

**1. CALL TO ORDER, 5:30 P.M.**

Session 24-02, a Regular Meeting of the Port and Harbor Advisory Commission was called to order by Vice Chair Casey Siekaniec at 5:30 p.m. on March 27, 2024 in the City Hall Cowles Council Chambers located at 491 E. Pioneer Avenue, Homer, Alaska and via Zoom Webinar.

PRESENT: COMMISSIONERS FRIEND, PITZMAN, SHAVELSON, SIEKANIEC, VELSKO, ZEISET & STUDENT REPRESENTATIVE ROGERS

CONSULTING: PORT DIRECTOR HAWKINS, PORT ADMINISTRATIVE SUPERVISOR WOODRUFF

STAFF: DEPUTY CITY CLERK PETTIT

**2. AGENDA APPROVAL**

Vice Chair Siekaniec read the supplemental items into the agenda: **Under Informational Materials Item D. Bureau of Ocean Energy Management – Study on Recreation and Tourism in the Cook Inlet Flyer, and Item E. Public Comments Received Regarding Harbor Tariff Changes.**

Vice Chair Siekaniec requested a motion and a second to approve the agenda as amended.

ZEISET/PITZMAN MOVED TO APPROVE THE AGENDA AS AMENDED.

There was no discussion.

VOTE: NON-OBJECTION: UNANIMOUS CONSENT.

Motion carried.

**3. PUBLIC COMMENTS UPON MATTERS ALREADY ON THE AGENDA (3 minute time limit)**

Rachel Lord, Homer City Councilmember, noted that she and Councilmember Hansen are the Harbor Expansion Champions from City Council. She stated that it's been really sporadic, and that they want to be coming to future Port and Harbor meetings to speak with the Commission specifically regarding harbor expansion. She said that it was her understanding that the Phase I geotechnical work portion of the project is still moving forward. She added that the work-in-kind was approved by the Pacific Ocean Division at the Army Corps of Engineers, noting that this was great news. She informed the Commission that between Council and City Staff, they've been sending out letters of appreciation and also updates to their Congressional Delegate/State partners, in addition to letters to their community partners in the Corps about being included in the Fiscal Year 2025 President's budget, which she said is great news. Ms. Lord added that they are looking at taking a trip to Washington, D.C. to ensure that they have somewhat of a presence there.

Steve Roth, city resident, asked for the Commission to consider a moratorium on the auxiliary skiff rule that had been added to the harbor tariff. His reasons were as follows:

- Fish prices are very bad right now.
- Fishermen, especially young fishermen are struggling right now.

- Seine fishers are required to have a skiff to do their fishing, it's not an option, and most of the time they can't put their skiffs on their deck.

Mr. Roth also requested that the Commission consider people that have a slip when making changes to the harbor tariff.

#### **4. RECONSIDERATION**

#### **5. APPROVAL OF MINUTES**

5.A. Unapproved January 24, 2024 PHC Minutes

SHAVELSON/VELSKO MOVED TO APPROVE THE JANUARY 24, 2024 MEETING MINUTES.

There was no discussion.

VOTE: NON-OBJECTION: UNANIMOUS CONSENT.

Motion carried.

#### **6. VISITORS/PRESENTATIONS**

6.A. Agnew::Beck – City of Homer Comprehensive Plan Rewrite

Shelly Wade introduced herself as one of the principal owners of Agnew::Beck Consulting and thanked the Commission for the opportunity to present. She also introduced Meg Friedenauer of Agnew::Beck and Luke Rubalcava of RESPEC, noting that RESPEC is one of the subcontractors working with Agnew::Beck to support the project, along with Kinney Engineering, Northern Economics, Corvus Design, and Stantec, a group that will be helping with Phase II of the project that deals with updating Title 21. She provided an overview of the project website, found at [HomerCompPlanUpdate.com](http://HomerCompPlanUpdate.com), and added that Agnew::Beck's primary focus is to begin with the 2018 Comprehensive Plan to make any updates and consider any changes. She outlined the primary guiding topics that will be investigated as follows:

- Land use and housing
- Public services and infrastructure
- Transportation
- Economic Development
- Health and wellness
- Sustainability, resilience and climate change
- Quality of life
- Fiscal considerations for the community.

Ms. Wade outlined Agnew::Beck's schedule for the week of their first community visit that was taking place at the time of the meeting. She noted that this process for the comprehensive plan is supposed to go through December, and that part of Agnew::Beck's deliverables is to provide the community with 3 potential options for how the community might look in 20 years.

**7. STAFF & COUNCIL REPORT/COMMITTEE REPORTS**

7.A. Port Finance/Budget Report – FYTD Report for March 2024

Vice Chair Siekaniec asked why there was zero wharfage on the deep water dock for this year. Port Administrative Supervisor Woodruff informed him that there will be some shortly, but that the number is dependent upon when there is activity at the dock. She noted that there are a lot of landings currently, but only some of them involve loading freight.

7.B. Port & Harbor Staff Report – March 2024

Ms. Woodruff thanked ex-Chair, Crisi Matthews, for her service in her time with the Commission. She turned the floor over to Port Director Hawkins for him to discuss his time spent in Juneau. Mr. Hawkins noted that it was a very busy two-and-a-half days meeting with legislators and the Department of Transportation. There were also lengthy discussions regarding the steel grid and the fact that it has been temporarily shut down due to safety concerns regarding the degrading pilings. Other discussion topics included:

- Repairs needed for Crane 8
- Anchorage Boat Show
- Credit card fees
- Review of the Commission’s Strategic Plan and Goals
- Land Allocation Plan update and the Large Vessel Haul Out Facility
- Joint Work Session with Council on April 15<sup>th</sup> at 5:00 p.m.
- Flag pole at the Harbor Office
- Updated parking map for Summer 2024

7.C. Homer Marine Trades Association (HMTA) Report

Commissioner Zeiset shared that the Association travelled to the Anchorage Boat Show with the Port and Harbor. He noted that Homer Marine Trades has scholarship money that students can apply for on their website, applications are due by April 15<sup>th</sup>.

**8. PUBLIC HEARING(S)**

**9. PENDING BUSINESS**

**10. NEW BUSINESS**

10.A. Comprehensive Plan

The Commission discussed the potential of prioritizing the Spit Comprehensive Plan within the broader City Comprehensive Plan, emphasizing its significance for recreation and commerce in Kachemak Bay. After some comments from Mayor Castner, it was revealed to the Commission that the Spit Comprehensive Plan will essentially become a part of the City’s new comprehensive plan once it’s completed. The Commission also expressed interest in hosting more work sessions with Agnew::Beck as needed.

## 11. INFORMATIONAL MATERIALS

### 11.A. March 2024 Port Operations Report February 2024 Statistics

Port Director Hawkins provided some updates on port operations, noting the following:

- Crane 3 is now operable after replacement of the live swivel.
- The ice plant is up and operational, and all bait storage lockers are rented out.
- Port Maintenance has been repairing some of the finger floats that were damaged due to old age.
- There was a boat fire in February, the boat was a complete loss, the damage was contained to one vessel, and the start of the fire is believed to have been an electrical heater.

### 11.B. March City Newsletter

Commissioner Pitzman directed everyone to the article regarding the Large Vessel Haul Out in the newsletter, noting that the Polar Bear vessel was just one of the projects happening there this winter. He and Commissioner Zeiset voiced that the Large Vessel Haul out provides great winter employment for many Homer locals, and Mr. Zeiset added that he's been involved with the work that's been taking place on the Polar Bear vessel, and that the Polar Bear alone has spent well over \$1 million in Homer this year.

### 11.C. City Manager's Reports to Council

March 11<sup>th</sup>, 2024

March 26<sup>th</sup>, 2024

### 11.D. Bureau of Ocean Energy Management – Study on Recreation and Tourism in the Cook Inlet

Port Director Hawkins noted that the flyer was just informational at this point, but that they're reaching out to the Port and Harbor because there is an effort to bring more gas to the system for resiliency purposes. He added that they know they've got electricity and heating in the future, and this appears to be a public information and education effort.

### 11.E. Public Comments Received Regarding Harbor Tariff Changes Memorandum from Commissioner Pitzman as backup

Commissioner Pitzman stated that he's been having a lot of conversations with members of the public revolving around the tariff changes, more specifically the work skiff exemption removal. Mr. Pitzman noted that he voted for the tariff change in support of removing the seine skiff exemption, but acknowledged what's happened in the last 6 months with the major catastrophic downturn of the commercial fishing industry. He added that he brought it before the Commission for conversation given that people are intending to bring this directly to Council to see if they can get some quicker action. Mayor Castner informed the Commission that the Council did hold public testimony on the tariff changes at the March 26<sup>th</sup> Committee of the Whole meeting.

Through the Chair, Mr. Pitzman requested Port Director Hawkins to explain the reasoning for why the seine skiff exemption removal was included in the tariff changes. Mr. Hawkins first pointed out that the seine skiff exemption rule had been in place for about 30-40 years. He continued, stating that the exemption came about for the Lower Cook Inlet seine fleet, a fleet that frequently fished out of the Homer harbor. Mr. Hawkins noted that this rule started with a local fleet and then grew to include the bigger fleet, and further that when the rule was written, seine skiffs were actually skiffs and not the small boats that they are today. He added that the harbor charges by linear feet, so when you take a 58 foot boat and add a seine skiff to it, the boat is now 75 or 80 feet of vessel that's taking up space in the harbor. His closing thoughts were that fair and equitable application of the rate drove this decision.

Commissioners seemed to all share the same desire to postpone the work skiff exemption removal, but acknowledged that they would need to wait until the next meeting to make any recommendations to Council.

## **12. COMMENTS OF THE AUDIENCE (3 minute time limit)**

William Roth, city resident, introduced himself to the Commission as a commercial seiner who fishes down in Kodiak. He warned the Commission that a number of boats will go bankrupt this summer if something doesn't change drastically within the near future. He advocated for the young fishermen in the community who he believes will not be able to afford this change to the tariff. He closed with the assertion that it's not an option for a lot of the commercial fishermen and that's a problem.

Robert Roth introduced himself to the Commission as a salmon seiner in the Lower Cook Inlet. He stated that he's not necessarily against the tariff, sharing his belief that every boat in the harbor should be charged, but that he did feel the price was excessive. He suggested the Commission take a look at the price per foot. In terms of fairness, he stated that the daily rate should match the yearly rate, reasoning that people who are in the harbor for short periods of time are charged excessively higher than people who are there year-round.

Steve Roth, city resident, questioned the motive behind the idea of turning the Large Vessel Haul Out to a campground. Switching gears to discussions pertaining to the tariff changes, he suggested implementing timeframes for when seine skiffs can be in the harbor in lieu of the removal of the exemption altogether. He reiterated the fact that he has to have a seine skiff to work, and that it isn't an option for him.

## **13. COMMENTS OF THE CITY STAFF**

Port Administrative Supervisor Woodruff thanked the members of the public who testified, and noted that there will be more on the Large Vessel Haul Out at the next meeting.

Port Director Hawkins thanked the members of the public who testified. He shared that having worked on the 2011 Comprehensive Plan, he felt that the commercial industry on the Homer Spit was not well-represented in that plan. He reasoned that there would need to be a stronger effort from both the Commission and City Staff to ensure that the commercial industry is well-represented in the new Comprehensive Plan, and also so the Comprehensive Plan doesn't become lopsided.

## **14. COMMENTS OF THE MAYOR**

Mayor Castner emphasized the importance of the outreach to staff in the development of the Comprehensive Plan. He echoed support for Mr. Pitzman’s comment from earlier in the meeting about the false equivalency between the Large Vessel Haul Out and a campground. He stated that there are many places to pitch a tent around Homer, but there are very few places to pull a boat out of the water. Lastly, Mayor Castner spoke to the termination of City Manager Dumouchel’s contract, stating that the City Manager is hired as an employee-at-will by the Council. This termination was for no particular reason, he insisted, adding that there’s “no smoking gun, there’s nothing to lose sleep over.” He assured the Commission that Mr. Dumouchel left a very strong staff behind that will continue to move forward and won’t panic.

**15. COMMENTS OF THE COMMISSION**

Student Representative Rogers thanked the public for providing testimony.

Commissioner Zeiset thanked everyone who attended, and added that he’s looking forward to continuing on.

Commissioner Velsko thanked the Roth family for attending the meeting. She added that the Commission appreciates and wants to see more public involvement.

Commissioner Pitzman thanked the public for coming. He noted that there wasn’t any action on the tariff changes given that it was added to the agenda too late to be an actionable item. He added that he liked the Mayor’s use of the term “false equivalency” in regards to the comparisons between the Large Vessel Haul Out and the temporary camping on the Spit.

Commissioner Friend thanked the public for attending tonight’s meeting. He shared that he is looking forward to the comprehensive plan rollout and is hopeful that the community will show up for the open house meeting at Islands and Oceans tomorrow night.

Commissioner Shavelson thanked the public for their testimony. He stated again that his eyes were opened by the fact that the Spit Comprehensive Plan was going to be rolled into the City’s Comprehensive Plan. He shared that he would like to see the Large Vessel Haul Out remain an anchor in the community, and he feels that starting with the comprehensive plan is a great place to make sure that happens.

Vice Chair Siekaniec thanked the Commission for a good meeting.

**16. ADJOURNMENT**

There being no further business to come before the Commission Vice Chair Siekaniec adjourned the meeting at 7:32 p.m. The next Regular Meeting is Wednesday, April 24, 2024 at 5:30 p.m. All meetings scheduled to be held in the City Hall Cowles Council Chambers located at 491 E. Pioneer Avenue, Homer, Alaska and via Zoom Webinar.

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Zach Pettit, Deputy City Clerk

Approved: \_\_\_\_\_