

G. Steadman photo

Southport Harbor

Fairfield, Connecticut

Past, Present and Future



A Presentation by the
Harbor Management Commission
December 6, 2022

This presentation, prepared by the Fairfield Harbor Management Commission, includes images of Southport Harbor and descriptions of the harbor's history, resources, and exceptional natural and cultural values. Also included is information concerning the Southport Harbor Management Plan and the Commission's responsibilities and ongoing initiatives to manage use and conservation of the harbor in the public interest.

We present these slides as part of our continuing efforts to not only inform the public, but also to encourage everyone who enjoys the harbor to do their best to be good environmental stewards and to act in a manner that will help sustain the harbor for the benefit of future generations.

Please contact us at HMC@fairfieldct.org with any comments, questions, and suggestions.

Thank you for your continued interest and support.

Fairfield Harbor Management Commission



The Town of Fairfield in Southwest Connecticut



Fairfield is a coastal community on the north shore of Long Island Sound, part of the coastal area of the State of Connecticut as defined in the Connecticut Coastal Management Act.

Much of Fairfield's character and quality of life is intrinsically tied to the water and shoreline resources of Long Island Sound and the Town's coastal area.

Among the Town's distinct districts is the Village of Southport.

Southport Harbor

Southport Harbor at the mouth of the Mill River is one of Fairfield's most valuable natural resources — a center of boating activity in western Long Island Sound and one of the most scenic and historic locations on the Connecticut coast.

The harbor played a prominent role in the development of Fairfield and continues to have a significant influence on the Town's quality of life.

Since 1986, the **Fairfield Harbor Management Commission (FHMC)** has principal responsibility for guiding the harbor's beneficial use and conservation.

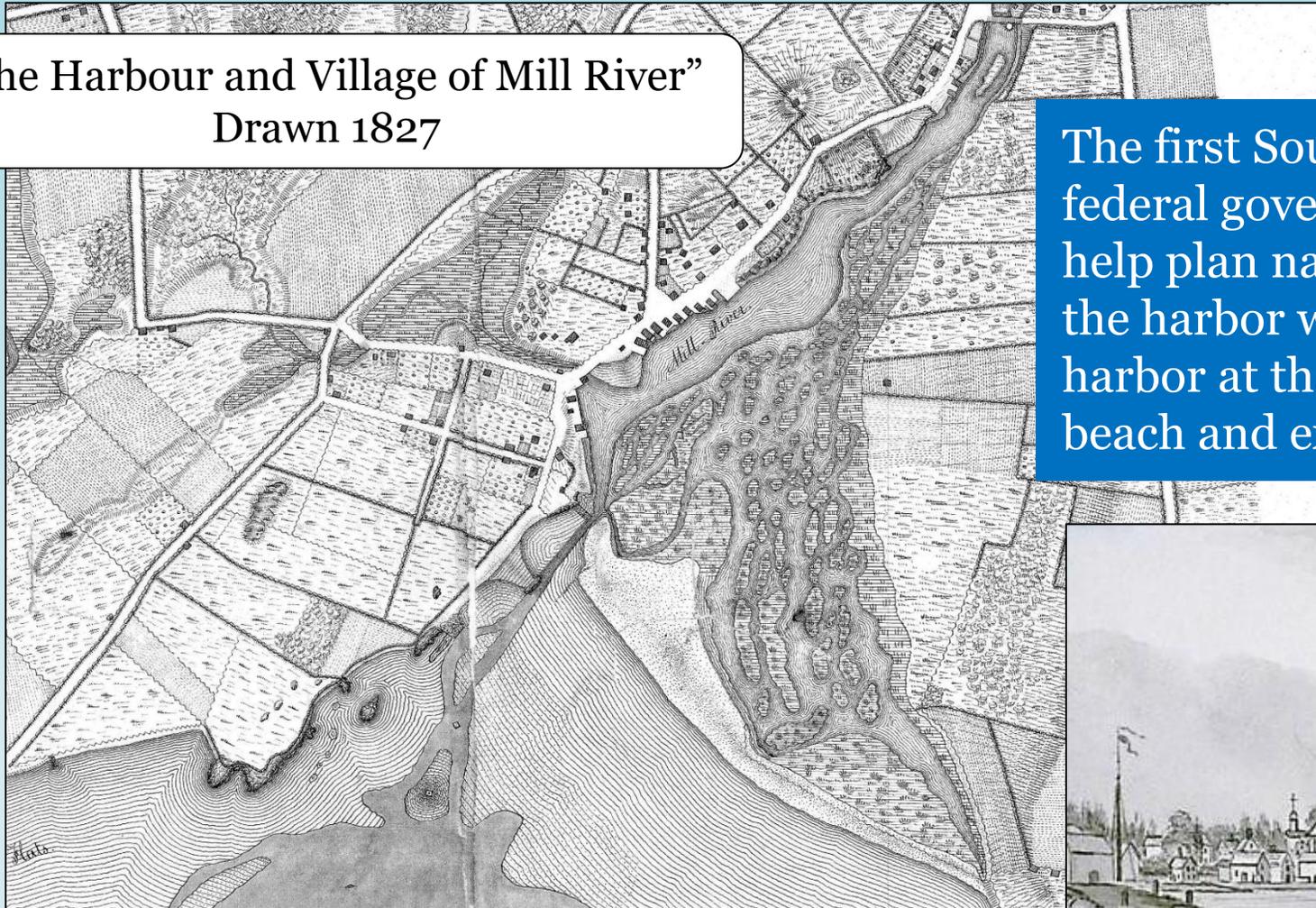


Google Earth

Historic Coast

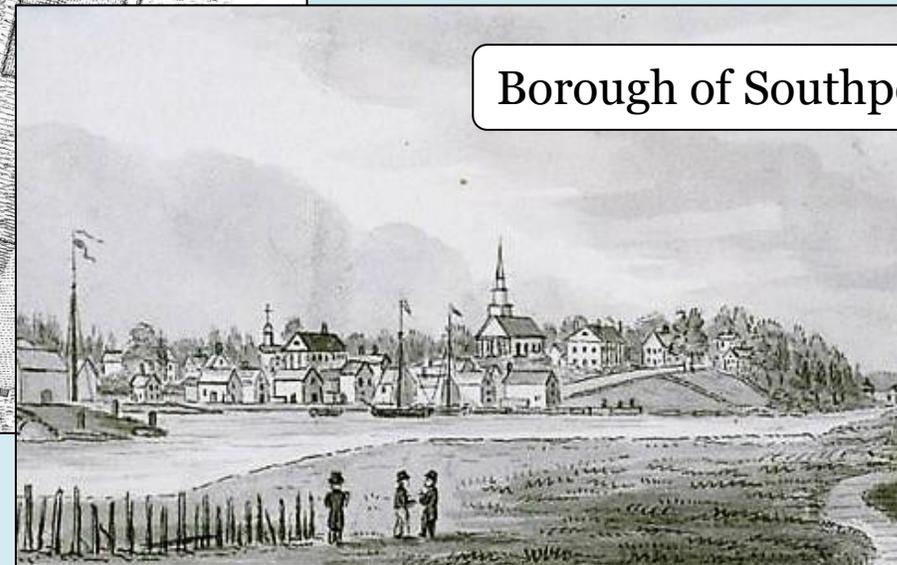
“The Harbour and Village of Mill River”
Drawn 1827

The first Southport Harbor survey by the federal government was conducted in 1826 to help plan navigation improvements, including the harbor wall and jetty. The east side of the harbor at that time was shaped by a barrier beach and extensive tidal marsh.



From the 1826 Survey by the U.S. Topographical Engineers

Borough of Southport



“Connecticut Historical Collections” by John W. Barber, 1836

Historic Maritime Community

Few places have more nautical tradition than Southport Harbor. From about 1760 to 1900 the harbor was a major maritime center, its wharves bustling with activity. In 1836 it was written that “more shipping is owned in this place in proportion to its size than any other place between New York and Boston.”

“Market boats” carried cargoes (notably onions and other local farm products) to distant and nearby ports, and vessels ranging from small sloops to large ocean-going ships were built in shipyards on the west side of the harbor.

Today, the harbor is the centerpiece of a local, state, and National Register Historic District.

Courtesy Pequot Library, Roderick P. Curtis photographer



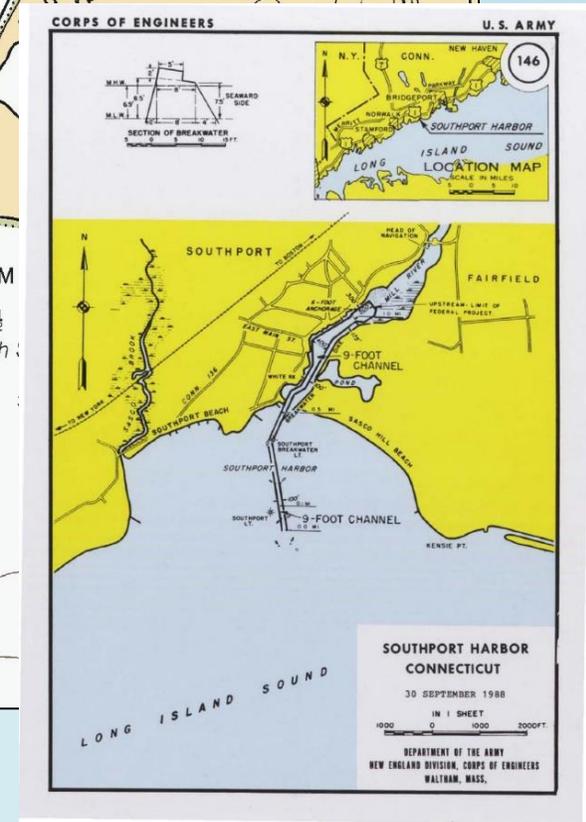
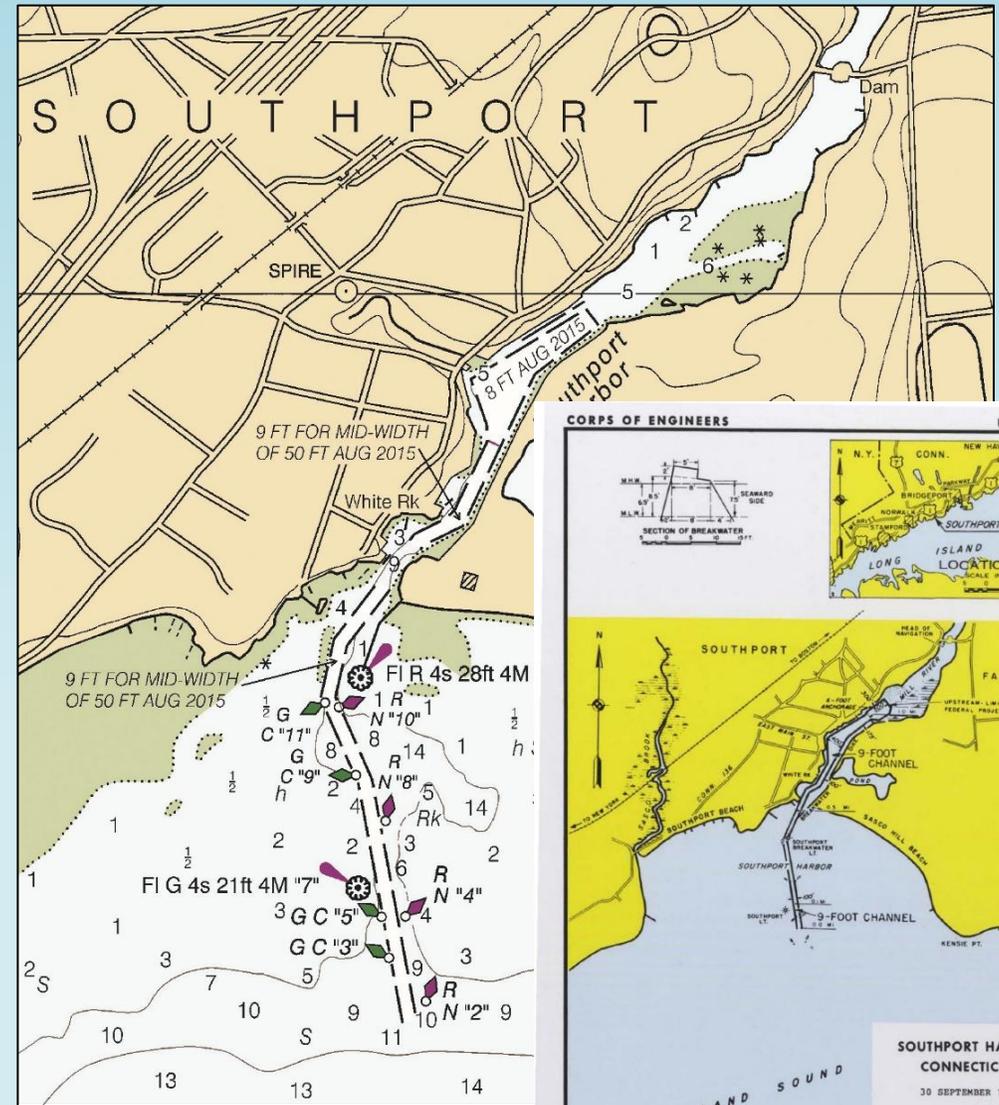
Courtesy Fairfield Museum and History Center

Federal Navigation Project

The Southport Harbor Federal Navigation Project (FNP), first authorized by the U.S. Congress in 1829 and including a designated navigation channel, anchorage area, and jetty, has served the harbor since the early 19th century. This is one of the oldest Federal navigation projects in the United States.

Responsibility for maintaining the FNP, including dredging of the channel and anchorage when funds are available, rests with the U.S. Army Corps of Engineers.

Day to day management of the FNP for the public's use and enjoyment is the responsibility of the Harbor Management Commission.



Center of Recreational Boating

More than 200 sail and power boats are docked, moored, or dry-stored in the harbor. Many visiting vessels enter the harbor on weekends and holidays during the boating season and use public boating facilities and services available pursuant to the Southport Harbor Management Plan.

The harbor supports sail training programs for children and high school students and the Fairfield Community Sailing program, and provides significant opportunities for recreational fishing.



Hugh Smith photos

Public Access

Public access to Southport Harbor from the land is available from three Town-owned properties: Perry Green; the Town Boatyard (historically known as Ye Yacht Yard); and the Lower Wharf.

Views of the harbor are enjoyed from all three locations.

In addition to its boat launching ramp, the Town Boat Yard includes the Town Landing open to the public as required for the Federal Navigation Project.



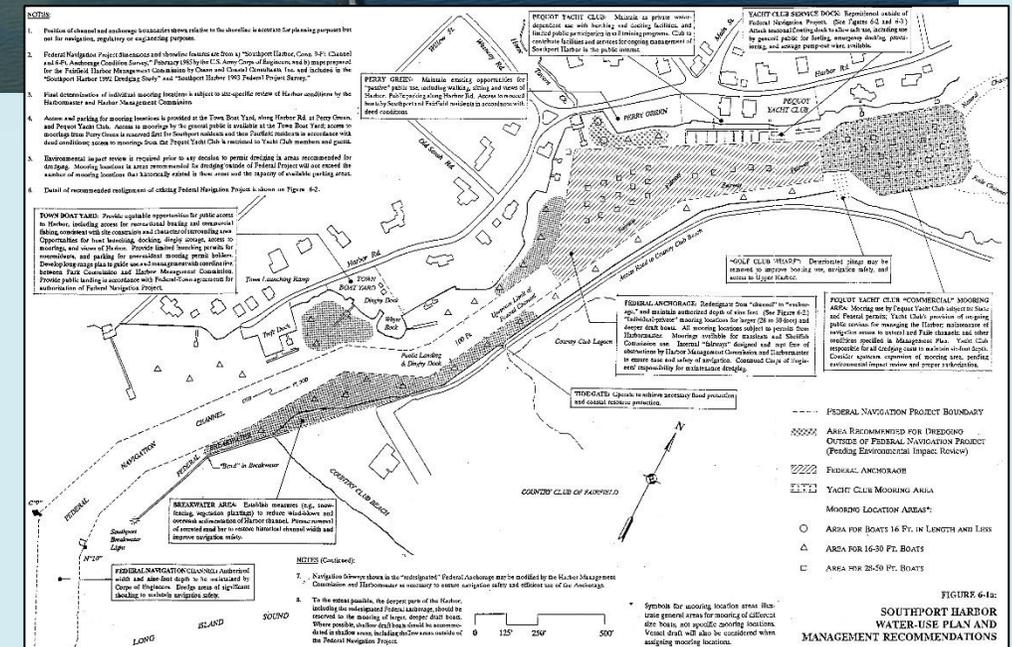
G. Steadman photo

Harbor Management Plan

The Harbor Management Commission is responsible for preparing, maintaining, and implementing the Southport Harbor Management Plan to guide beneficial use of the harbor's coastal and navigable waters and protect and enhance coastal resources.

The Plan was adopted by the Fairfield Representative Town Meeting in 1995 after approval by the State of Connecticut. Its goals, objectives, and policies continue to serve the Town and harbor well after 27 years.

The Plan resolved conflicts and regulatory issues concerning use of the Federal Navigation Project, ensured the project's future maintenance, and made clear the FHMC's oversight authority.



Harbor Management in the State of Connecticut 2022

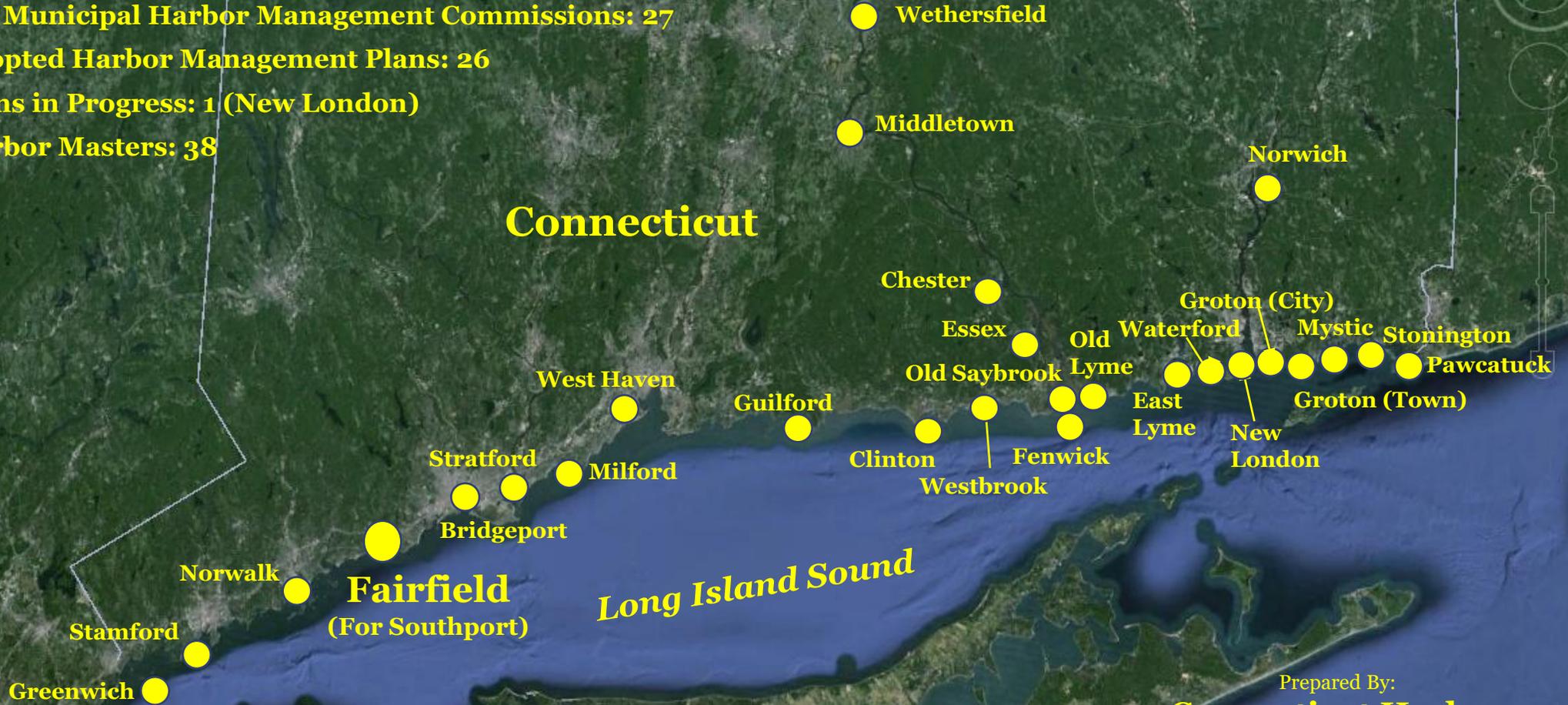
● Municipal Harbor Management Commissions: 27

Adopted Harbor Management Plans: 26

Plans in Progress: 1 (New London)

Harbor Masters: 38

Connecticut



The Southport Harbor Management Plan is one of 26 harbor management plans in CT.

Prepared By:
Connecticut Harbor Management Association

April 2022

Google earth

Harbor Management Authorities

Connecticut Harbor Management Act of 1984

Sec. 22a-113k through Sec. 22a-113t of the General Statutes

Authorizes any municipality with navigable waters to establish a harbor management commission and prepare a harbor management plan for the most desirable use of the municipality's waters for recreational, commercial, and other purposes and for the preservation and use of coastal resources.



Harbor Management Ordinance Chapter 24 of the Fairfield Town Code Adopted by the RTM 7-28-1986

Establishes the seven-member Fairfield Harbor Management Commission; directs the FHMC to prepare the Southport Harbor Management Plan; and authorizes the FHMC to exercise the powers, duties, and responsibilities authorized by the CT Harbor Management Act.

State of Connecticut Harbor Master for Southport

Appointed by the Governor upon a recommendation from the FHMC, the Southport Harbor Master has significant responsibilities for managing Southport Harbor in the public interest.

The Harbor Master is a state official but serves as an ex-officio member of the FHMC and must conduct all harbor master duties in a manner consistent with the Harbor Management Plan.

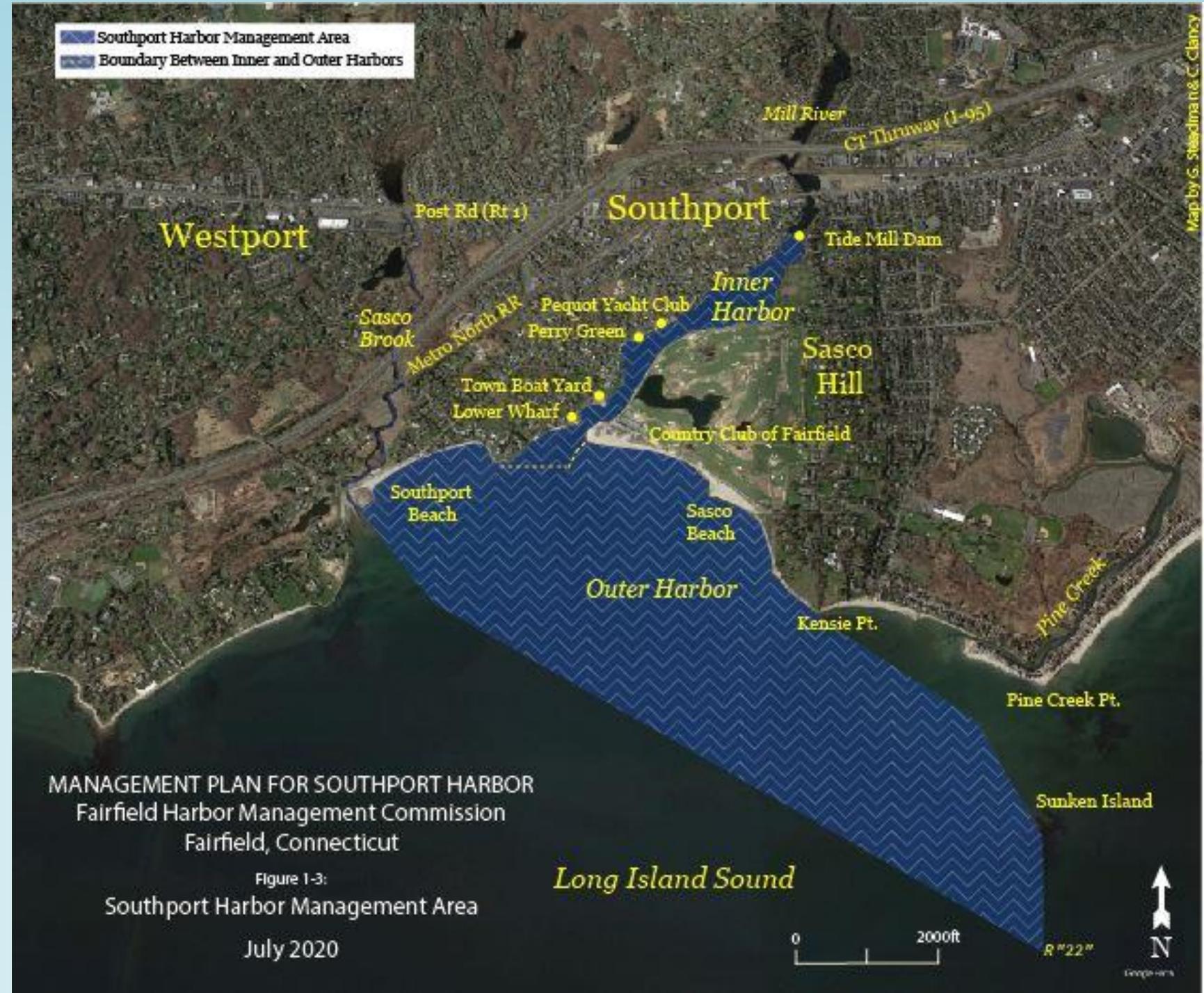
Among other duties, the Harbor Master administers the FHMC's Rules and Procedures for Mooring and Anchoring.



Courtesy Fairfield Museum and History Center

Harbor Management Jurisdiction

The area of jurisdiction of the Harbor Management Commission and Harbor Management Plan is established in the Town Code and in the Plan and is known as the Southport Harbor Management Area, shaded in blue on this aerial image.



Southport Harbor Management Area

The Harbor Management Area includes:

- *Southport Inner Harbor* (from the south end of the federal jetty to the Tide Mill Dam at the head of navigation);
- *Southport Outer Harbor* (west of Kensie Point); and
- The tidal portion of *Sasco Brook* within the bounds of the Town of Fairfield.



Harbor Management Goals and Policies

The Harbor Management Plan's goals and policies establish Fairfield's Vision for safe and beneficial use and conservation of Southport Harbor. The goals and policies guide decisions by the FHMC and provide the basis for harbor improvement projects.



CT Port Survey Commission

Southport Harbor c. 1946

Harbor management goals call for:

- *Public health, safety, and welfare*
- *Recreational boating and other traditional water uses*
- *Environmental conservation*
- *Preservation of maritime heritage and quality of life*
- *Public access to the harbor in appropriate locations*
- *Public support and participation*



G. Steadman photo

Southport Harbor 2015

Public Safety

The FHMC, Harbor Master, Fairfield Police Department Marine Unit, and Pequot Yacht Club (PYC) work together to promote and maintain boating safety. The Marine Unit's high-speed SAFE boat is on-call 24 hours/day as an invaluable asset for emergency response in the entire western Long Island Sound region, along with the Fairfield Fire Department's emergency response boat.

The Harbor Master and PYC staff review everyone's responsibilities for keeping harbor waters safe for resident and visiting boaters, junior sailors, and high school sailing teams training in the harbor.



Harbor Emergency Drill

Hugh Smith photo

Harbor Moorings

To maintain public safety, protect natural and historic resources, and provide for optimum use of the harbor, the Harbor Master must approve the location and use of all boat moorings. The Harbor Master also maintains the mooring waiting list which is open to all on equal terms.

As required by state law and the Town Code, all mooring fees (ranging from \$100 to \$200/year) are deposited in the Town Harbor Management Account and may be used only to improve the harbor for the public and help cover FHMC and Harbor Master expenses.



G. Steadman photos

North Anchorage

Originally part of the Southport Harbor Federal Navigation Project, the North Anchorage was “defederalized” by a Congressional Act in 1996 at the request of the Harbor Management Commission. That same Act modified other aspects of the FNP to resolve navigation conflicts and meet the needs of harbor users as set forth in the Harbor Management Plan.

Defederalization of the North Anchorage enabled the Pequot Yacht Club to maintain its own mooring field as needed for the PYC’s continued viability. In exchange, the PYC provides boating services to the general public and otherwise assists the FHMC and Harbor Master with harbor management in the public interest.



Mooring Maintenance

The mooring tackle inspection program helps ensure that all vessels are moored safely. All Town-owned anchors are removed, inspected, repaired, and re-set on a regular basis.

Under Sec. 24-12C of the Town Code, an annual maintenance charge is collected from all permit holders who use Town-owned mooring tackle. This covers the FHMC's substantial costs to haul, set, inspect, and replace the tackle.



Hugh Smith photos

Boating Services for the Public

The Harbor Management Plan calls for the Pequot Yacht Club to assist the FHMC and Harbor Master with managing the harbor in the public interest. PYC provides moorings and launch service for visiting boaters; allows the public to use its dock to purchase fuel and ice; and provides a vessel waste pump-out facility for public use.

Following the FHMC's guidelines, PYC assists the FHMC and Harbor Master with required inspection, repair, and replacement of all mooring tackle.



G. Steadman photo

Harbor Management Consistency Review

Pursuant to the CT General Statutes and Fairfield Code, the FHMC reviews all proposals affecting the harbor, including plans for docks, dredging, and bulkheads, and provides recommendations to the CT DEEP, Corps of Engineers, and Town agencies. The purpose is to determine the consistency of each proposal with the Harbor Management Plan and to avoid adverse impacts on the harbor.



In the period 2012-17, the FHMC reviewed plans by the Exide Co. for remediation of lead-contaminated sediment from the Mill River and harbor, thereby contributing to successful completion of the largest environmental clean-up project in Town history.

Dredging

Maintenance of the harbor's navigation channel has been a matter of community concern since the 1700s. Today, the federal channel and anchorage remain subject to ongoing shoaling; maintenance dredging is needed from time to time to maintain safe and beneficial operation of the harbor.

At the request of the FHMC, maintenance dredging was most recently accomplished by the Corps of Engineers in 2004-2005.

In 2004 and 2014-15 the Fairfield DPW excavated sand from the sand spit near the entrance channel and from the channel itself and used that sand to nourish Town beaches.

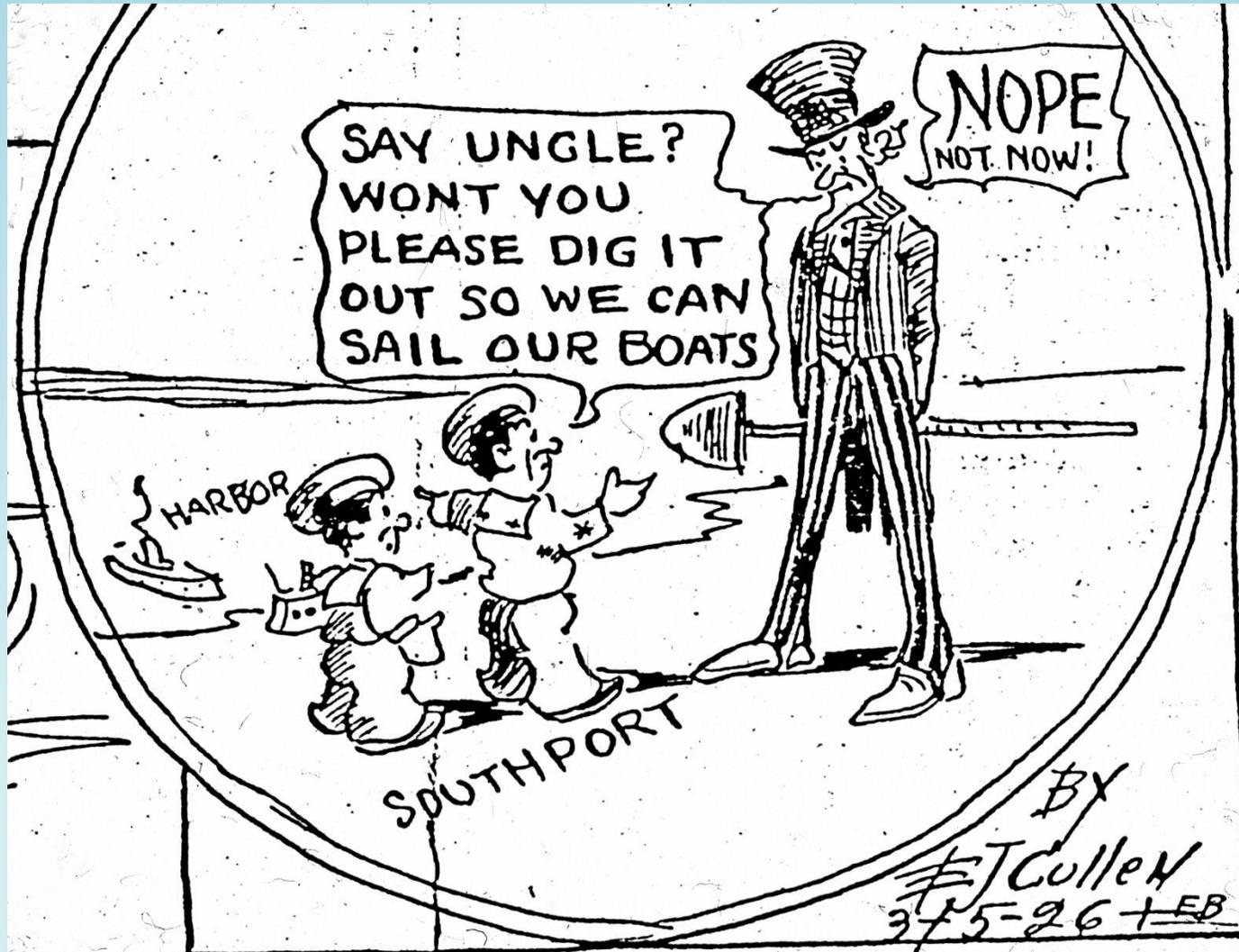


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Corps of Engineers Project

Hugh Smith photo



Fairfield News 1926

Dredging: A Complex Process

The dredging process is inherently complex and lengthy, including many regulatory and funding hurdles, and has been that way for many years.

In 1925, the federal government proposed to abandon the federal navigation project in Southport due to the decline of waterborne commerce. That decision was reversed and the project was reauthorized specifically to serve recreational boating.

Special Events

A major harbor event is the annual Blessing of the Fleet and Southport Street Parade to the Lower Wharf held in June. This annual event celebrates the maritime history of Southport and is made possible by the efforts of many Town agencies, volunteer groups, and individuals including the Fairfield Fire Dept., Fairfield Police Dept., Southport Volunteer Fire Dept., Sasquanaug Association for Southport Improvement, Southport Conservancy, Harbor Management Commission, Harbor Master, and many others.



G. Steadman photos

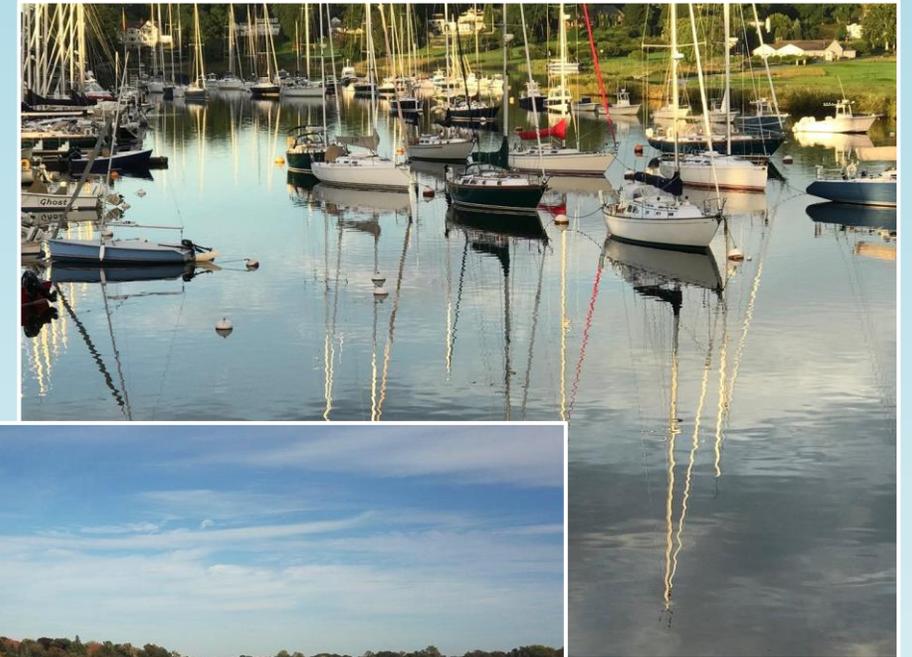


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Responsibilities for Plan Implementation

Implementation of the Harbor Management Plan is pursued through the coordinated actions of all Town, state, and federal agencies with programs and authorities that affect Southport Harbor. Principal responsibility rests with the FHMC.

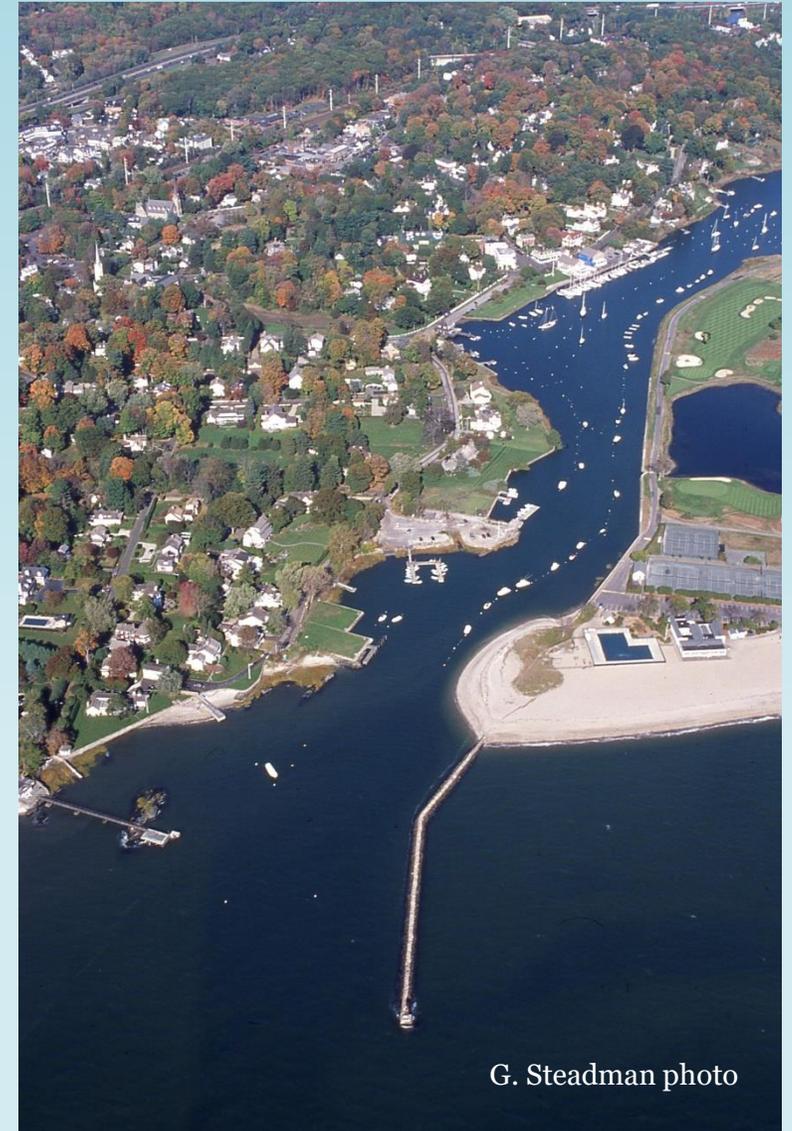
- Harbor Management Commission
- Representative Town Meeting
- Board of Selectmen
- Other Town agencies
- State of CT Harbor Master for Southport
- State and federal agencies
- Private groups and individuals



Hugh Smith photos

Benefits of the Harbor Management Plan

- Strengthens the Town's role for managing in-water activities (relative to state and federal authorities).
- Sets the Town's long-range vision for use and conservation of Southport Harbor.
- Increases coordination among Town, state, and federal agencies.
- Establishes continuing local forum for expression of interests and concerns.
- Provides formal basis for capital projects and other harbor improvements.



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The Harbor Management Plan Strengthens Home Rule

A recommendation of the Fairfield Harbor Management Commission consistent with and supported by the policies of the Harbor Management Plan is to be binding on state officials making regulatory decisions affecting Southport Harbor unless those officials can show cause why a different course of action should be taken.

See Sec. 22a-113n(b) of the Connecticut General Statutes

Note: A 2022 CT Court decision may be seen to diminish established municipal authority for harbor management and is being appealed by the directly affected town to the CT Supreme Court. The FHMC is closely monitoring this case. An amendment to the state's harbor management legislation may be needed to clarify certain long-standing municipal authorities.



Three Harbor Management Priorities in 2022-23



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- 1. Update the Harbor Management Plan (including long-range Sand Management Plan).**
- 2. Achieve federal dredging of the entrance channel and sand “spit” adjoining the federal jetty.**
- 3. Complete the Lower Wharf Improvement Project.**

Updating the Plan

Many recommendations in the 1995 Plan have been achieved. The 2023 Plan Update will reflect those achievements, adjust the Plan's goals, objectives, and policies where needed, set new recommendations, and include a long-term, cost-effective Sand Management Plan for maintaining the harbor's entrance channel.

THE MANAGEMENT PLAN FOR SOUTHPORT HARBOR



FAIRFIELD HARBOR MANAGEMENT COMMISSION
FAIRFIELD, CONNECTICUT

MARCH 1995

ADOPTED BY THE FAIRFIELD REPRESENTATIVE TOWN MEETING
EFFECTIVE OCTOBER 9, 1995



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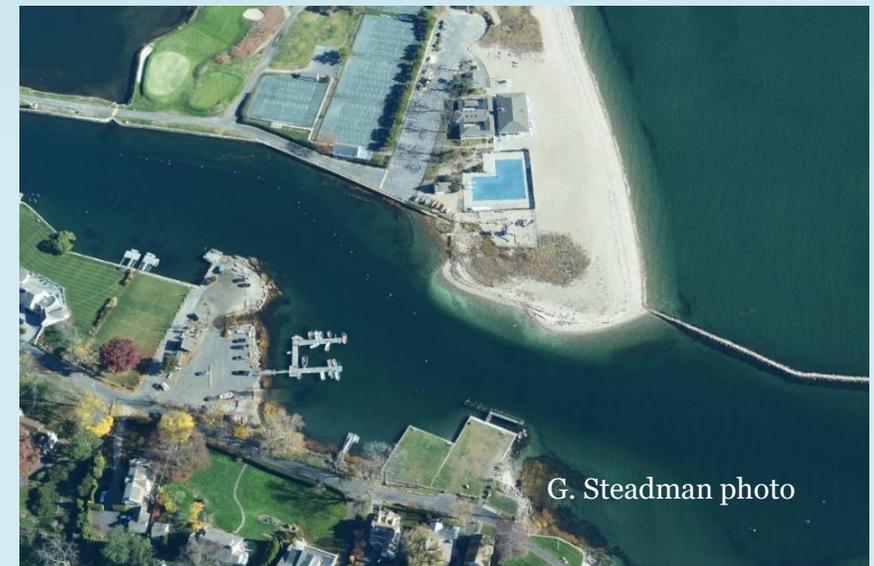
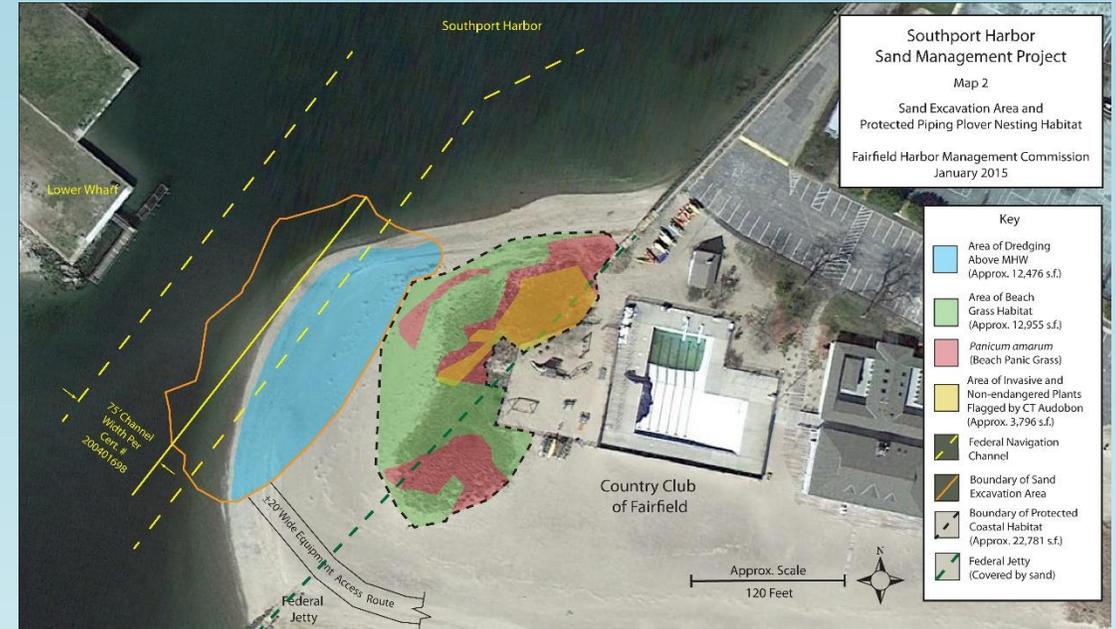


J. Engborg photo

Channel Dredging Project

Over many years, wind-blown and wave-washed sand built up against the east side of the harbor jetty, overtopped the jetty, and accumulated in and near the federal channel, thereby creating the ever-expanding “sand spit” on the west side of the jetty. Efforts to achieve a long-term solution to this problem have been delayed in recent years by the presence of a protected plant species on the sand bar, and by nesting of an endangered bird—the piping plover.

In 2022, the FHMC is working with the Corps of Engineers and CT DEEP on a new federal dredging plan to restore the full, 100-ft. width of the channel during the 2023-24 dredging season while protecting plant and bird habitat and using dredged material to enhance offshore oyster habitat.



Sand Management

The Sand Management Plan, in addition to a dredging plan to restore the 100-foot channel width and use the dredged sand for a beneficial purpose, should also include measures to reduce the natural movement of sand over the harbor jetty. That may require work to expose the jetty and move sand on the updrift (east) side of the jetty.



Lower Wharf Improvement Project

This project designed by the FHMC includes reconstruction of the public boat ramp at the Town Boatyard (historic Ye Yacht Yard) and repair of the piers and wall at the Lower Wharf managed by the FHMC.



G. Steadman photos

Phase 1, involving reconstruction of the boat ramp to the extent possible without dredging, was conducted by the Town DPW in 2016-2017. Phase 2—repairing the Lower Wharf public piers and stone wall — is now proceeding; in 2022, the FHMC is applying for the necessary state and federal permits and pursuing construction funds.



Public Comments and Suggestions

The Fairfield Harbor Management Commission appreciates everyone's interest and support for our continued efforts to manage safe and enjoyable use of Southport Harbor and protect the harbor's exceptional natural and historic resources for the benefit of future generations.

We wish to thank everyone who responded in 2021 to our online harbor management questionnaire as we work to update the Harbor Management Plan. A summary of the responses, including all of the personal comments submitted, is posted on the Town website. We appreciate everyone's thoughtful comments and suggestions.

[www.fairfieldct.org /hmc](http://www.fairfieldct.org/hmc)

Acknowledgments

Fairfield Harbor Management Commission

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Jac Herschler (Vice Chair)
Sam Cargill (Secretary)
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Power Point presentation by G. Steadman for the FHMC
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