



Board of Harbor Commissioners

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October 11, 2024

Via Email: ccorpus@smcgov.org

Sheriff Christina Corpus
San Mateo County Sheriff's Office
330 Bradford Street
Redwood City, Ca 94063

Sheriff Corpus,

Thank you, and your staff for taking time to come to the San Mateo County Harbor District on September 30th, 2024, to discuss ocean rescue/maritime assists on the Coastside. As discussed, the Harbor District has a long and proud history of saving lives and property on the waters of San Mateo County, be it an ocean rescue off of Pedro Point or bayside assists off of South San Francisco, the San Mateo County has answered the call.

The Harbor District is the only public agency providing immediate on water search and rescue off the San Mateo County coast. The fishing fleet, recreational fleet, public, and other governmental agencies expect the Harbor District to be there when the call comes in, and for the most part, the District has responded, has saved multiple lives, has prevented an untold number of vessels from washing ashore or being lost at sea.

The Harbor District provides a multiple number of services under the search and rescue/maritime assist umbrella to include:

- **Search and Rescue**: The active search and recovery of a known or suspected person in distress.
- **First Responder Support**: Support of shoreside operations, i.e. cliff rescues.
- **Vessel Assists**: Assist vessels in distress to include vessels taking on water, disabled vessels, vessels at risk of grounding, vessels without fuel, etc.
- **Body Recovery/Evidence**: Assist the San Mateo Coroner, Sheriff, and Coastside Fire Protection District with the recovery of victims or evidence located at sea or on remote beaches and coves inaccessible from land.
- **Transportation Assistance**: Transport first responders (police, fire rescue, paramedics) to the scene of a medical or maritime emergency.
- **Firefighting**: Waterside firefighting.
- **Persons in Distress**: Novice windsurfers, kitesurfers, swimmers, surfers, kayakers, standing boarders are routinely caught off guard by weather conditions and require assistance returning to shore.

The San Mateo County Harbor District has responded to 358 ocean and 52 bayside active/urgent rescue cases in the past five years. The Harbor District has also responded to 4,855 ocean and 2,376 bayside maritime assists during the same period. However, this ability to maintain this capability is in jeopardy. The Harbor District is not properly staffed or equipped to provide search and rescue capabilities on a full-time basis. The Harbor District can no longer cover the staff shortages using excessive overtime, nor can the District ask staff members to work multiple or extended shifts to the point of exhaustion to close the coverage gaps. This has resulted in large blocks of time each week where the Harbor District cannot respond, cannot conduct search and rescue operations, or conduct maritime assists.

To continue to provide the search and rescue capability on a regular and dependable basis, the District requires a minimum of six (6) additional Deputy Harbormasters and a properly designed search and rescue/maritime assist vessel designed for open ocean operations.

The Harbor District has also requested funding support from the City of Half Moon Bay, as many of the beaches here on the Coastsides, including Surfers Beach, Mirada Surf Beach, Poplar Beach, belong to the City. The funding sought was the transitory occupancy tax collected from properties owned by the San Mateo County Harbor District. Initial response from the City has been negative, the Harbor District is still awaiting a formal response.

The Harbor District has made a request to San Mateo County Supervisor Ray Mueller for additional funding to support maritime operations, suggesting the County consider supporting the Harbor District with the personal property tax already collected from vessels owners in San Mateo County based on the value of their vessels. Supervisor Mueller stated he would look into it.

The Harbor District is also seeking funding under Local Public Safety Protection and Improvement Act of 1993 (Proposition 172). As you are aware, and as we discussed, Prop 172 (Now Section 35 of Article XIII of the California Constitution) created the Public Safety Fund. As defined by the California Legislature, one purpose of the fund was to support ocean rescue.

In order for the District to receive Prop. 172 funds, the District and Sheriff's Office would need to enter into a Memorandum of Agreement (MOU). The MOU would detail the current working relationship already developed between our agencies and include a funding mechanism to allow your office to provide funding to the Harbor District from the Public Safety Fund. With the additional funding, the Harbor District will be able to close the safety gap that currently exists here on the Coastsides.

Again, it was great talking with you and your staff, and I look forward to a positive response in supporting ocean rescue/maritime assists.

If you or your staff have any questions, please contact me at (650) 583-4400, tmattusch@smharbor.com, or General Manager Jim Pruett at 650-822-4144, jpruett@smharbor.com.



Tom Mattusch
Board President

- Copy:
1. Captain Richard Cheechov, Coastside Patrol Bureau (rcheechov@smcgov.org)
 2. Undersheriff Daniel Perea (dperea@smcgov.org)
 3. Victor Aenlle, Chief of Staff, Sheriff's Office (vaenlle@smcgov.org)
 4. Virginia Chang Kiraly, SMCHD Commissioner (vchang-kiraly@smharbor.com)
 5. Jim Pruett, SMCHD General Manager (jpruett@smharbor.com)