

Norwalk Harbor Management Commission

City of Norwalk, Connecticut

The mission of the Norwalk Harbor Management Commission is to evaluate issues, make recommendations, and provide support to the City of Norwalk in preserving and enhancing the use, vitality, and quality of life associated with the Norwalk Harbor and Long Island Sound.

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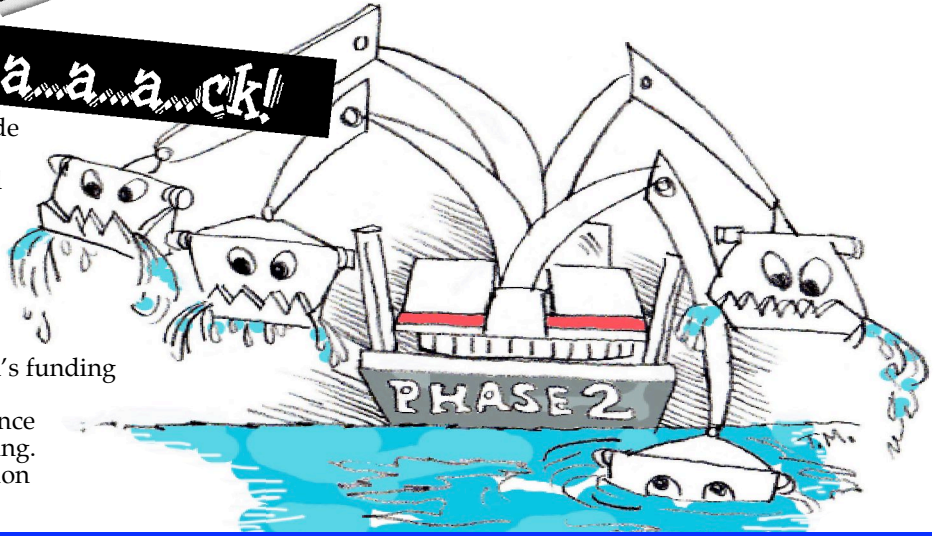
...and we are delighted that Phase 2 dredging is well on its way.

Twelve years ago, when we started the dredging process, we never imagined it would take this long. Our sincere gratitude to Mayor Dick Moccia for taking up the fight to keep our harbor "The Jewel of Long Island Sound", started by Mayor Frank Esposito and Mayor Alex Knopp.

Our gratitude also goes to Congressman Chris Shays, Sen. Chris Dodd and Sen. Joe Lieberman for working diligently to get the federal appropriations. We also thank Gov. Jodi Rell, Bob Genuario, Rep. Larry Cafero, Sen. Bob Duff, and Rep. Chris Perone, who were responsible for the State Bond Commission's funding of \$1 million for the needed capping material, and to Mayor Moccia, Norwalk's Common Council and finance department for the City's \$500,000 share for the capping.

Below, Dr. John Pinto reflects on the age old question ...are we there yet? *-Tony Mobilia, Chairman, NHMC*

It's Ba...a...ck!



Phase 2 Dredging: Dénouement or Swan Song

By John Thomas Pinto, Ph.D. NHMC, Dredging Committee Chairman

Phase 2 of the Norwalk Harbor Dredging Project is currently underway and is scheduled to finish January 31st 2009. The Norwalk Harbor Management Commission has devoted 12 years to this project and has not determined whether the final chapter in its efforts should be considered the dénouement or Swan Song. If one consults Wikipedia, a dénouement represents the climax of a series of events that serve as the conclusion of the story. For the commission and the citizens of Norwalk, it would mean that conflicts were resolved, normalcy established and a psychological purging has been experienced. On the other hand, a "swan song" is an idiomatic expression that refers to a final theatrical performance or an accomplishment and carries the connotation that the actors are aware that this is the last performance of their lifetime, and expend everything in one magnificent final effort. Time will help us decide which of the two terms is appropriate.

In the mean time, dredging has begun in the approach to the

the Stroffolino and Metro North Bridges. Our next major dredge area is the South Norwalk channel heading south from the Stroffolino Bridge to the north end of the South Anchorage. This stretch of channel is authorized for a depth of 12 ft but limited Federal funding only allows us to remove 33,100 cu yds to a depth of 9 ft MLLW. The final "base bid" item put forth by the U.S. Army Corp of Engineers (USACE) for the Norwalk project is an area required to serve as partial "cap" material for the Norwalk project in Central Long Island Sound. This is represented by the bend in Norwalk Harbor channel as it leads out to the mouth of the harbor. This section will be dredged to a depth of 9 ft and encompasses 31,800 cu yds. Two other areas which were part of option bid items by the USACE for the Norwalk dredging project include a 24,000 cu yds section opposite the South Norwalk Boat Club to the south end of the South Anchorage and a 6,800 cu yds area located between Long Beach and Round Beach Islands.

The commission in consultation with the USACE determined that the tally of 192,700 cu yds represents those areas in critical need of dredging and is all that Norwalk could ultimately accomplish with the \$5.608 million dollars in Federal funding acquired by Congressman Chris Shays and Senator Joe Lieberman. In addition, through the efforts of Mayor Richard Moccia, State Representative Larry Cafero and Senator Bob Duff, Norwalk received \$1 million dollars in State bond money ultimately acquired from money issued for the Urban Renewal Act. This bond money will pay for the dredging and transportation cost of 75,000 cu yds of material from North Cove Harbor in Old Saybrook which is needed for "capping" the entire Norwalk project. The Norwalk dredging project coupled with that from North Cove Harbor will be a distinct benefit to the State of Connecticut in that it

will enable 15 smaller dredging projects from around the State to use this material as "cap" as part of their individual requirements for disposal at the Central Long Island Sound site.

To address our earlier question of dénouement or Swan Song, Phase 2 is definitely not our final performance as dredging will always be vital to the survival of Norwalk Harbor ■



East Norwalk Basin and will involve the entire East Basin with removal of 53,000 cu yds of silt to a depth of 6 ft mean lower low water (MLLW). The next section will entail removal of 44,000 cu yds from the South Anchorage also to a depth of 6 ft. This is less than its originally authorized depth of 10 ft when this area served as a holding station for barges prior to heading up the harbor past

Coastal Permitting Changes Involve Harbor Management, Shellfish Commissions and Harbor Master

By Geoff Steadman, NHMC Planning Consultant

On November 3rd of this year, the Connecticut Department of Environmental Protection (DEP) instituted some significant changes in its coastal permitting program that regulates all docks, piers, bulkheads, dredging, and other work in the state's tidal waters, including Norwalk Harbor. Over the years, that program has caused more than a little consternation, for those of us who work in local government and for the owners of private businesses and waterfront properties. After all, it has sometimes taken literally years to get permits from the DEP for some projects.

We recognize that some of the consternation is unavoidable, reflecting just a basic reaction that many people will have when they're being regulated. It's also true that some of the issues associated with the DEP's permit program are inherent in any bureaucracy. The Norwalk Harbor Management Commission has always felt, however, that some of the problems were "treatable" if the DEP would take a critical look at its own program and accept that it can and should be improved. That's recently happened and the resulting changes are meant to streamline the permit process.

In a previous article (see the October 2005 newsletter) we talked about how the Commission reviews development plans and other proposals affecting Norwalk Harbor to make sure they're consistent with the city's Harbor Management Plan. This fundamental responsibility of the Commission is established by state law, the Norwalk Code, and the Harbor Management Plan and includes review of the applications submitted to the DEP.

While the Commission doesn't have power to approve or deny those applications, its recommendations have always had substantial weight since any recommendation pursuant to the Harbor Management Plan is binding on the DEP's decisions, unless the DEP shows cause why it should act otherwise. This requirement is set forth in Section 22a-113n(b) of the Connecticut General Statutes and was recently reaffirmed by the Connecticut Appeals Court in *DiPietro v. Zoning Board of Appeals of the City of Milford* (AC 26166).

Norwalk's harbor management review process, established in 1990 when the Common Council adopted the Harbor Management Plan, is based on coordination and cooperation among the Commission and other city, state, and federal agencies, particularly the planning and zoning commissions, Shellfish Commission, the DEP, and the U.S. Army Corps of Engineers.

The city's existing process will not change significantly as a result of the new DEP procedures and the role of the Commission will actually be strengthened.

What are some of the key aspects of the new procedures? First, an applicant is now required to consult with the Harbor Management Commission, Shellfish Commission, and Harbor Master before submitting an application to the DEP. At this stage of the process, the Harbor Management Commission will have the principal role in deciding if the application can move forward. The Commission can identify any issues it thinks will affect approval of the application, as well as specific information that needs to be provided by the applicant. The

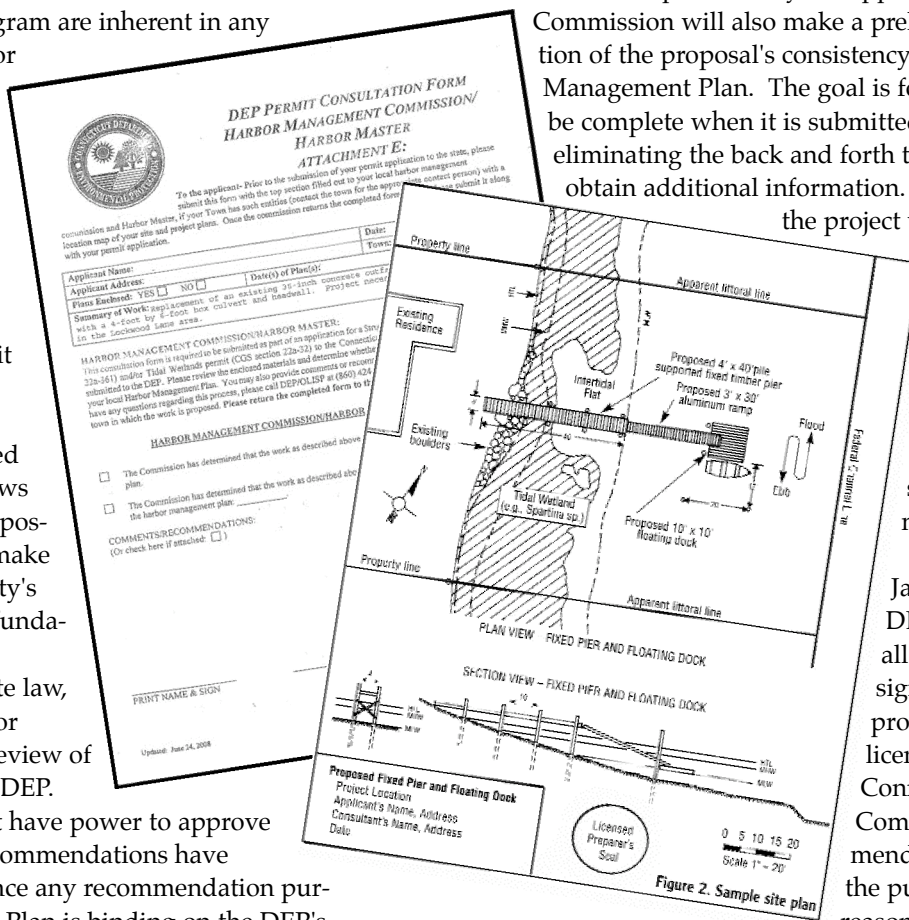
Commission will also make a preliminary determination of the proposal's consistency with the Harbor Management Plan. The goal is for the application to be complete when it is submitted to the DEP, thereby eliminating the back and forth time required to obtain additional information. No modifications to the project will be accepted by

the DEP after the application is submitted and the DEP's goal is to issue final approval of an acceptable application within six months of its submittal.

Also, starting January 1, 2009, the DEP will require that all plan drawings be signed and sealed by a professional engineer licensed in the State of Connecticut. The Commission has recommended this for years for the purpose of providing reasonable assurance that

the plans reviewed by the Commission are accurate and that any such plans approved by the DEP can be built as approved.

To get more information on the new process, you can contact the Commission through the Planning and Zoning Office (203 854-7780) or the DEP at (860 424-3034) or visit the DEP website at www.ct.gov/dep. The Commission looks forward to its expanded role in the DEP's permitting process and, through its reviews and recommendations, to continuing to advance the city's interests for maintaining a good balance between safe and beneficial use of the harbor and protection of the harbor's natural environment. ■



Hatcheries Provide a Reliable Supply of Seed Oysters

By Geoff Denham, Sargents Cove Oyster Hatchery

During the late 1980's and early 1990's Connecticut's oyster industry was enjoying a boom. Natural sets of oysters were at an all time high and record landings were being made. In 1992 the Connecticut harvest yielded \$48,000,000 making it the nation's second largest producer of oysters after Louisiana. The boom years came to a crashing halt in 1997 when two parasitic diseases Dermo and MSX struck the beds. Oyster populations suffered about a 90% decline in the summer and fall of 1997. Boats that were accustomed to harvesting hundreds of bushels of healthy shellfish were now pulling up dredges full of dead and dying oysters. The following years saw little recovery with no major natural sets occurring. In 2002 William Ziegler III of Darien approached Connecticut's largest shellfish company - Hillard Bloom Shellfish with the idea of starting an oyster hatchery. Hatcheries had proved successful on Long Island, providing a reliable supply of seed oysters for planting on leased beds in the Sound. The hatchery was set up under the supervision of oysterman Dave Hopp in Hillard Bloom's then vacant shucking facility on Water Street in South Norwalk. The first hatchery oysters were planted in the fall of 2003.

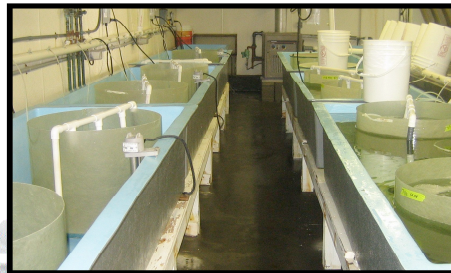
The hatchery season begins in January each year with the conditioning of mature broodstock oysters. These are usually selected for disease resistance and fast growth. Some strains have been selectively bred since the early 1960's. The broodstock are held in water heated to 60-65F and fed a diet of specially cultivated algae. After about six weeks the oysters will be in a condition to spawn. Spawning is induced by a rapid increase in water temperature. This mimics the Sound's waters warming naturally in late spring. One female oyster can release 10-15 million eggs so only a few females are needed. Usually about 100-150 million eggs are collected at each

spawn. The eggs are fertilized with sperm from a suitable male and stocked into large 400 gallon larvae tanks. The eggs develop after about 12 hours and begin their 14 day larvae stage. During this period the oyster larvae are fed a similar live algae diet to that of the broodstock. When the larvae have reached a size of about 1/3rd of a millimeter they are ready to 'set' or attach to some solid surface. At this stage the larvae develop an eye spot which enables them to swim away from a source of light and toward the bottom of the tank. Now the larvae are transferred to special setting tanks in which a supply of finely ground clam shell or cultch is provided. The oysters then begin to permanently attach themselves to the cultch. Ideally only one oyster will attach to each grain. This ensures the animal develops as a separate single oyster preferred by the half-shell market. The oysters now begin to resemble the familiar sedentary shellfish, albeit only about 1/2mm. In the next week or so the oysters or 'spat' will have reached a size of 1-2mm and can now be transferred to the nursery in Darien. By late summer most will have reached a size of about 1/2" when they are robust enough to survive by themselves on the seabed.

Most of the seed goes to Hillard Bloom Shellfish but the hatchery also provides seed to other growers and organizations such as Bridgeport's Aquaculture School.

Since 2006 the hatchery has typically produced between 11 and 15 million oyster seed each year. Some years are better than others. Problems have occurred with water quality particularly following heavy rain. Oyster larvae are extremely sensitive to contaminants and can serve as the 'canary in the mineshaft' giving us insight into the general health of the estuary. Even after the seed is planted, losses take place. Predation by crabs, starfish and drill, storms, and siltation consume up to 50% of the seed planted. The first hatchery oysters were harvested in 2006 after 2-3 years growing on the seabed. These are top quality 'Blue Point' oysters and supply the lucrative half shell markets of most major northeastern cities. Ironically, the success of the hatchery has coincided with a recovery of the natural oyster population to the Sound. Since 2004, natural sets have been increasing.

With the combination of the return of a healthy natural population and continued increase in hatchery production Norwalk's oyster industry is set for a welcome recovery. Connecticut's harvest is now around \$7.4 million, the best in many years but still a way off from the boom years of the early 1990's.



Water Quality Improves in Norwalk Harbor

By Tony D'Andrea, Mayor's Water Quality Committee Chairman

Through combined efforts of the Mayor's Water Quality Committee, the Norwalk Health Department, Shellfish Commission, Department of Public Works, Harbor Watch/River Watch, Norman Bloom and Son, NRG's Norwalk Harbor Station and the 2008 Summer Interns, the overall quality of water within Norwalk Harbor has shown remarkable improvement.

The Interns, Cecilia Lane and Caitlin Steckler, monitored over 30 river stations from the Norwalk/Wilton town line to Wall Street, and 13 beach sites from Calf Pasture to Norwalk Yacht Club to determine the type and make up of water entering the Norwalk River and Harbor. The only closure of a Norwalk beach in 2008 was located at the Harbor View Beach 6/16 through 6/18 due to high bacteria counts. The occurrence of beach closures in 2008 has been significantly less than in past years.

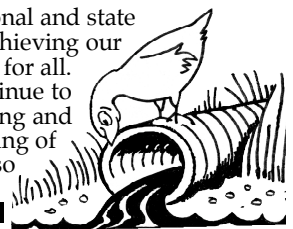
Although preliminary data of bacteria counts from the Norwalk River and Harbor bacteria counts are consistent with those of previous years, we must recognize the extra effort put forward by Tom Closter of the Health Department and Mike Yeosok of the DPW. They were instrumental in helping the Committee discover several areas of interconnected storm and sanitary sewers lines in the area of Lockwood and Moody's Lanes. These connections are thought to be responsible for the high fecal coliform counts in discharge coming from the drain pipe at the end of Moody's Lane. Repairs of these areas are underway

and new test data will be forthcoming.

The mission of the Mayor's Water Quality committee is to be increasingly pro-active on matters affecting the health and environment of Norwalk Harbor/River and its efforts have been steadily progressing. City agencies, large marinas and private citizens are requesting information on proper handling of storm water and run off from the land.

Areas of development around the harbor are being reviewed for consistency with best management practices and with the Norwalk Harbor Management Plan. It is extremely important that we continue to work toward eliminating chemicals and fecal microorganisms (from geese and septic systems) from entering the harbor through run off from landward sites and to be aware that storm drains empty directly into the harbor and Long Island Sound.

The level of inter-department, local, regional and state cooperation this year was instrumental in achieving our significant progress toward a cleaner harbor for all. To fight pollution successfully we must continue to evolve beyond accusations and finger pointing and move not only toward objective understanding of the problems that face our watershed but also development of rational cost effective means and plans to mitigate contaminants.



Three false alarms.

By Michael Griffin, Harbor Master

On more than three occasions, over the past several months, reports reached my office that tugs transporting a barge and heavy duty crane equipment were entering the harbor, an indication that the federal dredging project was finally underway. Unfortunately these reports proved to be only wishful thinking on the callers' part.

In fact, the first two equipment sightings resulted from water born commerce entering our harbor, shipments of 150 ton electric power transformers. These transformers were en route to the New Canaan Avenue power sub station transported by Weeks Marine from New Jersey. On both occasions the 350' crane barge was carefully aligned by her

two support tugs with the bulkhead at American Yacht Service on Water Street. Large spuds were next lowered from the barge to the harbor bottom to insure the barge maintained its exact position while the powerful lift crane went about performing its task. The transformers were offloaded by the crane and placed on special low profile heavy duty tractor trailers for the final leg of their journey, traveling by road to the sub station.

The third sighting was the beginning of a completely different project that proved to be very interesting. In July of this year, a federal court had granted to Weeks Marine exclusive salvage rights to

the tug Celtic, its barge the Cape Race and the 1,400 tons of scrap metal that it was carrying as cargo on what became the Celtic's final voyage. All this goes back to 1984 when the Celtic, while transiting from Bridgeport Ct. to Newark N.J. encountered rough seas and sank a mile south of

Sheffield Island in about seventy feet of water causing the death of her entire crew of seven men. Their bodies were later recovered still fixed at their duty stations. For almost two and a half decades the vessels and their cargo, originally valued at \$90,000 dollars, now estimated to be worth \$700,000, lay quietly on the bottom.

Prior to petitioning the Courts Weeks Marine engaged several commercial divers to explore the sunken vessels and later received a positive report that the tugboat's barge, the Cape Race, was resting on the bottom in an upright position with its cargo intact. It was determined that a floating crane equipped with a claw, and with favorable weather, could bring the entire cargo of scrap metal to the surface without disturbing the bottom, in less than three days, Their guesstimate was correct. Upon completion of the salvage operation

a tugboat hauled the bootie to shore to be sold at prevailing market rates. The question is will Weeks Marine, endeavor to raise the barge Cape Race for her value? Rusted and deteriorated, the barge has many holes in her hull, but her weight of 350 tons at today's market value of \$500 per ton would appear to make it financially worth the effort ■



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To contact the Norwalk Harbor Management Commission, call 203.854.7780 or visit us at: www.norwalkct.org/harborcomm
For state information: www.ctharbormanagement.org

Norwalk Harbor: The Jewel of Long Island Sound