

## **Do we need an expensive Fire and Rescue Boat?**

Brent Street

9/12/07

I have some information regarding the "fire & rescue" boat. I intend to present to the council in some sensible way as soon as we return from our trip. If the subject comes up before that time I would like you to have the info to use as you see fit.

I met with Chief Hanley who was very cordial and generous with his time and covered several aspects of the situation.

### **A. Why did this subject come up? He mentioned three incidences:**

1. The death of a swimmer during the jet ski competition,
2. A call from 4 or 5 people on a boat near buoy 25 (across the river from 1st St.) which was resolved by others with no damage or harm to the boaters.
3. The Valero dock fire

Chief Hanley expects 4 to 6 calls/year based on the above

Comments:

1. The driver of a jet ski ran into a swimmer and killed him. A rescue boat would not have been of any use.
2. The boaters were towed in, I believe, by other boaters.
3. The Valero fire should have been handled by Valero and Benicia forces on land. It burned for several days and they claimed they couldn't get to flames which were under the dock. Chief Hanley thinks a fire boat could have gotten under the dock (?).

None of the incidences giving rise to this project could have been helped by a 34' rescue boat operated in the fashion planned.

### **B. I asked what he felt would be the boat's Area of Responsibility (AOR) and he said they would be restricted to the city limits which extend part way into the river. He also expects to have a joint use agreement with Vallejo and Valero.**

The Chief believes the boat could fight fires on shore since the boat will have shallow draft of about 3 feet.

Comments

1. Our shoreline is mostly mud flat which, at low tide, can go out over 50 yards and at high tide has perhaps 2 feet of water over it 25 yards out

2. I doubt the boat drawing around 3 feet could get close enough to the shore anywhere, anytime to assist in a shore fire.
3. The Valero dock is the only thing they could get close to
4. Land based equipment is far more efficient everywhere along our shoreline
5. Why should the City equip, staff and maintain a boat that can only be useful to Valero?
6. What happens to staffing concerns when the City fire- fighters are busy with a three alarm fire on land?
7. What happens if they are busy with an emergency on the water and they are needed on land?

Chief Hanley says there will be no need for more firemen.

1. If #6 or #7 above happens, there will be a loud cry for more firefighters.

### **C. I asked about expenses such as docking and operation and maintenance.**

The boat will be kept (for free) at the 5th St. pier under the care of the tenant who has people on duty 24/7. Whoever is on duty will be ready, upon notice from someone in the fire dept, to start the engine and have it ready for the firefighters.

The firefighters will:

1. Suit up
2. Drive a car to the 5th St pier
3. Unlock the gate, drive in and park
4. Run to the boat (which may or may not be ready to go).
5. Drive the boat to the scene of the emergency

Comment

1. You can only guess the City's response time with a boat probably designed to do 10 knots.
2. Chief Hanley stated the USCG response time to Benicia is 10 minutes with 45 mph boats
3. The USCG has vast experience at water rescue.
4. If the dock tenant vacates, the City will need to relocate the boat. The free parking and instant readiness (?) cannot be relied upon to last forever.

**D. Chief Hanley said the estimate for conversion of the 34' aluminum boat would be around \$160,000. Maintenance was not discussed. Nor was the liability issue should City forces be judged at fault as a situation becomes critical and the boat owner wants to shift the responsibility.**

**E. I called the Vallejo Coast Guard station and talked to Petty Officer Davis who was very helpful with the following info:**

1. They respond to over 200 calls/year. The great percentage come from Suisun Bay from small fishing boats, a very rough area under certain conditions.
2. A lot of their calls are for boarding of suspected vessels.
3. They don't separate the calls by location.
4. Their AOR is from Antioch to Pt. Richmond and they have three high speed boats.
5. I don't think Hanley knew they had three because he stated that one reason we need a boat is to back them up in case their boat was busy.
6. Petty Officer Davis said that it is highly unlikely that all their boats would be handling emergencies at the same time.
7. Their boats are manned and ready at all times (no coordination needed between civilian and City staff)
8. P.O. Davis said they do not keep records of how many calls were received from within our City limits. I can't find anyone who can remember the USCG rescuing anyone within our borders.

**F. I also called Vessel Assist and spoke to Phil Delano, a part owner.**

1. They are a membership based towing service that does not handle emergencies due to very high liability exposure.
2. His company handles perhaps 10 towing calls/year between the Carquinez bridge and Port Chicago.
3. He said the USCG has a very fast response time and it is their job to deal with emergencies and they serve these waters very effectively.
4. He is unaware of any emergencies in our waters which would point out the need for a City fire and rescue boat.

Comment

Does the City want this large liability exposure?

**G. There are around 2500 boats berthed between Pt. Richmond and Pittsburg. The Benicia Marina has 376 berths, some of which are empty.**

1. Very few of the boats here actually operate, as a destination for their fun on the water, within our City limits.
2. The power boaters go up the Delta or towards San Francisco
3. About 15 of the sailboats enjoy the weekly Thursday night races from April to October. They have other boaters around them all the time.
4. This is not an area with a great amount of boating activity to justify an overkill of rescue vessels.

5. Those who go elsewhere would be outside our jurisdiction, unless we are to patrol the entire river
6. The Thursday races (for six months, two hours/week) seems to be the only time you will see several boats in our waters at the same time.

## **Summary**

1. The project seems to be based on unrelated incidences, limited research and imagined value.
2. It has serious operational flaws.
3. There is no apparent lack of boater rescue teams with the USCG, Vessel Assist and other boaters already on call or in the vicinity.
4. The fire fighting part of the plan is also impractical due to our shore line and seems to favor only Valero (deeper water) at the City's expense of \$160,000.
5. Chief Hanley thinks it is a good deal because the boat will be donated.
6. We get a free boat with questionable value, unverified need and open ended expense.

Thank you for your interest in this. I welcome your comments.

Brent W. Street  
240 East 2nd St.  
Benicia, CA  
707-315-4196