

# Time and tide wait for no man...or dredging project

## Barnstable Harbor needs work now, many say

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Town officials are racing against the clock to complete a critical dredging project in Barnstable Harbor.

The waterway on the north side of town is already known for its steep tide changes that can make navigating in and out of the area tricky at best. Adding to that challenge in recent years is ongoing shoaling, making it even more difficult for commercial and pleasure boaters. At low tide, the commercial and whale watching vessels are finding Barnstable Harbor impassable.

Kate Plettner, co-owner of Barnstable Marine Services, said Barnstable Harbor is a valuable resource to the town that should be maintained. Plettner said dredging is "almost like plowing snow" and should be planned for every three to four years.

"It's a town waterway and the whole town benefits from it," she said. "Hopefully, they'll consider

maintaining this facility."

After hearing about the problem from former town councilor Peter Jasin, a cadet at Mass. Maritime Academy, Councilor Ann Canedy got in touch with Plettner, a childhood friend, and set up a meeting with business leaders and officials including Town Engineer Bob Burgmann and marina manager Eric Shufelt.

Assistant Town Manager Paul Niedzwiecki said the town is hoping to complete a dredging project in the harbor before next summer.

"We've begun to contact the state/county agencies that we need to seek approval or permits from, so we're in the initial stage of drafting permit applications," he said.

While Niedzwiecki said the harbor is in need of a "comprehensive dredging," that project could take a full two years. In the meantime, they're trying to find some temporary relief.

Unfortunately, time is not on their side. Because of concern for marine animals and wildlife, the dredging window for Barnstable Harbor will close in March.

The town also needs to find a suitable disposal site for the spoils that are dragged from the

bottom of the harbor. "It's not so much seeking the authority to take stuff off the bottom, it's where you put it," Niedzwiecki said. "Disposal options are probably the number one way to expedite the process."

He said the town is considering several disposal plans and the comments they get will help lead them to a decision.

Department of Public Works Director Mark Ells said they're approaching the project in two phases. The first is to complete a stop-gap project before next summer and the second is a more comprehensive maintenance of the entire harbor area.

"But obviously, this is a huge funding issue," he said.

The short-term project could cost as much as \$75,000, if dredge spoils can be discharged on Millway Beach. If not, transportation costs could dramatically increase the final price tag.

Ells said the long-term cost for a complete dredging of Barnstable Harbor could be "hundreds of thousands, maybe millions."

Canedy said it's important for the town to start planning regular dredging of its harbors to avoid the need for emergency

action. The cost would have to be budgeted, she said, and could come in part from increased mooring fees.

While the town is trying to identify funding sources, the main concern right now is getting the permit - what Ells called the "slow cog in the wheel."

The material taken from the bottom of the harbor is expected to be relatively clean and could be used for beach nourishment.

"It's not going to happen in a month or so," Niedzwiecki said. "We're really trying to squish this in so we can get it in before the closing of the dredging season. We would be willing to ask for an extension, but the state is very reluctant to extend the dredging window."

Adding to the problem of a short window for dredging is the upcoming weather. Barnstable Harbor has frozen over in the last few winters. Also, the county-owned dredge, which is expected to do the work, already has a work schedule that includes projects on the south side of town.

Plettner said it's even possible the heavy ice on the harbor has accelerated the silting process on the bottom.