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NEWPORT BEACH

Harbor Commission Staff Report

February 11, 2026
Agenda Item No. 6.2

TO: HARBOR COMMISSION

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TITLE: Abandoned Vessel Abatement Program – Final update on vessels
New Beginnings and Haven

ABSTRACT:

Harbor Department staff are responsible for identifying and preventing derelict vessels from entering and remaining in Newport Harbor. If these vessels are abandoned within the harbor, code enforcement officers initiate an abatement process to remove the vessels, using SAVE grant money to cover a portion of the removal and destruction costs.

This report will update the Harbor Commission on the recent removal and destruction of two abandoned vessels, “New Beginnings” and “Haven”, highlighting difficulties and lessons learned.

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.

FUNDING REQUIREMENTS:

There is no fiscal impact related to this item.

DISCUSSION:

The National Oceanic and Atmospheric Administration (NOAA) Marine Debris Program defines abandoned and derelict vessels as “vessels that are no longer taken care of and pose a threat to people and the environment.” NOAA considers “derelict” as referring to vessels that are neglected with an identifiable owner, while “abandoned” vessels are those where the owner is unknown or has surrendered ownership rights.

Beyond environmental concerns, maintaining and eventually disposing of derelict and abandoned vessels can significantly impact an agency’s staffing and fiscal resources. The Harbor Department (the “Department”) recently faced these challenges while

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removing two derelict and abandoned vessels, New Beginnings and Haven, from the harbor. The following is a summary of the abatement process, challenges and lessons learned.

New Beginnings

New Beginnings was a 58-foot, 1972 Hatteras Yacht Fisherman that was towed to the Harbormaster's Office on October 13, 2025, after Harbor Safety Officers found the vessel in the East Anchorage taking on water and in immediate danger of sinking.

The vessel's owner, who was living aboard, admitted that he was physically and financially unable to maintain New Beginnings. The vessel was surrendered to the City on October 22, 2025, and impounded.

The U.S. Coast Guard assisted Harbor Safety Officers with stabilizing New Beginnings. Emergency repairs were made to plug holes in the vessel's hull slowing water intrusion. TowBoat US assisted with dewatering the vessel. Pumps remained in place and checked daily until the vessel was removed on January 26, 2026. Additionally, the Coast Guard removed hazardous materials from New Beginnings, including 21 marine batteries (approximately 1000 pounds), 350 gallons of diesel, and multiple barrels of other hazardous waste.

Total Costs (excluding staff time):

Salvage Operations: Approximately \$11,410.00

Destruction: Approximately \$30,680.00

Haven

Haven was a 38-foot, 1947 Cabin Flagship Owens that was impounded on June 8, 2025, at the request of a local shipyard operator, commonly referred to as a private party impound. Haven had been left at the shipyard, and the vessel's owner, who lives outside of the United States, stopped communicating with the shipyard operator.

Harbor Department staff contacted Haven's owner on multiple occasions, offering a settlement agreement that would release the vessel to the owner without any fines or fees. After months of negotiations, the owner finally agreed to surrender the vessel to the City and pay cost recovery fees. Haven was removed from the harbor on January 22, 2026.

Destruction Cost (excluding staff time): Approximately \$10,000

Challenges:

New Beginnings and Haven, like most other derelict vessels, had similar problems that led to their eventual abandonment in Newport Harbor: Some of these issues included:

- Owners had limited financial means and lacked local support

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- Deferred maintenance, resulting in the vessel(s) needing expensive repairs
- Due to neglect, vessels were unsafe, unseaworthy, and inoperable
- Owners avoided or failed to promptly respond to City communications

Lessons Learned:

An internal review of the Harbor Department's approach to responding to derelict and abandoned vessels, including New Beginnings and Haven, revealed opportunities to improve efficiency and effectiveness. Some of these areas of improvement include:

- Inspect vessels immediately after impounding to identify structural, water intrusion or hull degradation issues and hazardous materials
- Give owners, if known, no more than 30 days to release their vessel from impound pursuant to Newport Beach Municipal Code Chapter 17.70.
- Collaborate with State and Federal agencies for enforcement and funding assistance
- Improve documentation of enforcement activities to allow for cost recovery
- Expand the number of City approved contractors to reduce delays in salvage operations and potentially lower costs
- Standardize policies and procedures with less consideration for mitigating factors

ENVIRONMENTAL REVIEW:

Staff recommends the Harbor Commission find this action is not subject to 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 a physical change to the environment, directly or indirectly.

NOTICING:

The agenda item has been noticed according to the Brown Act (72 hours in advance of the meeting at which the Harbor Commission considers the item).