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# Opinion

## Our view

### 'Married' dredging projects may rescue harbor economy

It's fun to dream about all the exciting things to do with New Bedford harbor, and a lot of that has been happening lately. For most of those things to happen, however, some unpleasant grunt work has to be done or we won't even have a harbor worthy of the name.

As those who use it have known for years, the ship channel in and out of New Bedford harbor is nowhere near its allowable depth. While the charts might suggest that it is 30 feet deep at mean low water, the reality of it is that we have just 25 feet in places, or even less.

What this means is that as the years progress and the silt builds up on the bottom, it slowly closes the door on ever-smaller vessels. Shipping companies that want to come into New Bedford harbor have to offload some of their cargo elsewhere to reduce the draft of the ship. Or they send a smaller ship.

Or, worst of all, they send the ship somewhere else, which is exactly what has happened twice in recent months.

Capt. Michael H.M. Taylor, Maritime Terminal's vice president, told a roundtable discussion group at The Standard-Times last week that two ships this year bypassed New Bedford in favor of Philadelphia because they couldn't get in here. The loss of that commerce cost the city \$300,000 in trade, he estimates.

To get the channel back to its proper depth, something that hasn't happened since he 1950s, will require the dredging of anywhere from 500,000 to one million cubic yards of material. That's above and beyond the 500,000 yards being dredged in the upper harbor in the Superfund PCB cleanup.

While the material from the lower harbor isn't nearly as polluted as the Superfund gunk, it's not peppermint candy, either. This is, after all, a busy commercial harbor, and what's on the bottom is never going to be pristine and able to be dumped almost anywhere.

That means we have to identify some other place to dispose of the dredged spoils. In our case, according to those at the roundtable discussion, it will almost certainly mean waterfront lagoons known as containment disposal facilities. There, as in the Superfund cleanup, the material is contained and capped, probably for the long term, possibly for less if a technology comes along.

Those in the discussion, those propose a novel solution, one that hasn't been tried elsewhere: Marry the navigational dredging project with the Superfund dredging.

This accomplishes several things, but mainly it allows the projects to piggyback on each other in the permitting process, which is no small matter. These things take years — at least five in the best estimates of the various engineering and environmental experts we assembled.

Five years is a long time when our harbor commerce is already being slowly strangled by the lack of dredging. If we don't start now, five will turn to 10 and our losses will be compounded. Those who are advancing the marriage of these projects have their work cut out for them; this has never been done before.

But nobody ever stopped the EPA from incinerating PCBs, either. Let's get to work and make this happen, too. The entire region will be a winner in the end.

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