

# Message from the Harbormaster

October 27, 2009

There has been a lot of speculation lately about how the marina has been maintained and managed over the years. I can only speculate with everyone else since I arrived here in December of 2007.

The marina has exceeded its design life by a number of years and has crossed over to more of a liability than an asset of the City. The life of the marina is an interesting one though. Built by the State, it was one of Bellingham Marine's first Unifloat systems utilizing a concrete mix that had sort of a pink appearance. It was a good dock system in its day and has served the City well considering its age. It was never meant to last this long and it has been showing signs of deterioration for many years. So, what's the deal? Why are we still walking around on these poor things?

The simple answer is...funding. In 1997, prior to the transfer of the harbor from the State to the City, a study was done to determine the condition of the floats, piers, gangways, fuel dock and launch ramps. It was entitled the, "Whittier Harbor Condition Report" and it was done by Dennis B. Lybarger who was an associate engineer with ADOTPF. The study, as far as the floats were concerned, found much what we see today. Pitted to spalling concrete and recommended various repairs from epoxy fills to shaving and sealing. Not much different than what we are still doing today except for one significant difference. It is twelve years later and repairs will no longer maintain the safety and welfare of the public. The floats are falling apart and in some cases, ready to come adrift.

We are beyond worrying about maintenance funds and how they may have been spent better and we are beyond the point where throwing money at this problem makes sense. It is time to rebuild. There is no second choice other than getting out of the marina business altogether.

We are engaged in answering simple questions that anyone in business must ask themselves when they put together a viable economic plan. Lenders and grantors demand this.

1. How much will it cost to build?
2. How long do we want it to last?
3. How much will we have to charge in fees to operate and maintain it?

We've designed it. We've permitted it and now we are endeavoring to find out how much it will cost to run it and keep it in good condition for the next 30 years. We intend to finance it through revenue bonding and grant funding. We will do this with a viable business plan which will prevent the condition in which we find ourselves today. This makes sense. We can accomplish this and be proud of our harbor.