

NEWPORT BEACH HARBOR COMMISSION REGULAR MEETING MINUTES
City Council Chambers – 100 Civic Center Drive, Newport Beach
Wednesday, March 11, 2026
5 p.m.

1. CALL MEETING TO ORDER

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

2. ROLL CALL

PRESENT: Ira Beer, Chair
Marie Marston, Vice Chair
Steve Scully, Secretary
Bob Miller, Commissioner
Rudy Svrcek, Commissioner
Don Yahn, Commissioner
Gary Williams, Commissioner

ABSENT:

Staff Members: Paul Blank, Harbormaster
Cynthia Shintaku, Management Analyst

3. PLEDGE OF ALLEGIANCE – Led by Vice Chair Marston

4. PUBLIC COMMENTS (NON-AGENDA ITEMS)

Chair Beer opened public comments.

Joe Ferrino stated that he had previously addressed the Commission regarding Balboa Island and issues related to moorings at his property, built in 1945 and owned by Nigel Parker. He explained that he received a letter from Harbor Code Enforcement staff advising that the property could have either a dock or two moorings, but not both, and that he was required to remove moorings by March 7. He stated that he complied without contest due to the owner's age. He reported that other properties continued to have multiple moorings, docks, and vessels exceeding size limits, while his moorings were removed following a complaint. He stated that he was conveying a written statement from Mr. Parker recommending that the code be amended to allow one or two moorings and enforced consistently. He requested that his moorings be reinstated and asked what action the Commission intended to take regarding conditions on the Grand Canal.

Chair Beer stated that public comment is not a question-and-answer period and advised the speaker to direct inquiries to Harbor Department staff. He stated that staff had reviewed the situation and provided an appropriate response. He acknowledged Mr. Ferrino's concerns and stated that the comments would be taken into consideration.

Mr. Ferrino reiterated that the house had existed for 75 years and that enforcement appeared to be complaint-driven rather than systematic. He stated that the removal of moorings created hardship and inequity and urged the Commission to resolve ongoing issues on the Grand Canal.

Chair Beer closed public comments.

5. APPROVAL OF MINUTES

1. Draft Minutes of the February 11, 2026 Harbor Commission Regular Meeting

Chair Beer opened public comments. Seeing none, Chair Beer closed public comments.

Vice Chair Marston moved to approve the February 11, 2026 Harbor Commission Regular Meeting minutes, as amended. Seconded by Commissioner Williams. The motion carried by the following roll call vote:

Ayes: Miller, Svrcek, William, Yahn, Marston, Beer
Nays: None
Abstain: Scully
Absent: None

6. CURRENT BUSINESS

6.1 The Interesting Story of the Newport Harbor Kelp

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.

Captain Nancy Caruso, Marine Biologist, introduced herself and explained the mission of Get Inspired, a nonprofit organization focused on science-based environmental stewardship. She described over 22 years of work restoring marine species along the Orange County coast, including white sea bass, abalone, Pismo clams, and kelp. She explained that education and classroom-based restoration projects are central to building public appreciation and conservation support.

Ms. Caruso described partnerships with Hubbs SeaWorld Research Institute, Orange Coast College, and local school districts, reporting that over 5,000 students have raised white sea bass and nearly 3,000 have been released into coastal waters. She explained abalone restoration efforts, noting the loss of local populations due to overfishing and disease, and reporting that eight-year-old reproductive abalone were released under permit in December 2025.

Ms. Caruso described Pismo clam research and restoration, stating that her team has surveyed 14 miles of coastline with approximately 480 volunteers and successfully reproduced Pismo clams for the first time globally. She explained that students are raising clams in classrooms for potential restocking.

Ms. Caruso provided historical context on kelp forest collapse in Orange County, citing sea otter extermination in the late 1800s, fishing pressure, coastal development runoff, and the 1983 storm events. She stated that kelp disappeared from Orange County reefs from 1983 until approximately 2002, with the only remaining local kelp at Dana Point.

Ms. Caruso recounted her work with the late Dr. Wheeler North, who transplanted kelp from Baja California to the Newport Harbor jetty in the late 1970s. She stated that this kelp persisted despite environmental stressors and proposed that it may represent a genetically resilient "super kelp." She explained that kelp from both Dana Point and Newport was propagated and replanted along the coast following extensive sea urchin removal.

Ms. Caruso reported that 287 volunteer divers removed approximately 1.5 million sea urchins over ten years to allow kelp recovery. She stated that restored kelp forests now exist in Orange County, while Northern California continues to experience kelp loss. She explained that USC researchers are studying the genetics of Newport kelp to determine whether it can aid restoration efforts elsewhere.

Ms. Caruso described ongoing monitoring of kelp during unusually warm ocean conditions and noted that current sea surface temperatures may inhibit kelp reproduction. She concluded by inviting volunteers and thanking the City and Harbor Department for long-term cooperation.

Chair Beer thanked Ms. Caruso for her presentation and praised her commitment and impact.

Commissioner Svrcek asked whether the Newport kelp was the same species found at Catalina Island.

Ms. Caruso responded that genetic testing is ongoing and that preliminary observations suggest differences, but conclusions cannot yet be drawn.

Commissioner Scully inquired about collaboration with the Wrigley Institute.

Ms. Caruso stated that while she has communicated with former researchers affiliated with Wrigley, the Institute is not currently conducting kelp research.

Commissioner Miller asked whether kelp harvested from warmer Baja waters might be more tolerant of temperature swings. He also inquired how the public can get more involved.

Ms. Caruso stated that warmer water adaptation may contribute to kelp persistence and noted observations of kelp growing in shallow, warm, and even freshwater-influenced environments near the harbor jetty. She encouraged the public to contact Get Inspired if they would like to volunteer.

Commissioner Yahn noted that there is a lot of dense kelp in Dana Point Harbor and asked if this was also super kelp.

Ms. Caruso noted that it is all the same species, but may be a different genetic strain, or may also be a super kelp, and requires further testing.

Commissioner Yahn asked about the fate of the removed sea urchins.

Ms. Caruso explained that starved sea urchins have little commercial value, can live decades without food, and persist even without kelp, necessitating removal for restoration.

Vice Chair Marston inquired why the sea urchins needed to be removed.

Ms. Caruso explained that they eat kelp,

Chair Beer opened public comments.

Adam Leverenz asked whether the kelp was resistant to sea urchin grazing or whether removal was the primary factor.

Ms. Caruso stated that she had observed a few urchins near the jetty and suggested further testing.

Council Member Grant praised Ms. Caruso's work and asked whether funding or regulatory barriers posed the greatest challenge.

Ms. Caruso responded that regulatory red tape was the primary obstacle.

Chair Beer closed public comments.

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

6.2 General Plan Update: Final GPUSC/GPAC Draft Harbor, Bay, and Beaches Element

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 Approve the 2026 Harbor and Beaches Master Plan and recommend staff forward to the Finance Committee for consideration.
2. Review the Final GPUSC/GPAC Draft Harbor, Bay, and Beaches Element, which has been revised to incorporate the Commission's input from October 2025. The Commission may provide additional input and should conduct a Harbor Commission Meeting vote to consider recommending the City Council adopt it as part of the comprehensive General Plan Update anticipated in May or June 2026.

Chair Beer introduced Item 6.2 concerning the General Plan Update and stated that recommendations from the Harbor Commission's Ad Hoc subcommittee had previously been forwarded to the General Plan Update Steering Committee and the General Plan Advisory Committee. He noted that joint meetings of those committees were held on December 3, 2025, and January 21, 2026, resulting in a revised draft General Plan, including the Harbor Bay and Beaches Element, now presented for Commission review.

Ben Zdeba, Acting Deputy Community Development Director, thanked the Commission and noted that he had first presented the element seven months earlier. He commended the Ad Hoc committee for its thoughtful input and stated that a detailed attachment summarized how nearly all Commission comments were incorporated or addressed. He reported that the Steering Committee and Advisory Committee reviewed each comment line by line and supported moving the revised draft forward as the final General Plan Update. He stated that the Commission was being asked to formally support the Harbor Bay and Beaches Element as part of the City Council's anticipated adoption in May or June.

Chair Beer expressed appreciation for the clarity and organization of the response matrix provided by staff and stated that it greatly facilitated review.

Commissioner Scully thanked staff for listening to Commission input and incorporating numerous suggested revisions. He stated that the staff report and attachments were clear and well presented. Commissioner Yahn echoed appreciation for the charted responses and stated that the organization made it easy to track how comments were addressed.

Vice Chair Marston thanked staff for addressing comments individually. She raised a concern regarding the term "lower-cost recreational boating," stating that the phrase lacked a clear reference point and could benefit from further definition.

Chair Beer opened public comments.

Jim Mosher stated that while Appendix B was helpful, the Commission had not seen a comparison between the existing Harbor and Bay Element and the new Harbor Bay and Beaches Element. He noted that some prior policies were retained, modified, deleted, or newly added. He stated that an implementation plan and glossary were still forthcoming and could define terms such as "lower-cost boating." He further stated that water quality policies were moved to the Natural Resources Element, and that other elements, such as Safety, Recreation, and Land Use, contained provisions relevant to harbor operations, resilience, and housing. He recommended that commissioners continue to follow the update through the Planning Commission and City Council review.

Chair Beer closed public comments.

Secretary Scully moved to recommend the City Council adopt it as part of the comprehensive General Plan Update. Seconded by Commissioner Miller. The motion carried by the following roll call vote:

Ayes: Miller, Svrcek, William, Yahn, Scully, Marston Beer
Nays: None
Abstain: None
Absent: None

6.3 Review and Discuss Proposed Elimination of Mooring Length Adjustment Process

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. Review and discuss the proposed elimination of mooring length adjustments; and
3. Provide direction to staff regarding the adoption of a recommendation to eliminate mooring size adjustments.

Chair Beer introduced Item 6.3 regarding the discussion of eliminating the mooring length adjustment process in Title 17. He summarized prior concerns, including navigational safety, limited harbor capacity, public access impacts, fairness among permit holders, and administrative burden.

Commissioner Miller asked whether reductions in mooring length were also considered.

Harbormaster Paul Blank responded that reductions were permitted and had occurred, though infrequently. He stated that mooring sizes are fixed in five-foot increments and that vessel length limits are strictly enforced based on manufacturer specifications.

Commissioner Yahn asked whether minor overages were ever allowed.

Harbormaster Blank stated that the limits are absolute and cited a prior appeal involving an 18-foot vessel exceeding the limit by several inches, which was denied and upheld by the Commission.

Commissioner Miller inquired whether the manufacturer's Letter of Origin (LOI) includes bowsprits, swim steps, and outboard engines.

Harbormaster Blank responded that outboard engines are not included. He noted that swim steps may be included if they are integrated into the vessel; however, bolted-on swim steps are not included. Lastly, he noted that bowsprits are generally not included.

Secretary Scully asked how many mooring extension requests were received annually.

Harbormaster Blank estimated approximately 15 requests over five years, with roughly half approved and half denied, primarily due to safety concerns.

Chair Beer asked whether staff could prepare a comprehensive report evaluating harbor capacity, navigational safety, fairness, and public access impacts.

Harbormaster Blank stated that such a report would require significant effort but would be valuable.

Chair Beer requested that staff prepare the report for future Commission consideration.

Chair Beer opened public comments.

Adam Leverenz stated that the same fairness arguments applied to residential pier extensions, which continue to be approved. He expressed concern over inconsistent enforcement and urged equal treatment of permit holders.

Anne Stenton, Newport Mooring Association, acknowledged harbor crowding but requested flexibility for de minimis extensions, noting that five-foot increments can prevent permit holders from purchasing otherwise suitable vessels. She expressed concern about equity compared to pier extensions.

Chair Beer closed public comments.

Chair Beer clarified that private piers are governed by established project lines and noted that moorings present different regulatory considerations. He suggested that, within the next three months, staff provide a report evaluating whether the City should discontinue accepting future applications for length extensions. He indicated the report could assess harbor capacity, navigational safety considerations, fairness among permit holders, and impacts on public access. He further noted that the report could outline potential policy options, including whether amendments to Title 17 of the Municipal Code would be necessary. He added that any future policy recommendations would return to the Harbor Commission for further review and consideration at a subsequent meeting.

There was no further action taken on this item.

6.4 Discussion of Potential Safety Requirements for Small Vessel Rental Customers

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
2. Receive and file; or
3. Provide direction to staff and/or the Newport Harbor Safety Committee regarding potential safety guidelines or requirements for single-day small vessel rental concession operators and their customers in Newport Harbor.

Chair Beer introduced Item 6.4 regarding potential safety requirements for small-vessel rental customers.

Secretary Scully discussed the potential development of a short-term safety training requirement for rental users operating in the harbor. He emphasized the importance of educating users on navigating mooring fields, ferry traffic, and common safety challenges, particularly those involving stand-up paddle boards, currents, and wind conditions. He noted that the training should not be overly burdensome for rental operators, but should encourage users to be more informed prior to entering the harbor.

Secretary Scully referenced an example from Lake Tahoe, where a boating safety video and mobile application are used to educate users on navigation, safety rules, and environmental conditions. He acknowledged that the example included promotional elements, but suggested that a shorter, Newport Harbor-specific safety resource could effectively address key safety considerations.

Secretary Scully proposed that such training could be delivered through accessible platforms, such as a mobile application, the City's website, or a video (e.g., YouTube). He suggested that the Harbor Commission consider further evaluation of this concept, potentially through the Safety Committee, and engage rental operators, the Harbormaster, and City staff to assess feasibility, resource requirements, and implementation options.

Commissioner Svrcek suggested including a short quiz to ensure comprehension and stated that the training could be completed prior to rental.

Commissioner Williams emphasized balancing safety improvements with minimizing the burden on rental operators and supported modeling the program after Lake Tahoe's boating app.

Commissioner Miller stated that boating safety concerns related to rentals are raised frequently and supported pursuing the concept through the City's existing app.

Commissioner Yahn noted that renters are exempt from needing the California Boaters Card and expressed support for moving forward.

Vice Chair Marston stated that she supported the concept.

Chair Beer opened public comments.

Adam Leverenz suggested that rental operators, rather than City staff, should be responsible for ensuring renters view safety materials. He recommended requiring renters to watch a short video before receiving keys.

Chair Beer closed public comments.

Chair Beer deferred to Vice Chair Scully regarding whether to establish an action item or provide direction to staff, noting his role on the Harbor Safety Committee to evaluate potential safety guidelines and requirements.

Secretary Scully recommended referring the matter to the Harbor Safety Committee for further development. He suggested the Committee work to better define the proposed safety measures, engage with the Harbor Department and City staff to understand feasibility and constraints, and consult with rental operators to gather input. He indicated that the Committee would report back to the Harbor Commission with findings and potentially an action plan outlining implementation options.

The dais expressed agreement with this approach.

6.5 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 Yahn (05-10-2023)

Secretary Scully reported that there were no new updates regarding the Balboa Ferry project beyond previously reported grant funding progress.

Commissioner Yahn reported that he recently met with Joe Beek, who confirmed information consistent with prior discussion. He indicated that Mr. Beek expressed confidence that the project will proceed successfully. He noted that while a final cost estimate for the vessels has not yet been established, funding will continue to be pursued as the project advances through naval architecture and design

documentation, after which the project can move to the bidding phase. He further stated that although costs may ultimately exceed the initial grant funding, Mr. Beek is confident that additional funding sources will be secured to fully fund the project.

Commissioner Yahn inquired whether the item should remain as an ad hoc topic for Commission review or if it had progressed to a stage where continued Commission involvement was no longer necessary.

Chair Beer expressed that continued updates would be beneficial, particularly for maintaining transparency and informing the public. He indicated a preference to retain the item for periodic updates until the project reaches a more imminent stage, even if updates are limited, noting that sharing any progress would be valuable.

General Plan Harbor & Bay Element Update Ad Hoc – Commissioners Scully, Marston, and Yahn (10-09-2024)

No updates.

Chair Beer opened public comments. Seeing none, Chair Beer closed public comments.

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

6.6 Harbor Commission 2024 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.

Conduct annual review of Title 17 and recommend updates to City Council where necessary (Commissioner Yahn)

No update.

Collaborate with the Water Quality/Coastal Tidelands Committee to partner on areas within the Harbor that both Commission/Committees intersect (Commissioners: Svrcek, Scully)

No update.

Continue with the participation of businesses, nonprofits, and the Harbor Department with a Newport Harbor Safety Committee to promote best practices and address safety issues on the water (Commissioner: Scully).

No update.

Review Harbor Department responsibilities, evaluate the Department's readiness and effectiveness to deliver Harbor services as necessary for normal operations and during emergencies and make recommendations as determined necessary (Commissioner: Scully, Williams).

No update.

Work with City Staff on an update of the market Rent to be charged for onshore and offshore mornings (Commissioner: Williams, Beer).

No update.

Support staff in all efforts related to the dredge completion of the Federal Navigation channels in addition to the upcoming agency renewals of Regional General Permit (RGP54) shallow water dredging permit. (Commissioners: Cunningham, Svrcek)

No update.

Chair Beer opened public comments.

Adam Leverenz inquired when the public will see Title 17 again before the City Council reviews it.

Chair Beer advised that it return to the Harbor Commission for review prior to being recommended to the City Council.

Chair Beer closed public comments.

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

6.6 Harbormaster Update – February 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 Manager Chris Miller presented an update on the Lower Bay Dredging Project and reported completion of the Balboa Yacht Basin project, with normal operations restored. He outlined current project status, including completed areas, active dredging zones, and upcoming work, and noted that some completed areas may require minor follow-up based on post-dredge surveys, while others have been fully signed off. He projected that dredging near Marina Park will begin within approximately four to six weeks, subject to field conditions, and identified a temporary pause in operations due to equipment issues, with work expected to resume upon securing a replacement tug.

Chair Beer requested clarification on the official start date of dredging operations.

Harbormaster Blank confirmed that dredging began on December 3, 2025.

Chair Beer inquired regarding the total volume of material removed to date.

Public Works Manager Miller reported that approximately 105 scows have been removed, equating to an estimated 200,000 cubic yards of dredged material. He explained that while the project has historically been estimated at approximately one million cubic yards, the current total is closer to 800,000 to 900,000 cubic yards, due in part to prior dredging completed in 2021. He stated that the project is approximately one-quarter complete. He noted that of the material removed to date, approximately 125,000 cubic yards have been transported to the Port of Long Beach, with additional material from the Marina Park area expected to increase that total.

Public Works Manager Miller confirmed that approximately 50,000 cubic yards of material from Marina Park to 19th Street will be transported to the Port of Long Beach within a defined disposal window and stated that the project remains on schedule with an ending date of mid to late September. He explained that current dredging activities establish an access channel to support safe navigation of project-related barges. He advised that increased harbor activity during the upcoming boating season will require coordination with ongoing dredging operations and indicated that staff will continue to engage stakeholders to manage impacts.

Chair Beer inquired whether the distance to the Port of Long Beach is comparable to the LA-3 disposal site.

Public Works Manager Miller responded that the LA-3 site is approximately six miles offshore, while the Port of Long Beach is approximately 19 miles from the harbor entrance, or roughly three times the distance.

Chair Beer inquired regarding the projected timeline for completion of the project under contract. Public Works Manager Miller responded that the anticipated completion timeframe is mid- to late September. He explained that project timelines are influenced by several factors, including initial startup conditions and varying dredging productivity. He noted that early phases required more time as the contractor mobilized and addressed more complex dredging conditions, while subsequent phases are expected to progress more efficiently in areas with more consistent dredging conditions.

Commissioner Svrcek commended staff for the quality and clarity of the project updates, noting they are regularly received and easy to understand.

Secretary Scully inquired regarding the nature and severity of the tug failure, including whether it was a major mechanical issue or expected to be resolved within a reasonable timeframe.

Public Works Manager Miller staff reported that the tug issue involves a shaft packing failure requiring warranty repair in San Diego. He indicated the repair is expected to be completed within a reasonable timeframe, though the exact duration is unknown, and noted that efforts are underway to secure a replacement tug to resume dredging operations.

Commissioner Miller inquired about the status of the Port of Long Beach disposal schedule and whether any flexibility exists in the timeline.

Public Works Manager Miller responded that the current disposal window is anticipated to extend to approximately June 1, noting the schedule had recently shifted by several weeks. He stated that June 1 remains the operative target date and expressed confidence that the contractor will meet the deadline, potentially completing work ahead of schedule.

Commissioner Yahn inquired why the proposed dredging area within the Lido Isle turning basin includes the entire basin, including mooring areas, rather than being limited to designated federal navigation channels. He further asked whether the full area qualifies as a federally funded channel under Army Corps of Engineers guidelines or reflects additional dredging undertaken by the City beyond federal requirements.

Public Works Manager Miller explained that the majority of the harbor, estimated at approximately 90 percent, is under federal responsibility, including areas within mooring fields and not solely designated navigation channels. He clarified that dredging activities target areas with high spots throughout the harbor, rather than only the primary deepwater navigation channel along Pacific Coast Highway. He noted that the Lido Isle turning basin requires limited dredging primarily along its outer edges, as central areas are already near the required depth.

Public Works Manager Miller noted that while nautical charts identify the main deepwater navigation channel, federal responsibility extends beyond that channel to include most harbor waters. He further explained that the harbor is maintained at varying depth requirements, generally including depths of approximately -20 feet, -15 feet, and -10 feet, all of which fall under federal responsibility.

Vice Chair Marston inquired regarding the testing of dredged material, including whether material is regularly tested prior to removal and whether post-dredging testing is conducted to confirm reduction of contamination and compliance with disposal requirements, including eligibility for the LA-3 disposal site.

Public Works Manager Miller explained that extensive sediment testing is conducted prior to dredging to determine appropriate disposal locations. He noted that testing is repeated as necessary, particularly if data becomes outdated over time. He clarified that pre-dredge testing determines whether material

qualifies for disposal at the LA-3 open ocean site or requires alternative disposal methods. He further noted that material not meeting LA-3 requirements must be managed through other approved disposal options, such as the Port of Long Beach.

Public Works Manager Miller explained that the federal government is not required to test the post-dredge surface, commonly referred to as the "Z layer," for this project. He noted that pre-dredge testing determines disposal requirements, while post-dredge testing requirements may vary depending on the regulatory program. He explained that under certain permitting programs, such as Regional General Permit 54 (RGP 54), regulatory agencies may require analysis or testing of post-dredge conditions in specific areas. He confirmed that post-dredge testing has not been conducted for this federal project, as it is not required.

Public Works Manager Miller added that dredging is being conducted to restore the harbor to its authorized depth, which reflects the original design depth established when the harbor was federally maintained. He explained that the dredging process removes accumulated sediment deposited over time, bringing the harbor floor back to native material levels. He noted that, in theory, this approach removes the majority of contaminated material, leaving underlying material that is presumed to be cleaner.' Chair Beer inquired regarding the estimated volume of material to be dredged from the Marina Park area for transport to the Port of Long Beach.

Public Works Manager Miller responded that the volume is approximately 50,000 cubic yards. Chair Beer observed that, based on this estimate, the projected three-month timeframe for completion appears reasonable, subject to external conditions such as weather and transport.

Chair Beer opened public comments. Seeing none, Chair Beer closed public comments.

Harbormaster Blank noted that sediment testing and surveying are conducted on-site prior to dredging. He explained that no testing is performed on material once it has been collected and placed in a scow. He further clarified that federal responsibility for dredging extends to all areas within the designated project boundary, including mooring fields, consistent with the defined project limits throughout the harbor.

Harbormaster Blank presented the February operational report and began by outlining activities related to harbor cleanliness. He reported several incidents of unauthorized discharge into Newport Harbor during the month, including one incident at Marina Park and additional incidents elsewhere in the harbor. He stated that all discharge events were addressed promptly and resolved without major contamination. He noted that the Trash Rover was deployed and underwent maintenance, and that additional training was conducted to expand its operational use.

Harbormaster Blank reported that volunteer members of the Community Emergency Response Team (CERT) participated in training to operate the Trash Rover. He stated that these volunteers will be available to assist with Trash Rover operations both during emergency situations and during routine debris-removal activities. He noted that this collaboration expands the Harbor Department's operational capacity.

Harbormaster Blank reported that February experienced significant rainfall, resulting in numerous instances of vessel dewatering throughout the harbor. He stated that Harbor Safety Officers responded to vessels at public docks, onshore moorings, and other locations to address water accumulation and prevent sinking or environmental impacts. He reported that the department continued investigations into unpermitted liveboard activity during the month. He stated that the department has been asked to enhance its detection and enforcement capabilities in this area and that staff are evaluating technology solutions and procedural improvements to better identify unpermitted liveboards.

Harbormaster Blank reported that, with assistance from the Newport Beach Police Department, access to the Harbor Department's spill response trailer was restored after two motorcycles were found parked in

front of it, blocking access. He stated that police officers responded at the department's request and cleared the obstruction to ensure emergency readiness.

Harbormaster Blank described a documented incident involving unauthorized discharge from a rental Duffy vessel. He stated that a Harbor Safety Officer photographed the discharge and contacted the rental operator, who provided the renter's information. He noted that the Harbor Department subsequently issued a citation to the responsible party. He also reported a separate incident at Marina Park involving a vessel discharging oily bilge water into the harbor, which was contained and cleaned by staff.

Harbormaster Blank reported that staff conducted multiple mooring assists during severe weather events in February. He stated that two separate moorings became entangled due to storm conditions and that Harbor Safety Officers responded to untangle the gear and stabilize the vessels. He reported assisting a commercial tow service with the recovery of a sunken vessel originating from Laguna Beach. He explained that the vessel struck a reef, remained grounded for a period of time, and later fell into approximately 40 feet of water as tides receded. He noted that significant marine growth was visible on the vessel's rigging when it was brought into Newport Harbor and described the recovery operation as complex and carefully coordinated.

Harbormaster Blank reported that a vessel from the City's recreation senior services rental fleet was observed operating outside the harbor in ocean conditions. He stated that, in coordination with the rental operator at Marina Park, the Harbor Department directed the vessel to return to the harbor to ensure the safety of the occupants.

Harbormaster Blank described tabletop emergency response exercises conducted during an all-hands Harbor Department meeting held on February 20. He stated that staff were divided into five groups and presented with different emergency scenarios, including an aircraft engine falling into the Five Points area and a small civil aircraft crashing into the harbor. He reported that each group developed and presented an immediate response plan within a short timeframe and that staff demonstrated a strong understanding of emergency protocols and interagency coordination.

Harbormaster Blank reported an incident involving a tender found adrift near the Washington Street public dock. He stated that staff identified the vessel's owner, who typically stored it at the Fernando Street dock, and returned the tender to that location. He noted that the owner expressed appreciation for the assistance. He reported resolving an instance of unauthorized mooring use in the A-Field. He described the situation as resulting from a series of misunderstandings and stated that it was resolved without further issue.

Harbormaster Blank provided an update on the final restoration project at public docks, reporting that all but two docks had their decorative finials restored and reinstalled. He stated that the remaining installations were expected to be completed soon. He reported an enforcement action at the Central Avenue public dock involving a vessel exceeding the 30-foot length limit. He stated that a Harbor Safety Officer educated the vessel owner regarding the restriction and that the vessel subsequently departed. Harbormaster Blank recounted an incident involving a waterfront resident who also holds a mooring permit but did not have a vessel assigned to the mooring. He explained that, because the mooring had been vacant for more than 30 days, the Harbor Department temporarily assigned another vessel to it during dredging-related relocations. He stated that the permittee attempted to prevent use by placing a kayak on the mooring, which later broke free during severe weather. He noted that Harbor staff secured the kayak when conditions allowed, but declined to transport it to the resident's private dock, which prompted dissatisfaction from the permittee.

Harbormaster Blank reported that two City-licensed moorings were converted to helical anchor systems with dynamic tackle during the month, bringing the harbor-wide total to six such systems, including private moorings. He stated that these systems performed well during severe weather events and that permit holders reported positive results. He noted that staff will bring forward additional specifications related to mooring tackle and helical anchors for Commission review at a future meeting.

Harbormaster Blank reported continued collaboration with the Coast Guard Auxiliary. He stated that auxiliary members participated in on-water training with Harbor Safety staff and that future cooperation may include joint education and training initiatives. He provided an overview of the 2013 Public Dock Improvement Study, which evaluated dock utilization and identified key amenities desired by boaters. He reported that the study recommended improvements to existing docks and the development of additional docks near high-demand amenities. He noted that several recommendations have been implemented, including maintenance enhancements, dock reconfiguration, improved signage, and the establishment of the Harbor Department in 2017, while others remain outstanding. He emphasized that the Balboa Marina public dock was developed consistently with the study and is expected to see increased use over time.

Harbormaster Blank reported that the Harbor Department responded to 1,828 calls for service in February, the majority of which were completed. He presented service call statistics for February, reporting 1,828 total calls for service, with 1,716 mapped and 1,757 completed. He stated that the data is publicly available through the Harbor Department's online dashboard and can be filtered by activity type and location.

Harbormaster Blank reported on harbor amenity map usage and stated that a temporary issue with the QR code linking to the updated GIS-based map had been resolved. He confirmed that the current map is now accessible to the public.

Harbormaster Blank reported on permitting activity, stating that permit issuance through February exceeded the same period in the prior year. He presented comparative statistics demonstrating increased permitting volume and progress.

Harbormaster Blank reported on anchorage utilization, noting limited use during severe weather and increased use toward the end of the month. He stated that one large vessel remained in the West Anchorage after being displaced by private dredging at Linda Isle and was paying nightly anchorage fees until it could return.

Harbormaster Blank presented debris collection data, reporting that the Harbor Department began tracking debris by weight in 2024. He stated that, by the end of February 2026, the department had already exceeded debris collection totals from prior years, largely due to storm events that introduced large debris such as tree trunks and railroad ties.

Commissioner Svrcek noted a significant amount of trash and debris and expressed appreciation for the efforts to address it.

Commissioner Williams commended staff for the presentation and ongoing efforts to support harbor operations.

Secretary Scully noted recent public interest in a juvenile swordfish sighting in the harbor. Commissioner Miller inquired regarding the deployment and operation of the trash rover.

Harbormaster Blank explained that the trash rover is stored at Marina Park and deployed as needed using a crane. He stated that the device is manually operated via a controller, collects debris using a front intake and trailing net, and returns to Marina Park, where collected material is sorted and disposed of. He noted that while the rover has autonomous capabilities, it is currently operated manually due to performance limitations, and staff continue to work with the manufacturer to improve functionality.

Commissioner Svrcek inquired whether reported debris collection totals include material captured by the trash interceptor near the Fletcher Jones site.

Harbormaster Blank clarified that debris collected by the trash interceptor is removed separately at that location and is not included in Harbor Department totals. He noted that the interceptor removes substantial quantities of debris annually, significantly exceeding other collection efforts.

Chair Beer opened public comments. Seeing none, Chair Beer closed public comments.

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

7. MOTION FOR RECONSIDERATION

None.

8. COMMISSIONER ANNOUNCEMENTS (NON-DISCUSSION ITEMS)

Commissioner Svrcek reported that the Lower Castaways Ad Hoc Committee approved a site plan to be forwarded to the City Council. He stated the plan prioritizes public access, environmental features, and flexibility for future development. He highlighted proposed sandy beach areas, a small-vessel dock, and opportunities to enhance public access and recreational use.

Commissioner Svrcek recommended establishing an educational and historical theme for the site, including interpretive displays, public art, and potential programming focused on marine life, coastal ecology, and Newport Beach history. He suggested incorporating features such as sculptural elements, an amphitheater, and kayak/paddleboard access to support education and recreation, while maintaining a primarily public-focused use of the site.

Commissioner Svrcek also reported concerns regarding deteriorating infrastructure at Upper Newport Bay, including roadways, signage, bridges, and facilities, noting impacts to safety and visitor experience. He stated that the area is jointly managed by City, County, and State agencies, requiring coordinated planning and funding. He reported that City staff and Council Member Grant have initiated site reviews and identified improvements, though most issues fall under County or State jurisdiction.

Commissioner Svrcek expressed that while progress may be gradual, efforts are underway to improve conditions and preserve the ecological and recreational value of the Back Bay.

Chair Beer suggested including a review of the 2024 Harbor Commission Objectives by the Ad Hoc committee.

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

None.

10. DATE AND TIME FOR NEXT MEETING – Wednesday, April 8, 2026 at 5 p.m.

The next regular meeting is scheduled for April 8, 2026 at 5:00 p.m.

11. ADJOURNMENT

There being no further business coming before the Harbor Commission, the meeting was adjourned at 6:55 p.m.