

JESSICA CEJNAR ANDREWS / MONDAY, FEB. 7 @ 4:55
P.M. / LOCAL GOVERNMENT

Crescent City Harbor's Difficult 'Reset': Will Aging Infrastructure, Past 'Bad Leases' Foil Port's Big Plans?



Over half the pilings are deficient on the 50-plus-year-old Citizens Dock in Crescent City. File photo: Andrew Goff

Previously:

- [RV Park Residents Skeptical About Harbor's 'Transition Plan,' With One Insisting Upon a Third-Party Arbitrator to Represent Their Interests](#)
- [Crescent City Harbor Commissioners Refute Claims That Bayside RV Park Residents Will Be Evicted During Potential Revitalization Project](#)

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As the Crescent City Harbor District and developer Alex Lemus make provisions for 86 RV park residents, one harbor commissioner says those tenants were “initially not supposed to be there for more than 30 days.”

Commissioner Brian Stone says the redevelopment of Bayside and Redwood Harbor Village RV parks is one piece of a larger buildout of the port that includes shops and stores “like what you’d find in Monterey Bay,” a fresh fish market and a hotel.

But getting there won’t be easy.

The port needs to find \$30-40 million for repairs to half-century old Citizens Dock as well as the seawall near the outer boat basin, according to Stone, who has [filed a committee](#) with the California Secretary of State’s office to run for Del Norte County supervisor this year.

Buildings need to be torn down and things need to be fixed, Stone said.

And though voters approved a 2018 transiency occupancy tax measure benefitting the harbor, that \$236,306 goes toward paying down a U.S. Department of Agriculture loan that rebuilt the marina following tsunamis in 2006 and 2011, Stone said.

“We have failed as an agency in the past to address those issues,” he told the *Wild Rivers Outpost*. “These are all problems previous boards have left us with.”

RV Park Conundrum

Lemus, CEO of Florida-based Renewable Energy Capital, answered a request for proposals from the harbor district in December 2020 and in August 2021 proposed a plan to increase tourism at the port. The plan included upgrading Bayside RV Park's infrastructure and landscaping as well as purchasing Airstream trailers and cabins for overnight short-term stays.

When Lemus presented his proposed redevelopment project to harbor commissioners, the parks' residents, some of whom had been living there for five years, were alarmed. Many accused the Harbor District of planning to evict them despite multiple assertions to the contrary.

At the Harbor District's Feb. 1 meeting, Lemus and Harbor District Board President Rick Shepherd stated they would create a written transition plan for both RV parks as well as 86 individual plans for each resident.

According to Stone, those long-term residents have lived at the RV parks since before the Harbor District took over ownership. The port's lease agreements with the previous owners had stipulated that tenants couldn't stay longer than 30 days, he said. That stipulation is based on guidance from the California Coastal Commission that guarantees public access to the coast for all, Stone said.

The previous owners of both RV parks didn't comply with their lease agreements and when the Harbor District took over operation of the parks, they found there were "all these long-term tenants," Stone said.

"Because of what has happened with prior lessors, we're stuck with this and we're going to get to a situation where we have to relocate them, and that's what Alex is wanting to do," Stone told the *Outpost*. "It's not something we created or tried to create."

Stone said the reason the Harbor District is having to make provision for 86 RV park residents is due to poorly written leases that are 40 and 50 years old.

According to Stone, under its previous owner, Rachel Towe, Redwood Harbor RV — then called Anchor RV — had netted the Harbor District \$26,686 in lease payments.

Under its previous owner, Bayside RV Park had netted the District about \$43,642 per year in lease payments, according to Stone.

Since the Harbor District took over ownership of the park, it's received \$397,256 in gross receipts from Redwood Harbor Village, Stone said, and \$381,599 in gross receipts from Bayside RV Park.

According to Harbormaster Tim Petrick, the harbor district is making a \$100,000 profit on Bayside RV Park.

"We're doing a bit better than we were when they were leased," he said.

'Ocean Salt Water Destroys Everything'

Though the Harbor District is making a profit on its RV parks, Petrick said, "If you gave me \$40 million tomorrow, I could spend it all on infrastructure."

Though the Dungeness crab season so far has been much better than last year, the larger boats tying up at Citizens Dock, which is more than 50 years old, is leading to wear and tear.

At the Harbor District's meeting last week, Petrick said one of the pilings at the dock had failed, forcing the port to purchase piping to extend a floating camel to cross multiple pilings.

"If you gave me \$40 million tomorrow, I could spend it all on infrastructure," Petrick told the *Wild Rivers Outpost*. "The seawalls need replacing, Citizens Dock, the whole surface needs to be removed and the

pilings replaced. I can replace every other one of my piers in the outer harbor.”

According to Stone, 162 of the 320 pilings at Citizens Dock are considered deficient. As a result, instead of allowing three tractor trailers at a time to take the local catch to market, only one is allowed on the pier, he said.

The other concern is the sea wall, Stone said.

“You can see the riprap from underneath the parking lot falling down into the inner boat basin there,” he said. “We need to replace that all the way over to the launch ramps and onto the old Coast Guard station and that’s going to be millions of dollars also.”

Also last week, an ad-hoc committee consisting of Harbor District Board Secretary Harry Adams and President Rick Shepherd recommended tearing down a number of buildings, including the old Beacon Burger restaurant at 160 Anchor Way, due to mold, rot and a cracked foundation.

Adams said he and Shepherd directed Petrick to seek out bids for the demolition and bring them before the entire Board of Commissioners for consideration.

According to Petrick, if someone had put about \$50,000 into remodeling the old Beacon Burger, it might still be a viable building. But even if it was still a viable building, a restaurant may not be the best use of that space, he said.

“So, in this case, get rid of it, and let’s put in what we can make the most money off of that is going to serve the public the best,” Petrick said. “There’s a lot of those things that we’re going to be addressing around the harbor. We’ve got, not necessarily other developers, but other people with money we have reached out to and said, ‘I like this space or that space, these are the things I want to do with it.’ I’m expecting to

get some proposals in the not-terribly distant future for new opportunities for some of these areas.”

Hoped-for future development

According to Stone, Lemus’s proposed changes at Bayside and Redwood Harbor RV parks amounts to a reset to make the harbor more of a tourist attraction.

This reset includes installing charging stations for electric vehicles and electric RVs, turning the old office building at Bayside into a convenience store and putting a food court, gas station and more shops into the area that’s sandwiched between the RV park and U.S. 101, Stone told the *Outpost*.

Stone said a redevelopment plan the harbor district created about four years ago called for creating a “shopping experience” along Starfish Way, Anchor Way and Marine Way. Those stores would each be small businesses that would have leases with the harbor, which would generate more revenue for the port, he said.

Harbor District representatives have even met with a hotel developer who wants to potentially build “4-star/5-star lodging” at the port, Stone said. The hotel developer has investors “all lined up and ready to go” but wants to see if the port moves forward on its current redevelopment project, he said.

“Just the redevelopment project we figure is \$2-2.5 million in new revenue, and then when you start considering the rentals or the leases on the buildings that we produce, then you’re getting more revenue there on each one of these leases,” Stone said.

Stone also drew a comparison between the potential future revenue the Harbor could realize if its redevelopment goals are met and the rent the current RV park tenants pay.

“Let’s say Mr. Lemus upgrades the trailer parks to Airstreams with little porches and things on them — little cottages — or whatever we end up with in the long term,” he told the *Outpost*. “Here, we’re going from individuals that are paying \$380 a month for a space — \$10-12 a day — up to a potential revenue of \$200 a night or more depending upon what’s happening. And then we get 6 percent of the gross.”

Petrick said a hotel developer did want to build on the the port’s north side, but it was for a 2-star or 3-star hotel similar to the dozen or so that are already clustered around the harbor. Petrick said he hasn’t started negotiations with the developer yet.

“Where they wanted to do it is on the dredge ponds, and that’s a year out from us being able to remove that soil anyway,” Petrick told the *Outpost*. “They’re great ideas and yes there has been interest in it, but nothing has gone beyond the discussion stage.”

What’s next for RV Park tenants?

Though harbor commissioners and Lemus promised not to break ground on construction or take possession of the two RV parks until the needs of the current tenants are met, Petrick said the situation and the timeline is currently fluid.

“I think some of it is going to be dependent on what Alex does,” Petrick told the *Outpost*. “He talks about things like buying a plot and making an RV park offsite — there’s a lot of things being thrown around as to possible solutions, and it sort of depends on which of those seems to work for people.”

According to Petrick, though the harbor district has promised not to evict any of the current RV park tenants to make way for the redevelopment project, it has issued for-cause evictions. Some residents are leaving on their own, too, he said.

However, Petrick conceded that maybe the Harbor District didn't do a good job on reassuring the park's current tenants that they weren't just going to be kicked out.

"This board, myself and Alex have all been very adamant in all of our discussions behind closed doors — this all needs to be done properly and we need to take care of the tenants and can't just kick people out on the street," he said. "(Del Norte) already has a big enough homeless issue to begin with."