

2009 Seward Harbor User Survey Text Response Compilation

Harbor Goals and Potential

- What is the overall goal for the harbor? Working harbor, commercial harbor, upscale marina?
- Are we looking at our competition (Homer, Whittier, Valdez, Cordova, and Kodiak) and assessing how we measure up to the standards in the region?
- Services and upgrades referenced in the survey should already be on the planning table for a competitive harbor. Perception that the harbor already generates an excess of revenue over costs and the items listed in the survey are basic and should already be provided in a first-class harbor.
- We don't communicate a vision of what the harbor could be. Seem to be in reactive, daily management ("police-force") mode instead of forward thinking. Just listen to Homer and Kodiak harbormasters talk about their ports. We need than enthusiasm and vision here.
- We have a wonderful harbor facility with great potential. It would be great if the harbor and city personnel felt that users and local businesses were partners in the success of the harbor rather than the enemy.

Policies

- In making harbor policies, City Hall and Seward citizens need to recognize how much of the city tax base and budget (i.e. parking fees, fish tax, vessel property tax, sales tax) is derived from private businesses that operate out of the harbor. Next to the Seward Highway, the harbor infrastructure accommodates a large amount of commerce that trickles into other aspects of Seward's economy and quality of life. If the harbor did not exist, Seward would not exist in the diversified fashion it does. That being said, it is not fair to suggest that all harbor services, maintenance, and capital improvements, must be supported strictly through moorage rate income and direct paid services provided in the harbor. Harbor policies, services and financial support of the harbor should not neglect those quiet operators who make for little public burden but provide great economic value to the City as a whole. I specifically reference commercial fishing boats, scientific research vessels, and barge activity.
- Allow the pleasure boating community to help draft the maintenance rules. We have legitimate concerns and many of us are afraid that we will hold the bag while the commercial fleet will be allowed to do what they like since they are transient.
- Re-assess drug testing policies for harbor staff.
- `Whenever Code makes demands, department procedure should offer compatible solutions. I.e: Code says all antifreeze must be disposed of properly.... Harbor provides facilities, information and signage so users know what to do and are able to do it.
- Public comment sessions would be really helpful to get feedback before changing the code.
- Policy development shouldn't take place in the back room or on the docks; this is the first notice they are looking at revising city code. Since the vast majority of slip holders live o/s of Seward, they better be contacting current holders.

City Finances/Budget, General

- Seems like the city management does not appreciate that the slip holders and harbor users generate most of the funds for the city. They make us feel like they consider us a cash cow. Business owners do not pay for summer parking downtown. Why are harbor businesses & employees unfairly taxed through parking fees?
- A parking management department is unnecessary. The parking should be the same as it is downtown. No fee. This will go a long way to encourage customers to spend time in Seward.
- It is inappropriate for the community to ask its harbor's customers for financial support as the harbor revenues have been used to subsidized other parts of the town infrastructure through the general fund. Respondents cite the recent availability of federal funds to upgrade harbor facilities as an alternative. One respondent indicated approaching the Regulatory Commission of Alaska to investigate having the Seward Harbor (as a monopoly) designated a regulated entity.
- The harbor is an economic driver for the City – providing jobs and revenue through fish tax, sales tax, and passenger fees. Increased fees will ultimately harm the harbor businesses and reduce the revenue the City receives from harbor activities.
- More taxes and higher fees are counter-productive to a solid economy; instead, like any business, the City must operate within its current means.

- The City residents have some responsibility to help fund infrastructure improvements to their community.
- Most respondents are opposed to increased fees. They cite the passenger fee (originally \$1.50) as having risen despite the fact that it was supposed to sunset. Most users do not think existing slip-holders should be charged higher fees to cover harbor expansion or additional moorage as they will not benefit directly.
- Consider changing passenger fee to a percentage, not flat fee, therefore City will thrive when businesses do and will have to cut back when the businesses experience challenging years. Would help City support businesses as it would be in their best interest to grow business.

Environment

- Seward is expanding to the point that our resources can not meet the demand (fish). Stocking is not adequate for the users and steadily dwindling.
- Need additional waste management for recycling, used oil, coolant, and anti-freeze.
- Need an oil changing facility.
- Need additional septic pumps with fresh water and remove the token system (ease of use and tokens not available after office hours).
- Coal dust is a serious problem. Results in ruined lines, residue inside boat, and stained sails; all costing the user additional money to address.
- Need to rid the harbor of stray electric current; it is often referred to as a "hot" harbor" which rapidly deteriorates zincs.

Condition of the Docks

- Upgrade older existing facilities before adding anything new. While all users are paying fees designated for "dock improvements", many long-time users have not benefited from their investments. The users highlighted the poor conditions on A, B, C, and D, specifically mentioning the need to: stabilize the fingers; ensure that all permanent slips have equal access to power, phone, and cable services; tighten or replace cleats; and ensure the docks are safe for the users. Those with slips on these docks lodged strong opposition to adding any new infrastructure and incurring additional fees before these docks are repaired. S dock was also highlighted by users as needing repair. "Everyone pays the same moorage and harbor fees, yet there is quite a discrepancy in the quality of moorage and services in the harbor."
- If the City is unwilling or unable to offer equal quality and services to its users, that they designate charges based on the quality of the slip/dock assigned. This is NOT a suggestion to simply raise the rates for the new facilities but to look at the value of each location based on safety, security, and services.
- Lighting on the new docks needs to be "fixed"; cleats need to be added on the end of N dock
- Add trash cans and pet clean up stations on the docks.
- Make electricity available to transient customers

Launch Ramps

- Launches are not well-maintained and are inadequate in very low tides.
- One respondent noted that the City's fireboat, the John Foster, is unable to launch during low tides, impeding their ability to respond to emergencies.
- Add an extender ramp to at least one launch position.
- The location of the launch next to the Kenai Fjords Visitor Center was noted as "unhandy" due to all the seasonal traffic, lack of a staging area away from vehicular traffic, pedestrians crossing behind trailers backing up into the upper part of the launch
- There is a problem with commercial businesses (eg. kayak boating or park's service) using the public boat launch for commercial enterprise or government tourism. They restrict boat launch access for periods of up to 1 ½ hours each morning. Either institute a time limit at the launches or designate a separate area for commercial launches.

ADA Issues

- Pave the short section of gravel between the street and the top of J dock ramp to make it easier for carts, wheelchairs, and pedestrians to negotiate.
- Need permanent slips that are ADA accessible.

Facilities

- Need year-round facilities (with shower) at or near J-Dock ramp, South Uplands, and in any area in which live-aboards are positioned (presumes City support for live-aboards)
- In general there's not enough showers for all harbor users and campers and no change machines
- Seward needs a laundry facility
- Add a few more longer camping spaces in the camping areas to allow for RV users with trailers. Is there a place to store trailers for those in the water from May-Sept?
- Provide hospitality area: public pay phones and local information for visiting crew members in harbor.

Fish Cleaning Stations

- Respondents offered many favorable comments regarding the fish cleaning stations. Improvement suggestions included: adding a fish cleaning area at the transient slips. Valdez was cited as a good example of fish cleaning stations off which Seward could benchmark.

Customer Service

- Comments regarding customer service in Seward varied greatly from those that thought staff was awesome to respondents on the opposite end of the spectrum.
- Provide staff training that works toward true customer service; train staff as if the harbor were a business, and operated like they have a competitor (they do with Valdez, Whittier, and Homer) and work to keep their customers.
- Training and job restructuring could foster problem-solving skills for front line staff so that they can work with customers when questions arise instead of having to quote a "policy".
- Because front line staff are unable to adapt to situations that aren't already outlined, there is a need for an authority figure to be available more often (6am – 10 pm) during the high season.
- Monitor VHF channel 16 as well as 17 and have a mechanism for responding after office hours (especially for transient arrivals or slip-holders who arrive late and find another vessel in their slip.)
- We should always "welcome" a vessel upon arrival, either by radio or in person and offer assistance.
- Harbormaster needs to be more accessible to the general public – frequently "not here" or "too busy"; emails to harbormaster are intercepted and responded to by staff.
- Seward's overall attitude is "we're right, take it or leave it" – this from both City and business community.
- Decisions are being made arbitrarily and those communicating the information on the City's behalf won't take the time to talk with and listen to their customers.
- Arbitrary decisions are communicated as "policy" without anything in writing for customers to reference .
- Harbormaster tries to assist, but when policies are bad, she is unable to/or not allowed to exercise flexibility for the purpose of common sense. Can she not make recommendations to change policies that make it harder on her customers and staff?
- "Policies" change depending on who is responding on the City's behalf; responses are inconsistent.
- Seward is considered a "greedy little town" that seeks to get all they can from non-residents in the form of parking, moorage, ramp services, and retail prices.
- Complaints are ignored; customers do not have a voice.
- Recommendations for improvement are only considered if it can improve the City's bottom line.
- Rules are not applied equally to all customers; perception that Seward residents get preference; perception that big businesses get preference; perception that pleasure-boaters get preference.
- Staff may know the "policies" but don't have enough broad knowledge to understand and answer questions that they don't have a legally-approved response for – tend to say "no" when "I don't know" is more appropriate.
- Heavy-handed application of policies and "gotcha" approach (rather than helpful) to customers is a disincentive.
- "When you have to tell a customer "no", you shouldn't seem so happy about it"

Information Dissemination

- Online and electronic methods are good, but should be available as options and not replacements for telephone and in-person communication
- Would like Harbormaster to communicate more.

- Customers feel left out of the decision-making, despite fact they are paying same fees as locals who have the ability to vote locally.
- Rules should be available and well publicized.
- The tariff is hard to get to and the code is hard to understand if you haven't experienced a particular situation.
- Recent "lawsuit" cited as reason by harbor staff for several policy changes, yet no factual information was released by City to current customers to dispel rumors. Coal dust issue is another one cited by out-of-town customers who would like information relayed to them.
- Website needs updating, and it is difficult to get to. Seem to be "two" websites – the official one through the City of Seward.net and another "harbor" website that looks completely different.
- Website should re-structured to serve as a sales tool for harbor services; currently is geared for the recreational user and is missing information for the work boat community.
- All forms should be electronic and available on the web. Rates and service policies should be easily available on the web. Also, contact information such as who to contact for electricity or to obtain a transient slip. What to do when one arrives after hours.
- Post the waitlist on line so customers can better predict a slip opening when they are looking to purchase a vessel or prepare their vessel for transit to Seward.

Moorage Issues (Revenue)

- Offer 4- or 6-month slips for seasonal boats that won't be in the water in winter (at a higher rate?).
- Give year-round slip-holders a "rebate" when you receive moorage fees from another vessel you place in their slip to prevent "double-dipping" for the same slip.
- Institute a method of "auto-charging" transients or electronic "reservation" system for those vessels who frequently travel into the harbor or those who will arrive after the harbor office closes.

Moorage Issues (General)

- Derelict or unused boats tie up slips that could be better utilized – require their removal to a storage yard.
- Easy and increased transient moorage options; designate a specific slip to an inbound transient so they know where to go after hours.
- Allow those on the wait list to remain on the top even if unable to take advantage of a slip when it is offered instead of bumping them down to the bottom of the list. They would then get be at the top of the list when they were able to purchase a vessel or position one in Seward.
- Consider those vessels that are not truly transient, but resident vessels without slips; is there a better way to actively manage the transient space to allow for non-resident vessels. Possibly assigning rafting groups of similar vessels would free up a lot of the transient space.
- Limit moorage time near the fish cleaning station.
- Limit transient moorage to 3 days so they can't be used as a replacement for permanent moorage.
- Need more commercial fishing moorage.
- Support a separate government dock to limit interference caused by heavy tourist traffic.
- Support a designated Charter Boat area with a designated fish-cleaning station.
- Any legitimate marine business should be able to sell their boat and slip to the new owner.
- Transients should not be placed into permanent slip-holders slips when a short-term vacancy if no harbor staff is available on return to re-assign the transient vessel.
- Allow current slip-holder, when selling a boat, to let the buyer use that slip until the grace period runs out, or until current slip-holder purchases another boat; transfer of slip ownership would help boat sales, bring new customers, and assist current harbor customers seeking to upgrade.
- Do not transfer slip to new boat owner; negates the purpose of the wait list and is inconsiderate of those who have been paying the City for the privilege of getting the next slip.
- Allow a slip holder to swap out vessels suitable to the slip in a streamlined manner (without an additional fee).
- Allow a slip holder to authorize another individual to use the space with a simple pre-notification to the harbor office.

- Notify slip holders if another vessel is being placed in their slip; customer has paid for the right to the slip and should not be the one responsible for notifying the harbor of their comings and goings but should be harbor's responsibility for notifying the customer if their paid service is being impacted
- There should be a 72-hour (3 day) minimum notice to move one's boat from a slip. Would accommodate those many customers who reside in Anchorage or those who need to make trailer/boat yard storage arrangements. Consider special allowances for vessels that are not legal for normal road transport.
- If you pay annually to be on the wait list you should have priority for designated non-transient slips; monthly transient payers should not get moorage in a non-transient slip before those on the wait list have an opportunity to have it
- Provide slip holders a fact sheet on the benefits and policies available to them as slip holders
- Provide a fact sheet for policies such as "if someone pulls out you could use the slips if you are the first person to ask." This information is only known by word of mouth throughout the fleets and friends.
- "Slip holder" is misleading, as customers don't have the slip unless moored in it; when out of the slip, the harbor reserves the right to use it for other vessels, charging them a fee, even though the "slip-holder" is still paying for it
- Revisit the moorage agreement which authorizes the harbor staff to move vessels; ensuring the staff are still accountable for how the vessel is moved, how fenders are attached, and how the vessel is repositioned (in a slip, attached to another vessel, etc).
- Charter vessels should be in their own district like the big tour boats
- Streamline the moorage agreement process by pre-printing previous years' information and allow for "if nothing has changed and you want to renew, sign here" (like the U.S. Coast Guard Documentation Unit does it); timing of the required documents (insurance, boat documents) do not coincide with slip renewal – can this be streamlined to require only one trip to the harbor?
- The rate structure and policies are complicated and not customer friendly especially if you are changing one boat from your slip to another boat or slip.

Boat Wash/Maintenance

- Revise the onerous restrictions about working on one's boat in the harbor and allow minor repairs.
- As a working harbor, a boat wash area is extremely important and needed, with respondents citing the area by the 50 ton travelift having been removed from the City's revenue base several years ago and now sitting as empty space.
- The lack of a boat washing station was consistently highlighted in comparison to Valdez, cited as a benchmark operation.
- Several users stated that they will be using Valdez' services in the future, both due to availability and lower cost. (Homer and Cordova were also cited as alternative options by our customers). Port Townsend, WA was also cited as a model that increased their economic base by attracting vessels to the harbor because of their haulout and repair facilities.
- Specific references included the lack of a catch basin included when the new travel lift area was finished to allow bottom-scrubbing as part of the travel lift. Other suggestions included a simple pad near each ramp with a designated hose (to serve the recreational boater). A broader suggestion was to provide a "quick haul-out" area for bottom cleaning, zinc changes, prop greasing, etc. at a per-hour charge. Water and electric would be required.
- "At present, the greatest priority is a place to do simple boat tasks. The recent court case has reduced our ability to do the necessary maintenance that boats require. In my opinion, this is the single largest problem in the harbor and was not addressed (so far) in this survey."
- Many users requested the return of a grid to offset the high expense of using the Travelift. Frequently cited as an amenity at other Alaska harbors.
- A public use crane is needed to facilitate equipment and gear loading. While Icicle and certain boat owners are generous in offering assistance, that should not be their responsibility.

Economic/Business Disincentives

- Charging dock moorage to unload product at a processor. City received fish tax from the product and no other harbors charge moorage in this case.
- Public ownership of specialized docks. Consider selling docks to Icicle and Shoreside for increased commerce and reduced maintenance costs to the public.

- Lack of focus on working boat industry including limited services (water, cranes, carts, loading facilities) for commercial and industrial harbor users.
- Declining fish restoration/enhancement efforts
- Failure of City Council and City Administration to reflect a pro-business stance and adopt business-supportive practices. Current rules impede commercial boat operations
- Head “fees” and per seat per day taxes
- Fee structure (cost of substituting vessels, late fee charges and interest charges on late payments)
- Lack of a [larger than] 250-ton lift; will lose business to Kodiak
- Paid parking
- Lack of available/accessible land for commercial marine service development
- Limited marine repair professionals, boatyard services
- Limited marine supply availability (fully stocked chandlery, sailboat hardware, block ice) – think Kachemak Gear Shed in Homer
- Limits on credit card transactions
- High electric rates

Financial Transactions

- Streamline payment processing: pay for parking and launch fee in a single transaction; either single envelope for daily users or single location (with credit card capability) for passes; don’t discontinue autopay for electric utility with the switch from finance department to harbor management; allow online electronic payment (ACH or credit card) with automated fee; bill customers in good standing on one statement rather than cash pre-pay for every single transaction.
- Add credit card reader to parking lots allowing users to pre-pay a number of days for overnight trips on water.
- Remove credit card transaction limit
- Ramp usage fee should include the price of parking the truck/trailer. Writing two checks is needless.
- Slipholders should be able to launch and retrieve without paying an additional fee and should not have to pay for parking, or at least a reduced rate for long term parking.
- Include parking permit applications with the slip renewal paperwork and do not charge annual slip holders for the pass.
- Provide a written policy regarding credit card use and invoicing; notify customers in writing when policy is going to change
- Delay the annual slip payment from December, just before the Christmas buying spree to somewhere after the first of the year. Say February 1st.
- If vessel is in a moorage for a month, billing should automatically be charged at the monthly, not daily rate.
- Dissatisfaction with sales tax computation for annual moorage for customers on a billing system.
- Electric service charges are significantly more (up to 8x more) than the actual kilowatt charges.
- Can we allow for quarterly head tax payments during the summer rather than monthly.
- Add an electronic reservation and payment system for transient moorage.

Private Sector Services

- The Seward business community must acknowledge the charter fleet as a viable entity and that they bring a lot of business to Seward. Treat us appropriately. We need representation and support from the chamber.
- Local businesses give the impression that we are not customer-focused, but have more of a “take it or leave it” attitude. Non-service oriented compared with other communities that are much more helpful to their customers.
- Have overheard comments in the community that “we’ll be glad when the season is over and the people leave”.
- Seward lacks skilled labor and quality marine services for boat repairs.

Security/Safety

- Locked gates on all access ramps to floats so only the slip holders are on the floats like all other small boat harbors in the lower 48 (single respondent).
- Encourage live-aboards as an important part of the Harbor. They provide "neighborhood watch" security during the off hours.
- Add web cams with current technology to improve 24 hour security
- Dredge the harbor so larger tenders, tugs and other deep draft vessels don't have to wait for high water to come in.
- A fence or barrier is needed along the stretch of water front between the Holiday Inn Express and the Train Wreck; someone could fall into the water and down the rip rap. Others suggested mandating the harbor boardwalk be continuous from the to the travel lift.
- An overhead crosswalk could connect the current boardwalk to the new uplands and help keep pedestrian traffic from crossing behind boats that are trying to launch.

Areas Not Enforced

- 5 MPH/No wake zone
- Dogs, dog messes, leash laws
- Bicycles and skate boards on boardwalk, ramps and docks
- Proper mooring (too large vessels in smaller slips impacting vessel transit)
- Clutter on docks (carts, boxes, hoses, especially A-D floats)
- Launch fees
- Display of passenger fee decals
- Business licenses

Wireless Internet

- Wireless internet would be of value to out-of-towners who stay on their boats on the weekends. It would be of value to commercial boat operators who rely on internet contacts on a daily basis. And it would be of immense value to both private and commercial boat owners who spend considerable time on their boats during the summer (and those who would live on their boats for all or a greater part of the summer months (if permitted)).
- Should be offered through private enterprise