

Neil Merrilees

215 Mirada Rd
Half Moon Bay, CA 94019
650 728-3813

mermade4@yahoo.com

Harbor Dredging and the loss of Perched Beach coastal access

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Nick Dreher
CCC Coastal Analyst
California Coastal Commission

Mr. Dreher and Members of the California Coastal Commission

The Pillar Point Harbor Dredging project currently under review by Coastal Commission staff proposes that the area around the boat launch ramp be dredged, and the dredging material be placed on the existing “Perched” beach. While the dredging is necessary, the placement of the dredging material on top of a longtime beach access site, blocking hundreds of feet of water access is inappropriate. There are at least two nearby sites; Surfer’s Beach, and the Princeton waterfront that are in dire need of this sand, and where the placement of it will improve beach access, not block it. The dredged sand if placed properly, would help resist coastal erosion, as well as serving to hide existing rip-rap armoring.

Perched beach is in an important public beach access location, with parking, near a Highway 1 safe crossing, and right on the California Coastal Trail. It is the best public water entry point for kayaks, paddleboards, canoes and surfskis. It is used for group events, festivals, etc. It has been used in the past for a Hobie-cat regatta, outrigger canoe races, surfski races, a C-15 (sailing dinghy) regatta, and recently the Half Moon Bay Marathon. It is used by the Bay Area Sea Kayakers (BASK) club. It is used by the NorCal kayak anglers for fishing derbys. The beach access is broad enough that multiple boats can be set up at once making it the perfect spot for group gatherings, races, and events.

The current wide beach insures that individual users are not competing for beach space with the commercial activities run out of the HMB Kayak company. If the dredge fill is allowed to block off most of the beach as proposed, many users will be competing for use of much less space.

What is a better place for the sand?

1. Place the fill (tested clean sand) at Surfer’s Beach

All of the sand that is backing up in the harbor would have naturally flowed to the southern beaches, except for the breakwater that prevents sand movement.

Placing the sand at Surfer's Beach moves the sand in its natural direction. This solution would help alleviate beach erosion from Surfer's Beach to Miramar. This location is equally close to the dredge site, creating no additional transportation cost. Depositing sand at Surfer's Beach would require a permit from the Gulf of the Farallones Marine Sanctuary.

Harbor District staff has indicated reluctance to apply for this permit, due to possible delays. The dredging of this site has taken place once in 1999, and again in 2006, indicating a period of 6-7 years between dredging. Thus the Harbor District has had 7 years to obtain any necessary permits. The Gulf of the Farallones staff has stated publicly (HMB Review article 1/17/13) that they are interested in such a project, but cannot respond officially until an application has been made. No permit has been applied for.

Currently the Army Corps of Engineers is studying the sand movement issue, and whether or not they will share costs with the Harbor District for some sort of permanent solution. The ongoing study does not preclude the Harbor District from applying for a permit to move the sand, or from moving the sand. Placing sand at Surfer's Beach benefits the public.

2. Place the fill on the beaches along the Princeton Waterfront (outer harbor).

A decade ago, a storm event removed sand from the Princeton waterfront beaches, which is now on the harbor bottom. Ever since the sand disappeared property owners have placed unsightly and possibly illegal rip-rap armoring on the shoreline. Replacing the sand on these beaches would eliminate the necessity for this armoring, hide the existing armoring, and provide better beach access in this area.

Harbor District staff has indicated that the County of San Mateo should be the lead agency in this effort, and that we should wait for the County to conclude its Princeton planning activities before moving forward.

- a. Princeton planning policy revisions are ongoing, and the County has not indicated a date for any kind of conclusion or deliverable.
- b. All beaches along the Princeton waterfront are currently below the high tide line. At this point there is a clear delineation. County jurisdiction is above the rip-rap, and Harbor District jurisdiction is below the rip-rap (below high tide). The County of San Mateo has no authority to do work, and no plans to do work in the beach area. The Princeton waterfront below high tide is clearly in the jurisdiction of the Harbor District.

Placing sand on either the Princeton waterfront, or Surfers Beach would improve public beach access, and help resist coastal erosion. This would benefit the public as well as the harbor. Placing sand on Perched Beach does nothing to stop erosion, and eliminates an important stretch of coastal access.

If the fill is placed on Perched Beach, what will it look like?

5200 cubic yards of fill is a large quantity. If the area to be filled is 200' x 100' the pile will be 7' high. The documents shown to the public show the fill being placed behind a semi-exposed concrete "K" rail. If this is temporary storage for the fill, then the proposed end use for the site should be included in the application. The public should know what they are giving up beach access for. If this is permanent site for the fill, then landscape plans should be included, as this site is very visible from Hwy 1.

If the Coastal Commission decides that Perched Beach is the proper place for the fill, then I propose that an alternative harbor beach access site of similar size be required as mitigation.

Respectfully,
Neil Merrilees

