

DRAFT DOCKS & HARBORS BOARD STRATEGIC RETREAT

Meeting Minutes

November 15, 2025 8:30 am - 3:30 p.m.

Docks and Harbor Conference room or via zoom

A. CALL TO ORDER - Mr. Sooter called the Board Retreat to Order at 8:30 a.m. on November 15, 2025

B. ROLL CALL – The following members attended in person at the Port Director’s Conference Room: Tyler Emerson, Clayton Hamilton, Robert Horschover, Matt Leither, Nick Orr, Mark Ridgway, Annette Smith and Shem Sooter

Absent – James Becker

Also, in Attendance – Carl Uchytel – Port Director, Matthew Sill – Port Engineer, Matthew Creswell – Harbormaster, Leah Narum – Administrative Officer

C. PORT DIRECTOR REQUESTS FOR AGENDA CHANGES-None

D. PUBLIC PARTICIPATION ON NON-AGENDA ITEMS-None

E. DOCKS AND HARBORS BOARD STRATEGIC RETREAT –

The meeting focused heavily on strategic direction, the mission and purpose of the department, community alignment, financial oversight, internal processes, communication practices, and the expectations placed on board members. Throughout the retreat, participants expressed a desire for stronger clarity of roles, more intentional long-term planning, improved transparency, and a clearer connection between decisions and community needs.

F. Agenda

Session 1 - Welcome, Intent & Ground Rules

The facilitator introduced the purpose of the retreat—reassessing the strategic mission, values, and long-term direction of the department.

Participants acknowledged the importance of stepping back from day-to-day operational demands to reflect on why the board exists, what the department should accomplish for the community, and how board members can best support its mission. The retreat was framed as a foundational exercise to realign around shared goals, clarify expectations,

and strengthen communication.

Several board members expressed early that the department's overall impact on the community is substantial, and that the board's decisions must be guided by both operational realities and public expectations. In this spirit, the group set out to discuss what effective governance looks like in the context of a port and harbor system serving residents, mariners, visitors, and commercial entities.

Session 2 - Building Trust & Team Cohesion Session

Much of the discussion centered on clarifying the board's purpose. Participants noted that the board is more than a procedural oversight group—it is a body expected to provide vision, strategic direction, and leadership. Several speakers reflected on their personal motivations for serving and the importance of aligning individual viewpoints with the collective responsibility to the community.

A recurring theme was the desire to strengthen understanding of the board's role relative to the assembly. Some decisions require assembly approval, and the need to ensure alignment between the two bodies was emphasized. Members wished to avoid unnecessary delays by improving communication and clarity on what requires additional approval and what the board can act independently.

Board members also expressed the importance of trust—both among themselves and with the public. Transparency, accessibility, and a willingness to engage were framed as essential parts of public service.

Participants explored what motivates them as board members. Many expressed a commitment to improving the port and harbor system for the community at large. Speakers emphasized that decisions must reflect community needs, not simply internal preferences or the priorities of any single stakeholder group.

Multiple speakers stressed that a public entity must make decisions that consider the entire community. Some noted that it is easy for decisions to become overly focused on operational constraints or narrow perspectives, and the retreat provided an opportunity to broaden their outlook.

The board discussed the difficulties of balancing public pressure, operational limitations, financial realities, and long-term planning. They acknowledged that the port operates with significant revenue, which comes with heightened expectations for accountability and stewardship.

A major subject of concern was the relationship between budgeting and planning. Several members observed that projects were sometimes re-shaped simply to fit budget limitations, instead of budgets being designed around strategic priorities.

There was broad agreement that this “budget-first” approach was backwards. Members argued that the board should first define what the port and harbor system should achieve, identify the projects needed to achieve those objectives, and then allocate budgetary resources accordingly.

This concern is connected to a broader issue: the need for a coherent, long-range strategic plan. Without such a framework, decisions risk becoming reactive rather than intentional.

Speaker after speaker addressed the challenges of information flow—both within the board and between the board and staff. Some members noted they were not always aware of relevant developments until late in the decision-making process. Others said the board sometimes lacked enough background information to make confident choices.

Participants expressed a desire for more consistent communication channels, clearer documentation, and earlier involvement in key discussions. The retreat served as a reminder that good governance requires good information.

The group discussed the importance of feedback loops. Board members want opportunities to raise concerns earlier, to ask clarifying questions, and to better understand both procedural and operational contexts.

3 - Establishing a Unified Vision

One theme that repeatedly emerged was the importance of transparency. Several members emphasized that the public cannot trust the board's decisions unless they understand what the board is doing and why.

Members discussed ways to improve public engagement, including more accessible information sharing, availability for questions, and ensuring that board actions are clearly communicated. They emphasized that the public should not feel left out of processes that directly impact the community.

Another issue raised was the need to balance transparency with efficiency; while openness is essential, decisions cannot be stalled indefinitely by excessive review or consultation. Board members agreed that finding this balance is one of their ongoing responsibilities.

Board members discussed the importance of representing diverse perspectives. They recognized that the port and harbor serve a wide range of users—from commercial operators to recreational boaters, from subsistence harvesters to tourists.

Several speakers highlighted that the board benefits when members share different viewpoints, experiences, and priorities. They stressed the value of listening, understanding each other's motivations, and working collaboratively.

Some members suggested the board consider formalizing certain decision frameworks or expectations to make sure all relevant perspectives are consistently incorporated into major decisions.

Session 4 - Evaluating Projects & Setting Priorities Session

Discussions touched on the working relationship between the board and staff. Members acknowledged that staff are responsible for day-to-day operations and bring technical expertise that the board relies on.

At the same time, members emphasized the need for clarity: the board should define the high-level objectives, and staff should determine how to implement them. This division of

responsibilities helps ensure that the board stays focused on governance rather than operational micromanagement.

Board members also noted that understanding operational complexities—budget cycles, infrastructure constraints, and maintenance requirements—helps them make more informed decisions.

As the discussion deepened, participants returned frequently to the idea of long-term vision. The department plays a central role in the region's transportation, recreation, economy, and quality of life.

Because of this, members felt strongly that decisions should be rooted in strategic discipline. Rather than reacting to immediate pressures, the board should consistently orient itself toward long-term goals that benefit the whole community.

Some suggested developing a formal strategic plan, perhaps updated every few years, to help ensure decisions align with a coherent vision.

5 - Wrap-Up & Commitments

In closing, board members expressed appreciation for the chance to step back from the daily workflow to reflect on higher-level issues. Several members commented on the importance of continuing these types of discussions regularly.

There was broad agreement on several key priorities for the future: - Strengthen communication between staff and board members - Improve early access to information needed for decisions - Develop a long-term strategic framework - Ensure transparency and community engagement - Clarify roles and expectations between the board and the assembly - Maintain trust and openness both internally and externally

The retreat concluded with a renewed sense of purpose and a shared commitment to moving forward collaboratively and intentionally.

A. ADJOURNMENT AT 3:33 PM.