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# The Smithtown News

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## Renewed call for dredging

Boating community citing safety concern at channel from Stony Brook Harbor

By DAVID AMBRO

Local boaters have sounded the rally cry to dredge the mouth of Stony Brook Harbor into Smithtown Bay.

Suffolk County is responsible for maintaining navigable channels, and the County Department of Public Works has kept up with dredging the two inner channels in Stony Brook Harbor, which include Porpoise Channel on the Smithtown side of the harbor and the Yacht Club Spur on the Brookhaven side of the harbor. Boaters contend, however, that north of Porpoise Channel the mouth of the harbor has filled in and needs to be dredged desperately.

Smithtown Bay Yacht Club Commodore Mike Kozyrski and Stony Brook Yacht Club Commodore Denis Lynch sent a joint letter June 2 to Suffolk County Executive Steve Bellone asking for the harbor to be dredged. The letter cites a request a year ago, in June 2015, by Town of Smithtown Department of Environment and Waterways Director Russell Barnett to the Suffolk County Department of Public Works (DPW) for dredging at the mouth of the harbor.

"We strongly encourage you to request that the Suffolk County Department of Public Works (DPW) both address and alleviate this very serious problem in the most expeditious manner," says the commodores' letter to Mr. Bellone. "Inasmuch as the 2016 boating season is fast approaching, nothing less than the health and safety of Smithtown and Brookhaven boaters is at stake."

Paul Cona, an engineer and boater from St. James, sent a letter to **The Smithtown News** this week adding his voice in favor of dredging.

"I have been a boater for over 23 years and every

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**OUT OF TIME:** Smithtown High School West senior Sloan Fisher reflects on her class' senior countdown, an annual barbecue and ceremony where the entire grade meets at the football field and counts down the final moments of their high school career, Thursday, June 9. **See more photos and graduation coverage starting on page 8.**

-Anthony Lifrieri photo

# Dredging plan was scuttled in 2002

By DAVID AMBRO

An effort by the Suffolk County Department of Public Works (DPW) to dredge the channel into the mouth of Stony Brook Harbor got close a decade and a half ago, when two local legislators introduced a bill September 17, 2002 for \$1.2 million for the project.

But the controversial dredging was eventually scuttled in October 2002 as a result of opposition raised by Michael Kaufman, a member of the Nissequogue/Head of the Harbor Joint Village Coastal Management Commission. Mr. Kaufman effectively argued that dredging, under the Local Waterfront Revitalization Plan (LWRP) approved by the Town of Smithtown and State of New York in 1989 only permits dredging the inner harbor and not the outer channel.

Mr. Kaufman contends that dredging a channel in the outer harbor will be a waste of money because it will fill right back in. He claims that since the 1800s the flow of tidal water in and out of Stony Brook Harbor has created a natural winding navigable channel. "It twists and moves seasonally, but remains generally open because of the tidal dynamics into and out of the harbor," wrote Mr. Kaufman in a September 2002 letter about the dredge project proposed at that time.

Advancing the dredge project in 2002 were then County Legislators Lynne Nowick and Andrew Crecca, who represented Smithtown. Mr. Crecca is now a judge and Ms. Nowick a Smithtown Town Councilwoman. "There is a need to dredge for public safety reasons in that public safety vessels are unable to access the harbor and respond to emergency calls during low tide and the harbor in its current condition has become unsafe for boaters during low tide," said the Nowick/Crecca legislation seeking the \$1.2 million for the dredge work.

Smithtown Town Councilman Thomas McCarthy, who lives in Nissequogue and has a boat in Stony Brook Harbor, was a proponent of the 2002 dredge project. He argued that Mr. Kaufman's claim that the area has never been dredged and that this will be a new channel is incorrect. According to Mr. McCarthy at that time, the channel was dredged in July 1958 and again in 1980.

The Smithtown Town Board voted unanimously August 15, 2002 to endorse the dredge project. The Brookhaven Town Board at the time also passed a resolution endorsing the



Aerial photographs of the shifting sands at the mouth of Stony Brook Harbor.

dredge project. The town board approved a resolution authorizing Supervisor Patrick Vecchio to write a letter to DPW urging that it move ahead with the Stony Brook dredging.

During the 2002 debate, Town of Smithtown Department of Environment and Waterways Russell Barnett concluded that state permits

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## Boating community renews call to clear channel at mouth of harbor

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year the channel leading out to Smithtown Bay gets worse. For a couple of hours either side of dead low tide, the channel is all but impassable," Mr. Cona writes. "God forbid we have some sort of medical emergency while out in the Bay or Sound; by the time the Bay Constable gets out, it might be too late. This is a totally unacceptable threat to public health and safety. Please advocate on our behalf to have the channel dredged as soon as possible."

During an interview Monday, June 13, Smithtown Yacht Club Dredging Project Coordinator Kevin Rooney said the dredge work is needed more for safety than for convenience of the boaters. "We are asking for a limited maintenance dredge right now to preserve public safety. It is not for our convenience," he said.

According to Mr. Rooney, the channel into the harbor, from about buoy five to about buoy nine, is impassable for one-and-a-half to two hours on each side of low tide. He said not only do boats have to wait for long periods of time to get out or into the harbor, but that emergency vessels from the United States Coast Guard, Suffolk County Police

Department, and Town of Smithtown Marine Bureau also have to wait for that tidal window to get in and out of the harbor.

"It's a disaster waiting to happen," Mr. Rooney said.

According to Mr. Rooney, at this time the commodores are only asking for the dredge work at the mouth of the harbor and not the inner channels. He said the safety concerns that have arisen as a result of the extent to which the harbor has filled in outweigh environmental concerns that have been raised in the past about dredging the mouth of the harbor.

The letters to Mr. Bellone from the commodores, copies of which were sent to municipal officials, say the channel is used by more than 300 boaters who are members of the two yacht clubs, thousands of Smithtown and Brookhaven residents who keep their boats at marinas or launch them from municipal ramps in the harbor.

"Not only does this situation present a serious navigation hazard to boats leaving and entering Smithtown Bay, but it virtually precludes the ability of the Bay Constable personnel to rapidly respond to any medical or other significant

emergency which might occur in the Sound, north of Smithtown Bay during these twice-daily periods. Thus, the very lives and safety of Smithtown and Brookhaven residents are in jeopardy should they experience an emergency requiring assistance while on the water during low-tide periods," says the commodores' letter to the county executive.

"It is not an overstatement to say that the very lives of our members, their families and all other boaters are potentially in serious jeopardy due to inaction by various government agencies to prioritize and complete the necessary dredging of the Smithtown Bay channel. The situation is dire and it is totally unacceptable," Mr. Rooney said.

According to Mr. Rooney, the yacht clubs are launching a major lobbying initiative seeking to have the channel dredged immediately. He said the effort includes reaching out to the media to try exerting pressure on local officials. Boaters want dredging expedited and they want the channel to be placed on a routine dredging cycle so that it does not fill back in again in a few years.

Brookhaven Town Supervisor Edward Romaine

issued a statement June 2 asking DPW to undertake dredging work in Brookhaven waterways, including the Yacht Club Spur in Stony Brook Harbor, but his request does not include the same area cited by the commodores.

Mr. Romaine has requested dredging at more than a dozen locations during the 2016-2017 dredging season. Dredging season spans from October to January every year. "Dredging our waterways is essential for both the economic and ecologic health of our region, said Supervisor Romaine, who is a past member of the Suffolk County Dredge Project Screen Committee. "Keeping these channels safe, open and usable on a consistent basis is essential for the health of these waterways, and for boaters to safely enjoy during the summer months. These rivers, creeks and channels are important economic arteries for restaurants, marinas, local businesses, and our Fire Island communities."

Priority locations for dredging identified by Brookhaven include the Yacht Club Spur, extension to the channel, southwest of the Boat Works in Stony Brook but not in the area to the north where the commodores are asking for dredging.

