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Port of Newport explores capital improvement projects

(NEWPORT,OR) A creative approach to addressing two major capital improvement projects at the Port of Newport will be floated before permitting agencies in February after getting the conceptual nod from Port Commissioners at their meeting on Tuesday.

Aaron Bretz, Director of Operations, outlined a concept that would jointly address two of the capital improvement projects prioritized in the Port's 2019 Strategic Business Plan (SBP): the reconstruction of Port Dock 7 and improvements to the South Beach fishing pier.

With a trend toward consolidation in the commercial fishing industry and the subsequent move toward larger fishing vessels, Bretz explained that Port Dock 7's current configuration, which dates back more than 50 years, is obsolete – a sentiment supported in the Port's SBP.

Authored by the consulting firm of WSP USA, the plan notes that "The increase in bigger boats presents several challenges to the Port, as well as to other older harbors in the region. First, the existing docks are at the end of their useful life and will need to be replaced. Second, the larger vessels put additional physical strain on facilities that were not designed for them; this can cause structural damage, especially during storms. Third, replacement marina facilities will need to be designed to meet current and future vessel trends."

Bretz shared some general design ideas that he had worked jointly on with General Manager Paula Miranda and Harbormaster Kent Gibson that would increase dock capacity, both in terms of linear feet and in wider berths. The director of operations stressed, however, that these were merely concepts and a starting point for discussion at a meeting that is essentially a sounding board with permitting agencies.

Any new construction will bring substantial environmental mitigation costs, but Bretz explained the unique opportunity that arises from linking the commercial dock project to the South Beach fishing pier. At more than 50 years old, the pier is in need of replacement and listed in the SBP as a capital improvement project that should be addressed within the next five years.

Oftentimes, projects like these require investment into outside projects to earn mitigation credits required by regulatory agencies.

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“It is best for us to put that money into our own project rather than into someone else’s,” Bretz said. “With the South Beach fishing pier, we could get the mitigation credits we need while knocking out a project we have to do anyway.”

Still in the conceptual stages, a pier redesign could utilize the recreational marina breakwater as its foundation, allowing for the removal of 75 pilings and replacing any remaining creosote pilings with steel. In the process, the fishing pier would engage best practices according to the Americans with Disabilities Act (ADA) and generally be improved in a way that optimizes crabbing and fishing opportunities and reduces snag hazards. Connecting the two projects would also bring additional funding opportunities, according to Miranda.

If the joint projects were to proceed, the timeline is a long one that will begin with turning concepts into actual plans and designs, and end with construction in 2024 or 2025.

Port Commissioners were supportive of management’s efforts to find creative ways of tackling what could be a \$19 million project and, with acknowledgement that the idea is in the exploration stage, gave Bretz the go-ahead to float the idea at the U.S. Army Corps of Engineers Kaizen meeting in February.

Meanwhile, the Port awaits news from the Economic Development Administration (EDA) on more than \$1 million in grant funds for repairs to the Port Dock 5 pier. Officials have indicated that the funding has been set aside for the Port but the official award has not yet been made.

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