

August 10, 2015

To the Stamford Harbor Management Commission:

Dear Gentlemen:

Before I present a list of concerns regarding the proposal for a boatyard at Davenport Landing, I will point out some particulars regarding my experience. They are as follows:

1. Employed at the original Yacht Haven (1969 to 1972) where I worked in every capacity (yard proper, mechanical services, store, rigging, and dock departments) in one of the largest boat yards on the east coast at that time.
2. Employed at Rowayton Marine (a small yard) as lead technician. Took over as General Manager less than a year later.
3. Employed at Nichols Yacht yard in Mamaroneck as lead inboard technician. Was promoted to Assistant Manager after one year and became General Manager several months later. Nichols is the largest boatyard in that area of Westchester.
4. Employed at Beacon Point Marine in Cos Cob where I assisted the owner in building its service capability and reputation.
5. I was employed at Brewer's Yacht Haven as mechanical shop foreman. This was done by management there specifically to upgrade services as well as customer relations. I was employed there until shortly before the yard was closed.

These are representative of my experiences in the boat business. I have learned to handle and operate sail and power boats up to 65'. Travel-lifts, cranes, forklifts large and small, and all configurations of towing, hauling, un-stepping, stepping and blocking boats. I have every confidence in my ability to evaluate and critique this proposal. I hope the following provides you with useable information as well as being an expression of my concerns.

Randy Dinter

The financial sustainability of the proposed "Davenport Landing" boatyard:

With less than 30 boats in slips paying for summer dockage, and less than one third of the capacity for upland winter storage compared to the former boatyard, Davenport's revenue potential would hardly be promising. With no real business plan presented, it would be difficult to know if pricing for services and storage would be competitive with area yards. Higher pricing to make up for the lack of income producing space to generate income would likely force customers elsewhere. Economic viability under these conditions is unlikely.

While there is a list of services to be provided at Davenport, there is no explanation as to who and how it will be managed. It is curious that B.L.T. claims to be negotiating with a qualified boatyard operator, but the details must remain in secret. Information such as this is pertinent to the success of this business, and should not be proprietary. There is no explanation as to how the various disciplines, with their attendant needs, will be blended together in the space provided. In my opinion, the lack of in-water space provided for boats queuing-up or in for service is either a glaring omission or an ominous indication of the level of service expected.

Logistical challenges for the Davenport proposal:

At first glance the facility at Magee Avenue offered for additional storage has a major flaw. It's location away from the services at the Davenport site across the busy South End of Stamford. Without direct access to the harbor, boats will need to be trailered through city traffic adding further cost and liability along with other inefficiencies. This also is a limiting factor to the size and type of boat that can be moved there. Add to this the lack of electricity (for lighting, battery maintenance, or power tools) and water, and no washroom facilities, it simply becomes a parking lot and not a functioning component of the boatyard. Given that the size of boats that could be going there would likely be trailered home by a customer, it is not likely that the economic potential projected in this scenario would be realized. There is no clear description of any provision for security, nor is there any language indicating that another use would co-exist to profit the boatyard.

Another logistical challenge existing at the Davenport Yard is the lack of its ability to provide for the "queuing up" of boats. This is a problem which will be amplified during the fall for winter services and storage and in the spring as boats are launched, commissioned, and made ready for delivery to the customer. The former boatyard needed to rotate more than 60 boats a week through the processes of winterizing, or commissioning, unstepping or stepping boats in order to accommodate its winter storage commitment. A system of service docks at the former boatyard of at least the same total in-water capacity as that of "Davenport Landing" was dedicated to serve this purpose. 30 or more boats could be delivered in the fall or picked up during the spring by customers each weekend. As these boats were rotated out of the service area they were replaced by boats next on the schedule.

"Rafting" boats together in a confined space to meet scheduling goals is not a great option. "Rafting" boats is not an operation that most boaters can be expected to accomplish without issues in cramped quarters. Besides the fact that neighboring businesses as well as the federal channel could be impacted, it would bring nightmarish challenges to scheduling, handling, and the ability to move safely to or from "outer" boats to the dock. The potential liabilities presented here can mount exponentially. It would not be likely that the Davenport site could meet even half the capacity of the former boatyard when all is considered, nor is it likely to come close to meeting the goals projected by this applicant.

Location, Location, Location:

The obvious problem with the “Davenport” site is that it is next to a facility where abrasive dust being produced can be an issue for boats in the water as well as ashore and this dust will not be compatible with certain boatyard operations (some mechanical, painting, and varnishing). Its proximity to residences and a few businesses nearby can present problems stemming from noise and possibly odors (painting, paint booth, curing fiberglass). A facility located in this manner where the public can have the ability to access it can easily become what lawyers refer to as an “attractive nuisance”, a potential liability.

Another concern is the prop-wash from tugboats working in the area, as well as the barge traffic. This prop-wash can exert forces on boats many yards from where it originates and can come as a surprise to those inside a boat, on a boat, or trying to maneuver a boat in close quarters. Sailboats, with their deeper keels will be more affected. This concern comes from personal experience in this circumstance.

Of further concern is the removal of the Mill River Dam. It is becoming increasingly obvious that the north end of the West Branch of Stamford Harbor is silting at a much faster rate. While B.L.T. will dredge out a very nice recess for the proposed marina, it will simply turn into a “settling basin” for the silt. River flow, tidal activity and prop-wash will all be contributors to this situation. The need to dredge the proposed marina every 5 to 10 years will add significantly to its financial challenges.

Misinformation, Facts Overlooked, and other concerns:

B. L. T. and their consultants have pointed out that the greatest number of boats registered in Connecticut are 22 ft. and under. Given the many recreational opportunities offered by the State's lakes and rivers as well as Long Island Sound, this makes perfect sense. However, areas adjacent to Long Island Sound have provided a wonderful venue for larger boats and recreation in a unique resource. Aerial photographs or a ride through many of Connecticut's harbors will attest to this fact. During a ride through harbors (particularly in the Sound's western reaches) one will find many boats registered in New York or New Jersey, berthed here. In my experience, boats being registered elsewhere is not an indication that the owner is not a Stamford resident. It simply indicates the desire to go boating here for reasons that are obvious to those not land-bound.

The "Stamford Marine Market Study and Needs Analyses" implies that the need for storage and service would be mostly for powerboats. Anyone looking at a photographic overview of the 14 acre former boatyard taken during, or close to the winter storage season would see that at least one half of the boats ashore are sailboats. The reason for this is obvious. Stamford Harbor offers easy access and fairly deep water. This harbor is not constrained by a narrow, difficult, shallow channel, bridges, or uncharted rocks or shoals as are neighboring ports.

The conclusion that has been portrayed that "Brewer's Yacht Haven" was not financially viable is a myth. No statistics or facts were presented to support this logic. Mr. Brewer owns over 20 boatyards and certainly knows the formula for making them profitable. The Brewer organization made several overtures to the current and former owners of the property and had gone so far as to plan and lay out a new boatyard for the peninsula. They were rebuffed. During my employment at Brewers, it was usually surpassed only by Pilot's Point (a combination of 3 properties, considered to be Brewer's premier yard and many feel it is the benchmark for boatyards in the northeast) in its ability to generate money as a business. Yacht Haven paid high rent and taxes while maintaining the property conservatively (including a fairly comprehensive repair to the west bulkhead) with no real financial help or incentive from a landlord. In addition, inferences that Yacht Haven contributed in any significant way to pollution fail to consider that it had achieved the "Green Marina" status for standards and practices at Mr. Brewer's insistence.

While the market study is filled with statistics, charts and explanations of various economic data, it fails to provide the information needed to explain how the Davenport yard will be operated successfully. How would it accomplish storage goals indicated with the equipment listed? For instance, it would make no sense to haul and wash a boat and then try to set it in close proximity to another with a 60 ton, wide, travel-lift with a large turning radius. It would make less sense to haul boats with this lift, block them and then re-pick them with the crane in order to keep them close together for efficiency. How would boats be moved into the building? A suitable hydraulic trailer is the way to accomplish these rotations, but none is listed.

It is also presumed that the 60 ton lift listed is the one now employed at the present "Temporary Boatyard", and is the machine to be used at Davenport. This machine was considered too slow for modern operations and had been used for larger, heavier boats or as a back-up unit when it operated in the former boatyard. Its slow speed would soon cause scheduling problems if used to accomplish hauling large numbers of boats and would put an operator at an economic disadvantage. Further, there is no mention of an adjustable trailer that could be used for moving boats from Davenport to Magee Ave for storage. Boaters supplying their own trailers would be likely to move their boats home for storage.

Also notable is the portrayal of a congregation of boats alike in size and type stored at both the Davenport and Magee Ave. locations. The least experienced of boaters would realize that this would not be likely near Long Island Sound. To use this scenario as a basis for comparison of the capacity of this proposal to what was a reality in Stamford is ridiculous. Any attempt to derive real economic numbers from such a depiction would be misleading at best. Pictures of smaller boatyards, packed with boats, in rural areas east of Stamford offer no real comparative value. The reality is that smaller yards in Stamford (Muzzio Bros., New England Shipyard, Doanes, and Lindstrom's to name some) were not able to stand up to the economic pressures of development. Small yards such as those in neighboring Greenwich (Sea Beavers, Skimmer Boats, Old M. Amundsen and Axels Marine Service) also likewise succumbed. The remaining yards in Cos Cob (Drenckhan's Boat Basin, Palmer Point and Beacon Point) are doing well. This is due largely to the Town of Greenwich aligning its zoning requirements to those of the C.A.M. act. Cos Cob Harbor has become revitalized as well as its surrounding areas. It provides a much nicer, cleaner environment for boating, living, and working than was present before the C.A.M. act. What we are experiencing at present is a clear cut case for why the C.A.M. act was put into law and why our City's harbor management plan follows closely its tenants.

Another shortcoming of the Davenport proposal is how it would or could contribute to economic development. The former boatyard housed six businesses on site which were mutually beneficial to each other. A machine shop, sailmaker, two yacht sails organizations, a propeller service, and marine electronics service. They are all gone now. Besides those jobs directly servicing the yard, others grew up around it. These were air conditioning and refrigeration specialists, rigging services, specialized paint and varnish services, boat covering, boat washing, yacht surveyors, as well as the benefits derived by local, landlocked boat dealers. Other area boat businesses enjoyed mutually beneficial relations with the former boatyard as well. Some other local businesses such as automotive parts (for yard equipment) and food service outlets who gained on weekends from boaters profited as well. The loss of all this has had a negative impact for Stamford, with jobs and business gone. But of a more serious consequence may be the loss of highly skilled and experienced technicians whose contribution to boating safety should not be overlooked. True economic development can find its way seamlessly into local communities without being an all-consuming trend designed to serve special interests with political ties.

A potentially problematic scenario that needs to be considered is the possibility that Davenport Management may hire sub-contract or part-time people to augment on-staff technical services or in place of an on-site staff. My experience in dealing with subcontractors has been enough for me to know that their use must be minimal. Each is a business unto itself and businesses will put their needs first. This can lead to shifting priorities, scheduling difficulties and disappointed customers. Constant vigilance is required to ensure that sufficient and current insurance policies are in place as well a

qualifications (education) regarding skill levels and abilities to do the jobs. Further, scheduling difficulties can be encountered when trying to blend two or more of these skillsets to accomplish certain jobs (fiberglass repair and running gear, cabinetry and electronics, rigging and electronics, major installations such as engines, wiring and exhaust systems). The traditional method used by successful boat yards develops those individuals who show reliability and conscientiousness into the skillsets needed. This is more easily done in the presence of more experienced people while also providing the opportunity of learning to work among other disciplines on site. Today's boats are models of technological advances requiring highly trained technical support, while older boats sometimes require skills that are very hard to find. Having a blend of these skilled people on site, under his direction, will provide a manager with the best environment of control to sustain quality service and to keep abreast in an ever changing environment. It also will have the added assurance to boaters that the training, skill levels and experience needed to maintain or repair their boats is being evolved [here](#).

While the scant information to be gleaned from this proposal is clothed in unsupported speculation and statistical information, charts and pictures which maybe a distraction to some, they would hardly provide a basis upon which to act. The three non-mutually supporting pieces of property constitute a very diminished capacity as a boatyard for this City and can, in no way, replace what was on the 14 acre site, let alone what could be build there. What is most disturbing in this entire exercise in frustration is that the last three administrations of City "leadership" have undertaken a "behind the scenes" approach to undermining state law, the City's own regulations and criteria, as well as the City's Boards and Commissions. We have seen City's Corporate Council and Dept. of Economic Development used to aid this developer instead of supporting the rule of law, supporting the board and Commissions, or at least remaining neutral. Add to this the heavy-handed involvement of our former Mayor and Governor, the Zoning board, Harbor Commission and Planning boards have all had to fight an uphill battle to keep to laws, roles and regulations and City guidelines while being fair to all. This City deserves better political leadership and more honesty in those who serve us.

In Closing:

The two most glaring concerns I have with the Davenport proposal are the lack of substantive, factual information as to how it can function and survive, and the fact that it is based on three separated, non-mutually supporting or connected properties. In an attempt to supplant storage numbers removed from our harbor it fails to recognize and account for the true mission of a boatyard and to incorporate the realities of boatyard operations. One would think that, given the importance and prominence of this issue, a more detailed and thought-out presentation would be presented. Instead we have a proposal that clearly ignores the C.A.M. act (by not proving that the previous large water dependent use was not viable and to replace that use with a much diminished mixed use elsewhere), the Harbor Management Plan and agreements made by the previous developer in place with the City.

Given what is known and what can be deduced from this proposal, should it be accepted the City of Stamford will likely never be the home of another in-water boat show. Nor will we be treated to a gathering of racing boats, gleaming in new technology. Stamford will no longer be the stop-over destination for boats making their way North or South through the Sound. Diminished services and storage opportunities will eventually take their toll on boating as well as Stamford's once vibrant harbor. It is not likely that the skills once evolved here will ever appear to contribute to technological advances, as has been in our history. And, as it stands, emergency services once in prominence will still be waiting for a proper base of operations. This would seem to be a lot to give up for a business so obviously designed to fail.