific and measurable goals beneath each objective to better guide future work.

Chair Marston indicated she would assist with Objectives 2.2 and 2.3.

Commissioner Svrcek expressed particular interest in Objective 2.1 regarding public access and public docks.

Vice Chair Scully agreed that specific goals could be assigned under that objective, with Commissioner Svrcek taking a leadership role on those efforts.

Chair Marston inquired if there were any updates for Functional Area 2.

Vice Chair Scully reported that there were none at this time.

Commissioner Williams, chair of Functional Area 3, stated that although he had been assigned the role while absent from a previous meeting, the subject aligns well with his professional experience analyzing financial and operational data. He invited interested commissioners to participate.

Vice Chair Scully volunteered to assist, observing that Functional Areas 2 and 3 naturally overlap and should be coordinated.

Commissioner Williams reported that there were no updates for Functional Area 3.

Secretary Miller, chair of Functional Area 4, reported that considerable work is underway, with Harbor Department staff and Harbor Safety Officers developing ideas for future safety and modernization initiatives. He identified several concepts currently under consideration, including improving the effectiveness of the Trash Rover, evaluating potential privatization opportunities, and exploring the use of

privately operated drones to assist with harbor monitoring and enforcement. He noted that the objectives would continue to be refined as the work progresses and invited additional commissioners to participate.

Vice Chair Scully volunteered to join the functional area, noting that the Water Rental Safety Program falls within this area of responsibility.

Commissioner Kerr and Commissioner McElroy also volunteered to participate.

Chair Marston noted the strong interest in Functional Area 4.

Commissioner Svrcek, chair of Functional Area 5, reported that there were no updates because the Water Quality Board had not met since the Commission's previous meeting.

Secretary Miller volunteered to participate, expressing interest in the harbor's environmental sensing technology and noting that the City's monitoring capabilities are an important resource that deserves greater public awareness.

Commissioner McElroy also volunteered to join the functional area.

Chair Marston opened public comments.

Mr. Mosher suggested that the Commission consider adding an additional objective under Functional Area 2 – Harbor Infrastructure, Public Access & Capital Planning to better define and document the characteristics of Newport Harbor. He noted that the recently adopted General Plan incorrectly describes the harbor as encompassing 21 square miles and referenced City materials that state the harbor contains approximately 4,300 boats. He explained that the 4,300-boat figure appears to be derived from adding together the number of residential piers, moorings, and commercial slips, which he believes understates the actual number of vessels because many residential piers accommodate multiple boats.

Mr. Mosher recommended conducting a more comprehensive inventory of vessels in Newport Harbor using aerial photography or similar methods to establish a more accurate baseline of the number, location, and characteristics of boats in the harbor. He suggested that documenting this information would enable the Commission to better understand current harbor conditions, support future planning efforts, and measure long-term trends such as changes in vessel size and occupancy over time. He recommended that this effort be considered as a future objective under the Commission's infrastructure planning initiatives.

Secretary Miller responded to the public comment by noting that the concept aligned well with Functional Area 4, which includes the use of emerging technologies to improve harbor management. He explained that technologies such as drones and artificial intelligence could be used to rapidly map Newport Harbor, inventory vessels and slips, and collect data to support planning and decision-making. He expressed support for incorporating those ideas as a specific objective within Functional Area 4 and welcomed the public's continued input as the committee develops its recommendations.

Chair Marston closed public comments.

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

7.4 Harbormaster Update – June 2026 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.

Public Works Administration Manager Miller presented the monthly update on the Newport Harbor Dredging Project. Using the project's progress map, he explained that the map identifies the current dredging footprint, with green indicating completed dredging, yellow showing active dredging areas, and blue representing areas where work has not yet begun.

Public Works Administration Manager Miller reported that dredging of the Newport Harbor Yacht Club mooring field was substantially completed just prior to the Fourth of July, describing it as a significant milestone due to the amount of material removed and the extensive coordination required to temporarily relocate moorings. He recognized the Harbor Department for its assistance throughout that effort. He reported that final verification with the U.S. Army Corps of Engineers is underway, after which the displaced moorings are expected to be returned to their original locations. He stated that dredging operations have now shifted to the access channel along the southeastern edge of Lido Isle leading toward Marina Park. He noted that crews are completing work in that channel before advancing into the remaining under dredged portions of the project.

Public Works Administration Manager Miller reported that, as of the meeting date, the project had loaded 262 scows of dredged material and removed approximately 541,000 cubic yards of sediment, representing approximately 60% of the project's estimated 900,000 cubic yards of dredging. He stated that the project remains on schedule for completion in October 2026. He added that the project has now transitioned into a more efficient phase of "production dredging," with fewer obstructions to slow progress. He noted that work is currently focused on the access channel adjacent to the F Mooring Field, followed by the H and portions of the J Mooring Fields. He explained that once those areas are completed, dredging operations will move into the remaining areas of the harbor that have not yet been started.

Chair Marston also asked where vessels displaced from dredged mooring fields had been relocated.

Public Works Administration Manager Miller explained that the Harbor Department temporarily reassigned vessels to available vacant moorings throughout Newport Harbor until they can be returned to their permanent locations.

Secretary Miller asked when the displaced moorings associated with the Newport Harbor dredging project would be reinstalled, noting that many vessels had been temporarily relocated to the A, B, and C Mooring Fields during construction.

Public Works Administration Manager Miller responded that the temporary relocations primarily involve several moorings in the F Mooring Field and a row of moorings in the H Mooring Field that were moved to accommodate dredging operations. He stated that work on the access channel is expected to be completed by the end of the month, after which the temporarily relocated moorings will be returned to their original locations.

Commissioner Svrcek asked about the cost of the City's dredging program.

Public Works Administration Manager Chris Miller explained that the current dredging effort is the third major phase of Newport Harbor dredging. He stated that the initial harbor dredging project in 2012 cost approximately \$6–7 million, followed by the entrance channel and east jetty dredging project, which was also in the \$6–7 million range. He reported that the current harbor dredging project is valued at approximately \$14–15 million, reflecting the larger scope of work being completed.

Harbormaster Blank presented the Harbor Department's monthly activity report for June, including highlights from the July 4 holiday weekend. He organized the report around the Department's mission of keeping Newport Harbor clean, safe, and well enjoyed.

Harbormaster Blank reported that Harbor Department personnel responded to numerous incidents involving fuel, oil, and other contaminants in the harbor, including deploying containment booms and absorbent materials when necessary. He also highlighted significant improvements in the cleanliness of

Balboa Yacht Basin (BYB) following the City's early assumption of marina management responsibilities, noting that long-standing mold accumulation on dock boxes and pile caps has largely been eliminated. He also discussed repeated incidents of illegal dumping at the 15th Street Public Dock and 19th Street, explaining that video surveillance has shown many of the discarded items originated from the landside rather than harbor users. He reported that the department has also improved management of the used oil recycling facility at Balboa Yacht Basin to discourage improper disposal of hazardous materials. He shared video of an octopus observed at Marina Park, noting that the presence of healthy marine life reflects improving water quality throughout Newport Harbor.

Harbormaster Blank reported continued enforcement efforts against unpermitted charter operations, including the arrest of an individual with an outstanding criminal bench warrant following coordination with the Newport Beach Police Department and Orange County Sheriff's Harbor Patrol. He also reported that Harbor Department staff corrected an unsafe electrical extension cord running from private property to a vessel in the Grand Canal, eliminating potential fire and electrocution hazards. Harbormaster Blank further reported that the Department is developing new safety procedures for contractors and independent service providers working at the Balboa Yacht Basin. He explained that numerous vessel cleaners, mechanics, and maintenance providers perform work at the marina, but there is currently no formal process requiring them to check in with the marina office or establish appropriate liability protections for the City. He noted that staff are working with the City Attorney's Office and Risk Management to develop procedures that improve safety while recognizing that these individuals are service providers hired by slip tenants rather than City contractors.

Harbormaster Blank reported that the City is participating in Operation Chill, which rewards children observed practicing safe boating with complimentary Slurpee certificates donated by a local retailer, and responding to several paddleboard rescues during periods of strong afternoon winds. Lastly, he described the successful rescue of a kayaker suffering from low blood sugar, noting that Harbor Safety Officers safely brought the individual ashore and aided until he recovered.

Harbormaster Blank highlighted improvements in customer service following the City's assumption of management responsibilities at Balboa Yacht Basin. He described an incident in which Harbor Safety Officers restored electrical service to a tenant's vessel within minutes after receiving a report late in the afternoon, contrasting the Department's extended office hours and hands-on response with the previous management company's practices. He noted that the extended Harbor Department office hours enabled staff to quickly resolve a tenant issue that previously would not have received an immediate response. He also stated that tenants have recognized the improved cleanliness and overall condition of the facility. He also reported that staff successfully returned a previously reported stolen dinghy to its owner, temporarily reopened the East Anchorage to accommodate increased demand during the July 4 holiday weekend, and addressed unauthorized commercial use of public docks.

Harbormaster Blank reported that the Department assisted Animal Control with an investigation involving a displaced gull nest. He reported continued discussions with a harbor permittee interested in providing water taxi and shore boat services in Newport Harbor. He explained that another commercial operator has expressed interest in establishing a water taxi and potential shore boat service in Newport Harbor. He stated that Harbor Department staff have met with the proposer to discuss the concept, regulatory considerations, and potential implementation. He further reported that he contacted a harbor permittee who had previously expressed interest in shore boat service and invited that individual to collaborate directly with the proposer. He reported the following email was sent on May 26, 2026 at 8:37 a.m.

"I hope you're doing well. I'm reaching out because I'd like to put you in touch with a commercial marine service provider who is interested in providing water taxi service and potentially shore boat service in Newport Harbor. Given your interest and involvement in harbor-related issues, I think this could be an excellent opportunity for you to engage directly and contribute constructively to a potential improvement in the harbor. If you're open to it, please let me know and I'll make the introduction by e-mail. Best regards."

Harbormaster Blank reported that he had not received a response.

Harbormaster Blank addressed misinformation circulating on social media regarding Harbor Department code enforcement activities. He explained that while the Orange County Sheriff's Harbor Patrol did not issue City harbor code citations before creation of the Harbor Department, the Department has maintained an active enforcement program since 2019. He reported that Harbor Department code enforcement actions totaled 367 in 2019, 509 in 2020, 511 in 2021, 866 in 2022, 965 in 2023, 886 in 2024, and 957 in 2025. He noted that through June 2026, the Department had already completed approximately 400 code enforcement actions.

Harbormaster Blank provided an update on the September 11, 2025, vessel theft in which a large vessel was stolen from the Fernando Condominiums, traveled through the A, B, and Balboa Yacht Club Mooring Fields, sank one vessel, and damaged seven others. He explained that the incident was investigated by the Orange County Sheriff's Harbor Patrol, with support from the Harbor Department, and that the Sheriff's Department has been responsible for the criminal investigation and case disposition. Harbormaster Blank stated that he has received numerous inquiries from members of the public regarding the status of the case and has consistently shared the information available to him. To ensure the public record accurately reflected the case status, he read into the record, verbatim, an email response he sent to a member of the public regarding the investigation and its disposition.

Harbormaster Blank read the following email into the record to document the Harbor Department's response to inquiries regarding the September 11, 2025 vessel theft and collision incident:

"Thank you for your follow-up and for continuing to share your perspective. I understand your frustration, particularly regarding the limited amount of publicly available information associated with the vessel theft and collision incident you referenced. It was a serious event, and I recognize how concerning it may have been for those in close proximity, especially given the damage and safety risks involved.

I am aware that a suspect connected to the incident remains in custody. As this matter falls under the jurisdiction of the Orange County Sheriff's Harbor Patrol and the District Attorney's Office, the investigation, prosecution, and any public release of information are exclusively within their authority.

Given your interest in obtaining additional information or expressing concerns about the handling of the case, it may be worthwhile for you to contact Orange County Supervisor Katrina Foley, who represents the district and has oversight responsibilities related to County operations, including the Sheriff's Department.

I do understand and take seriously your broader concerns regarding code enforcement and safety on public docks. As I mentioned previously, I will be reviewing the history of these issues with our Harbor Code Enforcement team to determine what additional steps may be appropriate to improve compliance and safety.

Thank you again for your continued outreach and for your commitment to safety in the harbor."

Harbormaster Blank stated that the Harbor Department provided the individual with all information available to the City within hours of receiving the inquiry. He noted that, despite those responses, the individual has continued to publicly assert that the City has been unresponsive regarding the incident. He further reported that, according to court records, the suspect arrested in connection with the September 11, 2025, vessel theft and collision incident subsequently pled guilty to seven charges and is currently serving a 16-month state prison sentence.

Harbormaster Blank described the Harbor Department's response during the July 4 holiday weekend, including an unattended vessel that dragged anchor in the East Anchorage and was impounded after colliding with other vessels. He reported Harbor Safety Officers safely towed the vessel to Marina Park despite difficult conditions. He noted that during the incident, the vessel owner boarded the impounded

vessel while it was under tow but was safely removed, and after the impound process was completed ultimately became a customer by renting a City mooring for the remainder of the holiday weekend.

Harbormaster Blank reported that Harbor Department personnel responded to 2,324 calls for service through June, including 2,017 that were geographically mapped, demonstrating broad coverage throughout Newport Harbor. He reviewed utilization statistics for the Harbor amenity map and noted that additional opportunities exist to promote its use, including through the proposed rental safety program. He also reviewed year-to-date permitting activity, reporting that permit volumes are on pace to exceed the previous year's totals in most categories, and concluded with an overview of June anchorage utilization statistics.

Harbormaster Blank reported that on July 4 the Harbor Department issued two citations—one for public urination and one for illegal fireworks—and impounded one vessel. He also described the significant transportation challenges faced by Harbor Department personnel after their shifts due to widespread congestion on the Balboa Peninsula. To improve future operations, he stated that staff parking locations will be adjusted before future holiday events to allow personnel to leave the area more efficiently.

Vice Chair Scully commended the Harbor Department for its work and shared an experience from the previous Sunday afternoon when he observed two young paddleboarders struggling against strong winds. He stated that one of the children appeared to be in distress as the wind pushed both paddleboarders down the channel. He explained that he flagged down a Harbor Safety Officer responded after being flagged down, quickly recognized the situation, recovered both individuals and their paddleboards, and transported them to safety. He praised the officer's quick response and professionalism, noting he was very impressed with how efficiently the situation was handled.

Secretary Miller asked Harbormaster Blank to investigate an apparent oil discharge near the Jiffy Lube location that he believed continued to flow into the harbor.

Harbormaster Blank responded that the matter had already been addressed.

Secretary Miller also recognized Deputy Harbormaster Matt Cosylian and other Harbor Safety Officers for assisting boaters experiencing anchor issues in the East Anchorage during windy conditions over the holiday weekend. He asked when the City officially assumed management responsibilities for Balboa Yacht Basin.

Harbormaster Blank replied that the Harbor Department took operational responsibility on June 1, one month ahead of the planned July 1 transition, resulting in an estimated savings of \$35,000 for the City.

Secretary Miller further shared comments from a Balboa Yacht Basin slip tenant who stated the marina had been noticeably cleaner during the past month than at any time in the previous five years. He congratulated the Harbor Department on the improved appearance and maintenance of the facility.

Secretary Miller also asked whether the reported total number of harbor moorings included yacht club moorings.

Harbormaster Blank confirmed that it includes the yacht club moorings as well as approximately 25 county-managed moorings.

Secretary Miller promoted the upcoming Ben Carlson Memorial Pier Jump fundraiser and concluded by thanking Harbormaster Blank and the Harbor Department for their outstanding work over the Fourth of July holiday. He remarked that, in his opinion, Newport Harbor was one of the safest places in Newport Beach during the holiday weekend and commended the Department for its professionalism and dedication.

Chair Marston opened public comments.

Ms. Manich asked whether her comments would be limited to three minutes and confirmed with the Chair that the time limit applied specifically to the Harbormaster's report. She questioned whether the Harbor Department's permit activity statistics included permits issued for residential pier owners renting private slips. She stated that she had observed several residential piers advertised for rent online, including one marketed as a liveaboard slip, and asked under which permit category those activities would be reported. She also questioned whether the Department's code enforcement activities were being applied consistently, referencing the California State Lands Commission's observation that mooring permittees may be treated differently than residential pier permittees. She requested additional information regarding the types of code enforcement actions being taken.

Ms. Manich also discussed the September 2025 stolen vessel incident, stating that approximately one month before the theft she had submitted photographs to Harbor Code Enforcement showing individuals fishing from a no-fishing public dock and climbing over the fence into the adjacent marina. She stated that she did not receive a response to her report and described the impact of the subsequent vessel collision on the nearby mooring field, noting that a neighboring vessel sank and that a legally permitted liveaboard resident assisted in rescuing its occupant. She concluded by stating that she possesses additional evidence related to the incident.

Chair Marston closed public comments.

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

8. MOTION FOR RECONSIDERATION

None.

9. COMMISSION ANNOUNCEMENTS (NON-DISCUSSION ITEM)

None

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

Chair Marston summarized the Commission's direction from the meeting and stated that the proposed State Lands Ad Hoc Committee should be agendaized for consideration at the next regular meeting.

11. DATE AND TIME FOR NEXT MEETING – Wednesday, August 12, 2026 at 5 p.m.

The next regular meeting is scheduled for August 12, 2026 at 5:00 p.m.

12. ADJOURNMENT

There being no further business coming before the Harbor Commission, the meeting was adjourned at 6:18 p.m.