



Scott and Dina Diana riding through Porpoise Channel in Smithtown Bay on Friday. They say the channel often feels like a "traffic jam."

# BOATERS TO OFFICIALS: CHANGE the CHANNEL

## Dredging sought for 'serious navigation hazard' off Smithtown Bay

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**A** narrow channel off Smithtown Bay gets as shallow as a foot deep at low tide — a condition that some local boaters call dangerous and want Suffolk County to fix.

On a recent boat ride shortly before low tide, Scott and Dina Diana of Smithtown could see clammers standing in knee-high water in Porpoise Channel.

"It's not a convenience thing," said Scott Diana, as he piloted his boat to the shallow spot at the Outer Channel, where Porpoise Channel and a smaller channel called the Yacht Club Spur spill into Smithtown Bay.

Scott Diana, a safety manager for PSE&G who takes his children boating, said at low tide in the Outer Channel "there's no way for the constable to get out to you if there is

an emergency." He's requested that the county dredge the Outer Channel to at least four feet deep.

Smithtown's Director of Environment and Waterways, Russell Barnett, said the town has periodically asked Suffolk County Department of Public Works to dredge the area, including in June.

"The channel is even narrower than it was in the past," Barnett said. "If there was a medical emergency out in Smithtown Bay, it would be virtually impossible to get back into dock for about two hours on either side of low tide."

Last week, the Suffolk DPW sent a letter to Smithtown town officials asking for more information about their dredging requests. The DPW letter also noted that there are strictures set by Smithtown and by joint Nissequogue and Head of the Harbor village programs that prohibit new dredging, and that "we have been advised that should Smithtown Bay be dredged there is potential for



significant negative impacts to the estuary with Stony Brook Harbor."

"Given what they've laid out in this letter, it's not likely to happen in 2016 or 2017, if ever," Barnett said.

Last month, the Smithtown Bay Yacht Club and Stony Brook Yacht Club also sent a letter to County Executive Steve Bellone asking the county to support the dredging project.

"Not only does this situation present a serious navigation hazard to boats leaving and entering Smithtown Bay, but it vir-

tually precludes the ability of the Bay Constable personnel to rapidly respond to any medical or significant emergency which might occur . . ." the yacht clubs' letter said.

Scott Diana said the safety factor is constantly on his mind because of his 21-year-old son, Daniel, who the family often brings on the boat. "My son is autistic and has epilepsy," he said. "The boat really soothes him. We take him fishing." Dina Diana, a nurse, said the family's boat trips seem to be therapeutic for their son.

The Dianas said that the popular channel can seem like a "traffic jam" on busy summer weekends, and increasing access to the bay would only help. "We just don't want to see a major tragedy for something that could be easily solved," Scott Diana said.

Barnett said despite the DPW's letter, he's hopeful that a compromise can be worked out that protects both the environment and boaters.

"We will attempt to explore further with the DPW if there is some solution to this problem or some avenue to move forward," he said.

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