

Dredging background information 1/11/20

Over the years the BOS has had meeting after meeting discussing and advocating for the dredging project to go forward. CTC has been an active partner. We have known that the time would come when trips would be cancelled and we have advocated to no avail. Neither the Town nor CTC has had any control over the dredging timetable. All we could do is advocate. Representatives from the Army Corps have held numerous meetings on Chebeague and dredging has been a frequent topic at the BOS meetings as well as at the CTC meetings during the past decade. During the last 9 months it has been a hot topic. Those who have tuned into Zoom to participate in our meetings can attest to that fact.

Let's face it. The area around the Stone Wharf is shallow and full of eel grass. When the wharf was built islanders had their own dredge. It was built for a private company that could plan around the tides. It was not built as a ferry landing. Over the years the channel filled to the extent that the Nellie G. crew would have to row people to the wharf. At other times there were floats extending way beyond the wharf so that the boats could off load at low tide. In 1962 the channel was dredged and it has been done periodically ever since. Trips were cancelled before past dredging was done. This is not new.

No one ignored the fact that dredging needed to happen on a regular basis if CTC is to be able to work with the low tides. We started planning for dredging shortly after we became a Town. We started saving money. We knew the dredging needed to be done every 10+ years, which is why we reached out to the Army Corps a few years before it needed to be done. They control and approve the projects; require testing etc. A town can't just hire a dredge and go at it. That was 2009. We hoped to dredge by 2012 +/- to keep to our schedule.

The Army Corps reps came to Chebeague and suggested we apply to qualify for a Federal program that would ultimately take over the cost and responsibility of dredging after the initial dredging. At that point dredging was estimated to be over \$1million. This program sounded really good. They told us that we would have to share in the cost of the testing and pay 20% of the total cost. At that point we estimated around 1 million and that would mean we needed \$100,000. Every year the Army Corp presented a new hurdle: testing, economic study, eel grass study (this area is one of the densest eel grass fields around the island so the cost of mitigating the eel grass damage was added to the total cost; it will cost about \$350,000 to deal with the eel grass).

Because of environmental concerns the Federal Government requires dredging projects to conduct expensive testing. They have to make sure that the dumping grounds will not be contaminated. All of this takes time and money. When we were part of Cumberland, they had to conduct even more tests and fortunately that provided a good baseline re: environmental concerns but we still had to do more testing. We had to pay a significant % of that cost. And it took time.

All the time we kept telling the Army Corps that we were approaching a crisis. We wrote to our Senators and Congressional Reps. They advocated and got nowhere. We were in the same barrel as harbors all over the country.

We didn't give up. We couldn't afford to do this on our own. Last winter we had a glimmer of hope, and then we went into another period of silence. We heard that our contact had been sick and was out for a few months. We didn't give up. We continued to reach out to our Federal reps and kept writing to the Army Corps. All the while CTC was with us expressing their concerns – again these were public meetings. Then this fall we actually received a draft of a study. We saw hope but we also saw sticker shock. The cost had doubled due in part escalating costs and the eel grass issue. The first payment of 10% is due asap if we dredge in 2020, we have to pay another 10 % at the end of the project. The estimate for the total project excluding the study/testing (we already spent about \$80,000 a few years ago) is nearly 2 million. Then we found out that the final cost could be 25% more than the estimate because of a Government rule. We won't know the final cost for the project will be until it goes out for bid, but we estimate 2-2.25 million. Now we have gone from our projected share of \$100,000 that we had saved, to our current projected share of \$400,000-\$500,000.

But the good news in the fall was that we got a tentative dredging timeline of late 2021- early 2022. We were thrilled. We really thought it was going to happen, and then 6 weeks went by and we didn't hear from them again and didn't see the final draft of our report. Apparently, the government cut back the staff. And then we got a letter that backtracked and said there were a lot of other projects; and things looked very gloomy (my word) once again. I wrote back and asked what had happened. He told me that the final report was completed but that it only dealt with economic impact. I emphasized the community impact of the ferry cancellations once again, and it was then that he sent me the name and address and suggested that we tell the New England office how the cancelled trips were negatively impacting the community including kids being late for school or leaving early – same for commuters- Drs appointments, Rescues etc. This letter writing campaign was not our idea, but we took our contact's advice. The Town sent a letter and said it would be good to hear from residents.

Since that time, we have found out that Maine won't approve the permit unless we own the rights in the flats near the wharf so we need to acquire them from the Golf Course. We have been in communication with the GCGC. One more hurdle.

The Selectmen, Harbormasters, Town Administrators and CTC have worked really hard on this during all of these years. We are at the mercy of the Federal government. We got into this program because we only have to pay a % of the cost on this dredging, and then nothing after this. As you can see dredging is very expensive. If we did this ourselves it would be \$2,000,000+ of taxpayer money every 10 years. That would certainly negatively impact the budget and limit capital projects and donations to non-profits etc. The last letter we received hinted that going forward we might not be at the top of the list when we think we need the next dredging. This was not mentioned when we went down this road. He said if there is a local contribution you might move up - that too was new news but is 10 years plus out.

All of our meetings are open to the public. This saga has played out in public. We have no control over the Federal government and will deal with this dredging issue as long as the Stone Wharf is the passenger landing. All of our meetings have been on Zoom since last March, and the meetings are recorded and can be found on the Town WEB site. The Town and CTC have done the best they could given the challenges that I have described.

If we don't approve the \$150,000 warrant article, we will have no hope of dredging in the coming year, and we have no guarantee that even if we have the money that the Army Corps will put us on this list, but if we don't continue to try and let them know how we are being negatively impacted there is no hope and more trips will be cancelled as the silt fills in the channel even more. So that is the long answer to your questions.

Hope this helps. For more information tune in Wed Jan 13 at 6 on the Town Zoom.