



STANDING WATCH

Reshuffling the deck at Dana Point Harbor

SANTA ANA — An independent department created in the early 2000s to manage Dana Point Harbor might be in its final month of existence. The Orange County Board of Supervisors will finalize its decision on June 28 of whether to merge the Dana Point Harbor Department into O.C. Parks.

The proposed reorganization of the harbor department follows an interesting spring at Dana Point Harbor, where its director, for all intents and purposes, resigned the day before a county-sanctioned audit report was published and revealed a discount program regularly used by county employees at Dana Point Marina Inn.

Is the mismanagement of a hotel discount program and resignation of harbor director Brad Gross reason enough to scrap an entire department?

A report in *The Log's* June 3 issue ("What's Next at Dana Point Harbor?") already pondered how Gross's resignation and the first of four audit reports on Dana Point Harbor's management would affect the county's revitalization plan, which is 20 years in the making.

So far the county's responses have been predictable and expected.

Orange County Supervisor and former Dana Point Mayor Lisa Bartlett said Dana Point Harbor would not suffer any hiccups in transitioning from an independent department to a larger branch of county government.

"County Chief Operating Officer Mark Denny and my office have recently met with various stakeholders including boaters, and have assured them there will be a continuity in service," Bartlett said. "The re-merging of O.C. Dana Point Harbor with O.C. Parks will provide additional resources and support for operations. O.C. Parks managed Dana Point Tidelands ... prior to 2005 and currently manages the Newport Tidelands. All Tidelands Grants entrusted to the county will continue to operate consistent with Public Trust doctrine, Local Coastal Programs, and all applicable rules and policies."

Standing Watch/Take Action

In this section you will find resources and supplemental information on what you can do to Take Action. Submit additional information or tips on this issue to editor@thelog.com

Take Action

Here is a list of people to be in touch with to ask questions and express concerns about Dana Point Harbor's revitalization or the proposed merger:

Supervisor Lisa Bartlett:
Lisa.Bartlett@ocgov.com or 714-834-3550

State Senator Pat Bates: Rhonda Reardon, 949-598-5850

Assemblyman Bill Brough: Sharon Campbell or Anne Figueroa, 949-347-7301

Dana Point City Council members:
danapoint.org/i-want-to-/contact-us
O.C. Parks: 949-923-2280

County spokesperson Jean Pasco explained the merger would result in added accountability and oversight.

“Moving Dana Point Harbor under management by O.C. Parks ... would enhance oversight and accountability of this important public asset,” said Pasco.

Pasco added O.C. Parks is large enough of a department to provide Dana Point Harbor’s operations with “additional staffing support, project expertise and organizational assistance to improve the experience for harbor visitors and businesses.”

Coincidentally the county’s chief executive formally requested the Board of Supervisors, during this month’s budget hearings, approve O.C. Parks’ request for \$1.5 million in ongoing appropriations and the addition of 26 employees “to support the growth of the program and to comply with direction regarding use of extra help positions.”

County staff pointed out the request for 26 additional employees include an office technician, six park attendants, 12 groundskeepers, one parks animal keeper, three staff assistants, and three staff specialists. These positions come at the expense of 35 “extra help” positions, which would be deleted if supervisors approve the county staff recommendation.

“The regular positions will help O.C. Parks address maintenance of aging infrastructure, pending acquisitions of additional land, and new programming in acquired land and open space areas,” county staff explained of the new staff additions. “The added positions will provide direct public services in response to increased requests for events and programs at park facilities.”

Meanwhile a county resolution said the reorganization of the Dana Point Harbor Department into O.C. Parks would “improve service delivery to the public” and allow the county’s real estate department “to focus its efforts on the revitalization of Dana Point Harbor through the Public Private Partnership.”

A county staff report stated the duties previously assumed by Gross would be the responsibility of the O.C. Parks director should the two departments be merged.

“The purpose of the designation of the director of O.C. Parks to perform the duties previously performed by the director of Dana Point Harbor is to ensure compliance with the Coastal Development Permit for the harbor’s revitalization,” county staff stated. “If approved, the reporting relationships will be effective immediately and any technical adjustments to positions, appropriations and revenue will be made as part of the First Quarter Budget Report.”

Yet the county did not specifically outline the way additional staffing would boost oversight or accountability of Dana Point Harbor’s management practices.

A few questions immediately come to mind, such as whether a larger staff would actually translate into greater oversight and accountability or whether O.C. Parks is equipped to manage Dana Point Harbor.

Bartlett gave her two cents as to why additional accountability and oversight is necessary in the first place.

“The audit identifies issues related to an unapproved program and highlights a need to address operational deficiencies. There is no nexus to the revitalization effort,” Bartlett said.

Then again the Orange County Auditor-Controller’s office plans to release three more audit reports this year. The Auditor-Controller has also drafted an Internal Audit, which



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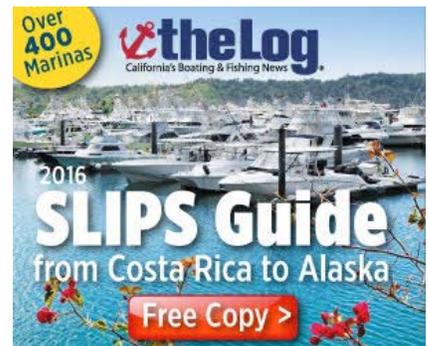


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would soon be in front of the Board of Supervisors for approval, to assess the procurement process of the harbor revitalization's request for qualifications.

"The remaining audits are underway and include a review of the Dana Point Harbor Special Revenue Operating Fund. This should be complete by late summer along with a separate audit of the Ocean Institute lease," a spokesperson with the Auditor-Controller's office told *The Log*. "In early fall, an audit of the Vintage Marina Partners, which oversees various retail concessions and dry boat storage, will be released."

Perhaps additional "operational deficiencies" would be revealed as these reports become public. County officials say business would continue to move forward despite recent events but what happens when potential private vendors take stock of how the process is playing out and balks at putting \$175 million into revitalizing Dana Point Harbor?

What happens if the county can't find a private vendor to commit to the project? Does the county have the resources, funding and infrastructure to fund the revitalization on its own?

If these, or other, questions weigh on your mind it's not too late to have your voice heard. You can still share your thoughts or direct questions toward the Board of Supervisors before the final merger vote is held on June 28.

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