



CITY OF

NEWPORT BEACH

Harbor Commission Staff Report

August 12, 2026
Agenda Item No. 6.4

TO: HARBOR COMMISSION

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TITLE: Harbormaster Update – July 2026 Activities

ABSTRACT:

July 2026 was an extraordinarily busy month for the Harbor Department, with calls for service running significantly above normal levels. The challenge was compounded by the absence of anticipated new staff at Balboa Yacht Basin (BYB) due to delays in the recruiting process. Despite being short-handed, the entire team rose to the occasion, pitching in across all functions to ensure that expectations were met for every harbor stakeholder and that Newport Harbor remained clean, safe, and well-enjoyed. The overwhelming focus for the month was on safety, driven by the high volume of vessels and recreational traffic on the harbor during peak summer season. Notable incidents included the termination of a dangerous voyage involving unsupervised minors, the successful deployment of a new patrol boat tracking system, multiple vessel rescues and assists, and the continued pursuit of an unpermitted commercial charter operator who was arrested twice — once in June and again on July 31 after skipping a second court appearance, resulting in a \$15,000 bench warrant. On the "Well-Enjoyed" front, the Department completed a full inspection of BYB, tested new customer self-service technology, and continued to demonstrate the operational advantages of managing both Marina Park and BYB under a single management structure.

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 Harbor Department's monthly activity reports to the Harbor Commission are organized around the Department's core mission: keeping Newport Harbor clean, safe, and well-enjoyed. This framework has been consistently applied in prior reports and provides the Commission with a structured view of operational priorities and outcomes. July 2026 was defined by an exceptionally high volume of calls for service — significantly above normal — at a time when the Department was operating without the additional staffing anticipated at BYB due to delays in the recruiting process. 1 The entire team demonstrated remarkable dedication, pitching in wherever needed to ensure that the harbor remained clean, safe, and well-enjoyed for all stakeholders. The overwhelming operational focus for the month was on safety, given the extraordinary volume of vessel and recreational traffic on the harbor.

Clean

Significant efforts were expended to maintain and improve the cleanliness of Newport Harbor during July 2026.

Significant maintenance and improvements were made to the pumpout facility at the Balboa Yacht Basin (BYB), ensuring this critical environmental infrastructure remains operational and accessible for boaters. A commercial vessel was found blocking the BYB pumpout dock and was relocated to the BYB guest dock to restore access

Fishing education and enforcement were conducted throughout the month. The many young anglers encountered were respectful, complied with all requests, and there were no issues

A discharge/pollution report was received at the Balboa Bay Club near a storm drain. Investigation determined the source appeared to be methane gas from an upland construction project; the matter was referred to upland Code Enforcement, which is handling the case.

A moored vessel created an oil sheen due to an accidental bilge discharge. While the amount of oil discharged was small, the resulting sheen was quite widespread before dissipating. All required notifications were made, and the owner has committed to preventing any further discharge. HSOs did an outstanding job identifying both the spill and its source.

Significant improvements were made to the oil recycling room at BYB, including adding capacity and implementing better measures to deter people from leaving materials the Department cannot collect, such as other hazardous liquids and batteries. This builds on a matter identified in the June report, when the Department first noted that a significant amount of hazardous material other than used motor oil was being improperly deposited at the BYB used oil recycling station.

Staff continued to participate in the oyster restoration project, including bi-weekly oyster sun baths — an ongoing initiative supporting natural water filtration in the harbor.

Construction activity at 1440 W. Bay was stopped due to debris entering the water.

Safe

Significant efforts were expended to maintain and improve the safety of Newport Harbor during July 2026. With the overwhelming focus of the month on safety given the high volume of harbor traffic, the Department responded to a remarkable number of urgent calls for service.

Dangerous Vessel Operation by Minors. The most alarming safety incident of the month involved a rigid hull inflatable (RHI) with a 70 HP motor being operated by three 12-year-old youths who were intentionally harassing female paddleboarders, speeding, and committing other violations. The voyage was terminated, and the matter was referred to Code Enforcement with very comprehensive documentation of the incident. The vessel owner and parent of one of the youths was cited and ultimately took responsibility for the incident.

Patrol Boat Tracking System. After a long effort and several previous attempts that were either not approved or not robust enough, the Department now has an approved method for tracking the real-time location of all four patrol boats. The public can access this information as well. This tool is tremendously helpful when evaluating what resources to assign to the many calls for service that come in daily.

Vessel Rescues and Assists:

- A dinghy was dewatered at the Fernando St. public dock
- HSOs assisted a stand-up paddleboard (SUP) with no lights across the East Anchorage at peak firework show time on July 4
- A disabled dinghy drifting toward trouble was assisted to safety
- A situation involving two vessels arguing in the West Anchorage was de-escalated by HSOs
- A medical emergency aboard M/V *Endless Dreams* was responded to; the Sheriff handled the medical response while Harbor staff remained on-scene for perimeter control
- A disabled 60-foot motor vessel was towed from outside the West Anchorage to the East Anchorage and handed over to a commercial tow service

- Two kids on paddleboards struggling in the wind were assisted back to the Balboa Bay Club
- A vessel dragging anchor in the East Anchorage, nearly hitting other boats, was impounded and towed by crew. The vessel was subsequently released from impound with \$658 in fees paid, and a mooring rental was set up with a mooring assist provided. This incident is further described in the “Odds and Ends” section of this report
- Improper anchoring in the East Anchorage was corrected on multiple occasions; boaters were compliant and were directed to the best spot to anchor and given a quick lesson on proper scope
- Navigation light education contacts were made on multiple occasions
- A sport fishing vessel at Lido Village Marina appeared to be protruding significantly farther than the beam of the vessel. Further contact with the marina management and vessel owner corrected the situation
- A vessel in distress near the harbor mouth was assisted and towed to safety
- Another disabled vessel at the mouth of the harbor and headed for the rocks was towed by HSOs to the OCSD public dock

PWC Speeding Enforcement. HSOs observed a personal watercraft (PWC) with two occupants speeding near the East Anchorage. The speed was documented via video, and a siren and PA were used in an attempt to slow the watercraft. Immediately after the siren was activated, the PWC accelerated further, getting on plane and heading toward the Back Bay. After losing visual contact under the PCH bridge, the HSO trailed behind and met the PWC at the launch ramp as their vehicle was about to pull it from the water. The owner claimed to believe the speed limit was 10 knots, and the operator claimed not to have heard the sirens despite aggressively speeding up after lights and sirens were initiated. The operator was educated on the rules, and a citation was issued

Nitrous Oxide System. A full canister of a Nitrous Oxide System for a jet ski was found on the 15th Street Public Dock and was handed over to NBPd

TikTok Takeover. The TikTok Takeover event scheduled for Sunday, July 26 did not materialize, but the Department participated in the public safety briefing with City partners. Marina Park renters were briefed on the situation in advance.

Well-enjoyed

Significant efforts were expended to maintain and improve the enjoyment of Newport Harbor during July 2026.

BYB Marina Inspections. The Department completed a full inspection of the entire Balboa Yacht Basin. Renters have been very receptive and have commented that they appreciate seeing management on the docks, paying attention to the details, and being actively engaged throughout the marina. Several tenants also expressed surprise that staff would be back out working the docks regularly, which reinforces the value of maintaining a consistent presence.

Integrated Marina Management. Having direct control over both Marina Park (MP) and BYB, the Department can now better manage inventory and occupancy at both facilities. This has created opportunities for mariners to use short-term slips at BYB when Marina Park is full, and for BYB tenants to be accommodated at Marina Park for various reasons. As an example, a visiting vessel was coordinated from a slip at BYB to a slip at Marina Park during a busy weekend, with staff managing the transition to avoid overlap with an incoming vessel. This level of coordination was not possible under the prior management arrangement.

Customer Self-Service Technology. IT has completed development of new customer self-service functionality. These functions will be available to the public — both new and existing customers — to help them better manage their slip and mooring sub-permit reservations with the Department.

Youth Supervision Concerns. Participants in a youth summer sailing program who were behaving badly and poorly supervised were addressed

First Aid Assistance. Staff assisted a BYB slip renter with the removal of a Sabiki hook that had become embedded in his finger. Two HSOs and another slip renter worked together to safely remove the hook using pliers while taking extra care to avoid causing nerve damage. The barb was particularly difficult to extract and required patience to remove successfully; fortunately, the hook was removed without further incident.

Anchor Retrieval. Staff assisted with the retrieval of an anchor for a boat with no windlass. The captain was very appreciative.

Odds and Ends

Significant efforts were expended to address harbor-related matters that do not fit neatly within the clean, safe, and well-enjoyed framework.

Constituent Praise. A constituent who witnessed an encounter between an HSO and an unpleasant permittee who had been asked not to speed in the mooring fields wrote in with praise for the professionalism and composure of the officer.

Mooring Realignment Project Costs. Public comments at a recent meeting suggesting the City spent hundreds of thousands of dollars on the mooring realignment project were inaccurate. The Department was budgeted to spend up to \$400,000 on the project. Actual expenditures were approximately \$70,000 (\$50K on engineering and \$20K on permit applications). The engineering is being reused for the mooring specs modernization project. When the permit was not approved, \$330,000 of budget was contributed back and reflected in the Department's financial reports.

Shoreboat/Water Taxi Service. Following the discussion at the July meeting, the Harbormaster was able to connect the permittee interested in shoreboat services with the individual working on a proposal to bring water taxi service to the harbor. This represents a constructive step forward on a matter that has been the subject of prior constituent interest and frustration, as noted in the June report.

Lower Bay Dredge Program. A fully loaded scow associated with the lower bay dredge program became stuck at a particularly low tide and had to wait for the tide to come back in before proceeding. This incident serves as a clear example of why dredging is important for the safety of navigation in the harbor.

Combatting Misinformation. A significant amount of the Harbormaster's time continues to be devoted to combatting misinformation shared via social media and in public comments, including responding to allegations of wrongdoing and illegal uses in the harbor. Example: a waterfront property owner reported that there was a "Bimini too high" on a vessel assigned to a shore mooring. The reporting party was dissatisfied with the response received from the Harbormaster explaining that there were length and beam limits associated with vessels assigned to shore moorings but no such limits on height. Another example involved the Harbormaster explaining to an angry constituent that the City is not actively engaged in redesigning the harbor and rebuilding slips to accommodate larger and wider vessels.

Public Records Act Requests (PRARs). The Department has requested IT assistance in reducing the effort required to respond to PRARs, some of which have recently been overwhelming. As Finance noted, one recent request of the Harbor Department was "the biggest request Finance has ever seen." The Department is working to make more records easily accessible to the public, reducing the effort necessary to collect, package, and publish them for specific requests, and improving overall transparency.

Other Administrative Matters. Another waterfront resident has complained several times about vessels assigned to shore moorings on North Bay Front. Significant effort has gone into responding to the requests and educating the resident about mooring

permit conditions, the Harbor Code, and how it can be amended. In another example, a slip renter at BYB was dissatisfied with the explanation of terms and conditions associated with her slip agreement and the absence of a provision for prorating the final month of rent.

Media/Public Appearance — Harbor Rules That Surprise People. While delivering a public address, the Harbormaster was asked, "What's one harbor rule that surprises people the most when they learn about it?" The Harbormaster responded with the top two answers:

1. Children 13 and younger **must** wear life jackets at all times when on a moving vessel.
2. A mariner cannot extend a time-limited stay at one of the public docks by simply moving the vessel to another spot on the dock. The vessel must leave the dock for at least 24 hours before the clock resets.

Community Appreciation. The Newport Beach Foundation (not the Newport Harbor Foundation) brought refreshments by the office to show appreciation for the hardworking and dedicated Harbor Team. It was a great interaction between the Harbor team and members of the public.

Consistent Matters at BYB. Ongoing daily priorities at BYB continue to include maintenance and cleaning, deterring fishing at the facility, addressing unauthorized use of empty slips and side ties, and curbing misuse of the oil recycling facility.

Emerging Recreational Technology. As the Harbormaster frequently notes, people stay up late at night devising new ways to enjoy the harbor — and the Department is all for it, as long as those ways are clean, safe, and enjoyable for all. The latest application with the potential to be very unsafe is an underwater scooter capable of significantly exceeding the harbor speed limit. The device can be operated by swimmers underwater or on the surface.

Theft of Impounded Vessel. A vessel impounded for overstaying its welcome at the Fernando Street Public Dock was stolen from the Marina Park dock. A case was opened with NBPd, and the Department provided video footage, a description, and registered owner information. Staff was advised not to engage directly, given NBPd's knowledge of the suspect, who is a local resident.

Note of Praise from a BYB Tenant:

"I'd like to highlight the helpfulness and service of one of your employees; Ryan, who manages the basin now. I've been working on my boat, the Viking 56 Spectacular Bid on C dock over the last month and he has been EXCEPTIONAL. He knows what he's doing, has introduced himself to everyone on the dock in the short time the city has managed the basin, and as

far as I'm concerned is an asset to the Harbor Department — and the harbor as a whole. If he's ever up for a promotion or anything, I hope he gets the recognition he has earned and very well deserves.

He also helped me put the outriggers back on my boat after my work crew failed to show up.

Absolutely love everything that's going on in the harbor. Have lived here my whole life and this is the best I've seen it run."

From an On-the-Water Observation. A constituent observed an interaction between a permittee and a Code Enforcement Officer and wrote in with praise for the professionalism displayed.

*"(referring to an accompanying photo image) This guy deserves a raise. You train your guys well. He stopped a guy for speeding through the moorings then the guy he stopped lit him up about someone's generator use at night. Was calm the whole time and listened even though the other guy was a total (*expletive deleted*)"*

Update on Unpermitted Commercial Charter Operator

The unpermitted commercial charter operator who was arrested in early June for skipping his arraignment related to offering charters in Newport Harbor without a Marine Activities Permit (MAP) had another arraignment scheduled for July 28. The operator chose to skip the hearing, which resulted in the court issuing a \$15,000 bench warrant. Our colleagues at NBPD agreed to locate and arrest the operator. On July 31, NBPD officers located and arrested the operator. Interestingly, the operator was receiving a \$500 Venmo payment at the time of his second arrest. While not yet confirmed, the arresting officers believe the payment may have been related to an unpermitted charter. This matter has been ongoing since 2023, and the City filed a misdemeanor complaint on March 18, 2026, alleging 12 counts. We are grateful to NBPD for their continued collaboration on this matter.

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).

ATTACHMENTS:

Attachment A – Harbor Department Statistics Infographic