



STONINGTON HARBOR MANAGEMENT COMMISSION

Newsletter



Volume 3, Issue 1

Spring/Summer 2014

FROM THE CHAIRMAN: *Jay Spalding*

The Stonington Harbor Management Commission (SHMC) publishes this newsletter annually to present important developments and information concerning the Harbor. 2013 marked a year of transition. After 10 years as chair Peter Vermilya stepped down and completed 19 years of service to the town on this Commission. Most notable in his many accomplishments was the new Harbor Management Plan adopted in 2012. I took over as Chair in April 2013. The Commission is now fully staffed with 5 Borough and 5 Town Representatives.

Other changes this year include the first ever private mooring permit fee increase from \$20 to \$50 dollars. The SHMC is wholly funded through these mooring fees. This fee increase will provide the Commission the necessary resources to properly manage the harbor. Every dollar collected goes back to the harbor in direct costs. The Harbormaster's boat refit, Slow-No Wake (SNW) and Transient Anchorage buoys, the mooring grid and depth survey are all projects reported in this newsletter that would not be possible without this fee increase. Using the new Plan, we are taking several steps to better manage the mooring field and make more moorings available to individuals on the waiting list. A hydrographic survey will give us better information about our changing harbor depths. The mooring grid system is about halfway through implementation. Together these tools will allow us to better utilize the space we have and readily identify new mooring locations. Finally, we are looking to the future and working with the Borough and Town to address the longer term issue of the degradation of the "Monsanto Breakwater".

The SHMC meets on the second Monday every month at 7:00pm in the Stonington Police Station Public Meeting room. The public is always invited. The Plan, SHMC Agendas and Minutes are available on the Stonington Town web site. And please contact me directly with your concerns.

FROM THE HARBORMASTER: *Eric Donch*

Well it certainly has been a long cold winter! I'm sure that you are all itching to get back on the water as am I.

The implementation of the mooring grid is well into its second year of the three year plan. I expect that this season we will be able to start seeing the actual rows and columns of moorings coming into place. With the new grid comes a new numbering system for the mooring field. Moorings will be in numbered rows from the entrance of the harbor to its head at the train tracks. Row 1 will be near the breakwater and row 48 will be closest to the tracks. The columns will be lettered East to West with column "A" closest to Stonington Borough and column "Z" closest to the Wamphassuc side of the harbor. The moorings will be designated number then letter (i.e., 23M).

It appears relief is in sight for the Sandy Point channel. The Army Corps of Engineers (ACE) recently issued a Public Notice of the intent to perform maintenance dredging to restore the channel to 10 ft depth and 100 ft width (see the link to the Public Notice the end of this newsletter*). The dredged material is expected to be placed on Sandy Point where much of it has been determined to have come from. The channel was last dredged in 1996/97.

Please keep in mind that the entire harbor is "SLOW, NO WAKE" and is marked as such. New larger, more visible "SLOW, NO WAKE" buoys will be placed at the entrance to the harbor this season to ensure all vessels are aware of the limit (see expanded article below).

I look forward to seeing everyone on the water this season. Flag me down to give me ideas for our harbor or provide feedback on what you like / dislike. I can be reached at 860-303-5046, and also via email me at: harbormaster@usa.com, and please use VHF channels 9 and 72 when on the water.

HARBOR HAPPENINGS

NEWS FROM A HARBOR PARTNER – CUSH

Since 2008, general water quality indicators have been measured bi-weekly May through October by CUSH (Clean Up Sound and Harbors). All findings are shared with the SHMC. Throughout Stonington Harbor, including Lambert's Cove, CUSH data have consistently indicated good water quality, which has further improved in mid-Harbor since 2009.

Many pollutants that enter the Harbor are likely removed by tidal flushing. However, water quality is poorer in the flow-restricted coves. To learn more about how changing conditions affect cove water quality, CUSH has begun monitoring on both ebb and flood tides, as well as monitoring the quantity and quality of input from freshwater feeder streams.

CUSH has invited national experts on organic turf and garden management to present workshops on safe and effective techniques for landscaping without runoff pollution. These experts, through CUSH, have also provided on-site consultation to local government and community organizations in our area. Coastal cleanups led by CUSH continue to remove dangers to navigation, threats to wildlife, and debris that damages our recreation and tourism industries.

CUSH invites volunteers and new members to join its efforts. More information about CUSH, its goals and activities may be found at www.cush.org.

PLEASE USE THE PUMP-OUT BOATS

Turn-around times for the pump-out boats that service Stonington Harbor have been vastly reduced thanks to a discharge pump located on the new Harbormaster Boat Dock just yards from the Borough Sewage Treatment plant. The Westerly based pump-out boats no longer have to return to home base to discharge their loads and can spend that time attending boats. The discharge pump services can only service the pump-out boats (i.e., no private boats). A pump-out boat can be called to your boat via VHF Ch 8 (preferred) or by calling 401-348-2572.

RULES OF THE ROAD: *by Eric Donch*

Because I believe so strongly in this subject I'd like to reprint a portion of this column from last season's newsletter. One of my pet peeves is it seems that no one keeps their VHF radio on. While underway, if so equipped, every vessel should have their VHF radio on and tuned to channel 9 as a minimum. VHF is a boater's tool to communicate with marinas, launches, and other vessels. If you need to have a conversation with another vessel, once you have established contact on Ch 9, then move the conversation to another channel. Your VHF radio is not a toy, nor is it a way to catch up on the latest gossip. Please, meet at the beach or use your cell phone for that.

Always keep channel 16 clear. Channel 16 is for hailing the USCG and distress calls only. I encourage you to monitor Ch 16 if your radio has a scanning feature. Every boater is responsible to respond to a distress call if able to do so without putting themselves in harms' way.

Always keep a chart out and refer to it often. Even if you think you know the waters you are in. Remember, slowing down is almost always the best answer!

SPECIAL PURPOSE MOORINGS

Special Purpose (SP) moorings are intended to provide access to the water for the general public. Moorings of this type will be approved by the Commission at its discretion for a period of one (1) year. These moorings allow qualified organizations to install a seasonal mooring if its intended use meets the requirements defined in the Harbor Management Plan (Art 4, Sec 4). Those requirements are: 1) mooring availability, 2) provides access to the water for the general public, 3) promotes the use of the water for recreational, education or research use, 4) person/entity is a "non-profit" organization, and 5) intended/actual use.

The intent is that SP moorings provide access to the water to the general public via a qualified organization and in a safe and orderly manner. The locations for SP moorings are temporary and assigned annually by the Harbormaster at sites that are typically unsuitable for long term private moorings.

At the beginning of each boating season, the SHMC has an open submission period, soliciting qualified applicants, with public notices published in local newspapers. Eligible organizations may submit an application for approval to install SP moorings for the approved one (1) year time period. Groups/individuals must resubmit an application each year if they want to continue to have use of SP moorings.

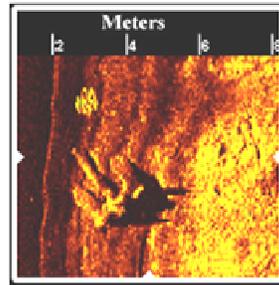
For the 2014 season, New England Science & Sailing (NESS) at 70 Water Street, Stonington, has been approved for four (4) Special Purpose moorings at the public meeting held in March. These moorings will hold a fleet of keelboats that are used in a variety of NESS instructional programs for the spring, summer, and fall seasons. Anyone interested in accessing these boats would need to contact Mark Zagol at NESS, (860) 535-9362, or via e-mail at mzagol@nessf.org.

HYDROGRAPHIC SURVEY OF HARBOR

You may have noticed a small boat traversing the Harbor in a “lawn mowing-type” pattern with equipment and technicians on board. We have contracted with HydroData, Inc. (Chester CT) to perform a detailed hydrographic survey of the entire Harbor. This survey will provide accurate depth contours in the mooring field and help identify the limits of the placement of moorings on the grid based on water depth, shoals and previously uncharted obstructions.

HDI mobilized a two-person field crew that included an ACSM certified hydrographer aboard their survey vessel equipped with commercial survey grade DGPS and an Inner Space Model 455 digital depth sounder. The survey area extends south from the RR bridges to the inner breakwater (also called the west breakwater), and west from east side of the harbor to Wamphassuc Point. Soundings occurred every 60 ft, which is half the spacing of the mooring grid and should assure that any anomalies between the moorings would be identified.

The survey also includes using a Marine Sonics Technology “Sea Scan” 600 KHz side scan sonar to “sweep” the west side of the harbor along the shoreline and also scan other areas of potential concern (i.e., submerged debris, abandoned and rogue moorings, derelict vessels, etc.).



A side scan survey provides a shadow-gram image of objects on the bottom that could pose a hazard to navigation. A typical example is shown here for an abandoned anchor found in shallow water that could pose a hazard to navigation.

These efforts initiated by the SHMC are part of an ongoing program to assure safe and efficient use of the harbor.

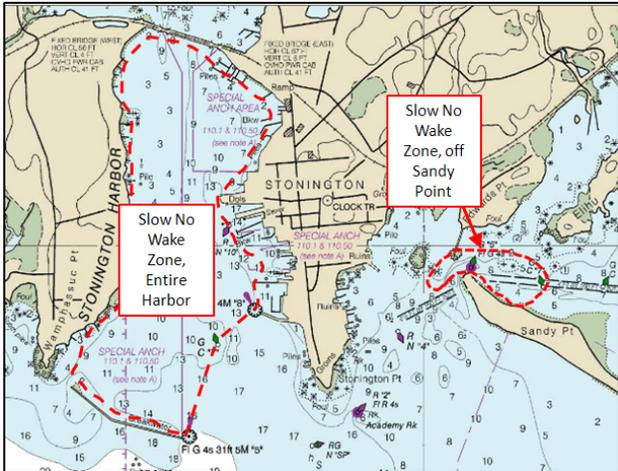
MOORING USE SURVEYS

You may have noticed someone in a small boat circling your mooring and possibly taking pictures. During the summer months, members of the Commission assist the Harbormaster by performing surveys of the mooring fields. Three surveys are conducted over the course of the summer. They determine if the mooring is on location with the proper buoy, if the buoy markings are correct, and if the assigned vessel is using the mooring. These surveys may include a photograph for verification. Each Commission member is assigned a mooring zone in order to split the workload. If you intend to vacate your mooring for an extended period (like a summer cruise) please notify the Harbormaster so that the survey properly accounts for that temporary vacancy.

SLOW NO-WAKE ZONES

The maritime use of Stonington Harbor has increased dramatically in recent years. Stonington has grown as a popular stopping place for cruising boaters and a destination port due to our excellent marine services, restaurants, and other attractions. In addition, there has been a huge increase in youth and adult small boat sailing, kayaking, and racing. However, increased use could also present increased risks. To address this concern, in 2011 the Town passed a “Slow/No Wake” (SNW) ordinance, and the Stonington Harbor Management Commission (SHMC) approved placement of a number of SNW buoys and signs in and around the harbor to advise boaters of the speed and wake restrictions.

Placement of SNW warnings immediately proved successful in slowing traffic. However, it seemed that some boaters had a misconception that the speed and wake restriction began as one passed north of the commercial fishing fleet docks. In fact, the SNW area runs from the east end of the West breakwater to Buoy "C7" and then to the west end of the old "Monsanto" breakwater. A separate SNW area applies to the tip of Sandy Point due to the proximity of the shore with the channel. See the chart below for clarification of the SNW areas.



To improve awareness of the ordinance, the SHMC in 2013 decided to increase the size of the four main buoys at the harbor entrance. Previously, during storm "Sandy", some of the original smaller buoys had suffered damage. Two small SNW buoys were then replaced in 2013 with larger, more visible and more securely anchored buoys, and the last two harbor entrance buoys will be replaced in 2014 with the larger buoys.

The SHMC believes the SNW ordinance coupled with installation of these buoys has contributed to the safety of Stonington Harbor. We appreciate the support we have received from boaters and the entire community. Thanks!

TOWN WHARF/BREAKWATER STATUS

In 1827, only 13 years after the Battle of Stonington, Congress directed the Corps of Engineers to create a Stonington Town Wharf, and in so doing, to ensure that Stonington would be "a good and secure harbor." In other words, the wharf was meant to be a breakwater protecting the Harbor's deep-water east side, as well as a pier. The structure was impressive. Seven courses of split stone were laid

atop a rubble footing. It was 12 feet wide at the top, and stood 8½ feet above mean low water. Mooring bollards ran down its length. It was paved with cut stone, and a tower for a navigational light stood at the west end. Wagons could be driven on it. There were steps to access boats tied up to its northern side.

For 150 years Stonington's wharf/breakwater was a landmark, featured in prints and postcards as a symbol of the community. It was a popular destination for walkers, artists, boaters and casual fishermen, as well as for those mooring and loading and unloading vessels of all kinds.

Decades later, the Army Corps began to re-think its vision for Stonington. As a result, in the late 19th century the Corps built the two outer breakwaters, as part of a scheme to provide "harbors of refuge" for coastal vessels. From this new perspective, the old wharf/breakwater no longer was important. The Corps not only abandoned upkeep of the 1827 structure, but removed its naturally-provided "west arm," by blasting and dredging away Penguin Shoal.

Despite abandonment, the structure endured for decades more and is often referred to as the "Monsanto Breakwater". However, after Hurricanes Donna and Gloria, it began to be obvious that deterioration was underway. By the end of the twentieth century, it was in abject disrepair. The remaining structure is nearly flush with the sea at high water (see photo below in January 2014).



Not only has the structure been knocked to pieces, but there has been a rise in sea level which has reduced the efficacy of *all* breakwaters, including the newer ones to the south. Consequently, storm surges that the old structure (in company with the

new ones) once could bar from the Harbor's east side are no longer impeded.

Storms Irene and Sandy resulted in the destruction and consequent removal of the outer half of "Skipper's Wharf," the first large dock to the north of the old wharf/breakwater. Owners of shorefront properties on the Harbor's east side now worry about damage from breakaway boats and docks.

Concerned about this situation as a threat to navigation, the Stonington Harbor Management Commission has joined a Task Force (with representatives of the Town and Borough Governments and State Senator Andrew Maynard) to assess, plan and seek support for the restoration of the Old Stonington Wharf/Breakwater. The process may be a long one, but it is a matter of real importance, for both practical and historical reasons. *We hope this effort will be supported by everyone interested in our Harbor's welfare!*

HARBORMASTER'S BOAT UPDATE

It is important that the Harbormaster have ready access to a boat of sufficient size and capabilities to perform his duties. Our boat, the *Robert G* has served this purpose for many years and was a second-hand boat when procured. But over the years, the boat and motor maintenance cost was increasing and the SHMC and the HM wrestled with the decision of "buy new" or "refurbish" what we have.

Although a new boat & motor were considered, it became clear that the current boat's design, a 20 ft Ocean Scout Bristol, provided the most versatility and functionality, and refurbishing it made sense. We also found that the motor could be traded in for a new one and that made sense too.

Consequently, the boat was refurbished with a new deck, new water tight compartments and a new fuel tank by its original manufacturer, Ocean Scout in Bristol RI. The outboard was traded for a new Yamaha 115 hp outboard and installed by PMW Marine.

The photos below show the boat refurbishment in progress and the results. We are now confident that the HM boat and motor will serve us well for the next 8-10 years or so.



THE REEF OFF SANDY POINT

Hit rock bottom recently? Many of us go to Sandy Point in a small boat for a day at the beach and anchor near the north end off the SW facing shore. But beware that there is an extensive rocky reef that starts 50 yards or so off the beach (in front of the clump of large shrubs) and extends several hundred yards SW towards the rocky extension of Bartlett's Reef (also called the "outer breakwater"). The image below shows how to locate the reef from the beach by lining up Omega St with the clump of large bushes and then looking SW toward Bartlett's Reef.

During the summer months with normal tides, the water depth over the reef varies from 1-3 ft and can easily damage props and lower units. In the winter with extreme tides, the reef is clearly visible at low tide, as shown by the photo below taken from the top of Omega Street in January 2014. And yes, that white dot is a seagull perched on the reef!

So please be careful when navigating in this area.



*Link to Public Notice: <http://www.nae.usace.army.mil/Portals/74/docs/Navigation/Pawcatuck19Mar2014.pdf>

WAITING LIST IMPORTANT DATES

Anytime:	Applications can be submitted and received
January 31 st :	Current Waiting List published on web site and at Town Hall
July 31 st :	Waiting List updated and published again
August Meeting:	Management Plan Annual Review and public workshop
September 30 th :	Waiting List Renewal Applications sent to those on current Waiting List
November 30 th :	Waiting List Renewal Applications due to Harbormaster

MOORING HOLDER IMPORTANT DATES

January 31 st :	Current assigned Mooring Holder List published on web site and at Town Hall
January 31 st :	Mooring Permit Renewal Applications sent to current mooring holders
March 31 st :	Mooring Permit Renewal Applications due to Harbormaster
June 30 th :	Winter Sticks must be replaced by approved Mooring Balls
July 31 st :	Assigned Mooring List updated and published
August Meeting:	Management Plan Annual Review and public workshop
October 1 st :	Winter Stick may begin replacing Mooring Balls
December 31 st :	Required Mooring Inspection documentation due Harbormaster
December 31 st :	All Mooring Permits expire

Stonington Harbor Management Commission
 152 Elm Street
 Stonington, CT 06378

Stonington Harbormaster: Eric Donch
 PO Box 135
 Stonington, CT 06378

Web Site: http://www.stonington-ct.gov/Pages/StoningtonCT_SHarbor/index

Assistant Harbormaster: Charles Estabrooks

Commissioners:

Borough Representatives (5):
 Sherman Crites, *Treasurer*
 Jesse Diggs, *Vice Chairman*
 Rodney Johnstone
 Bruce MacKinnon
 Edward Smith

Town Representatives (5):
 David Motherway
 Paul O'Neill
 Caleb Rose
 Jay Spalding, *Chairman*
 Peter Tacy