HOMER HARBOR EXPANSION STUDY FAQ

Feasibility Study/General Investigation

Project FAQ March 2025

1. What is the purpose of the feasibility study?

The study, led by the U.S. Army Corps of Engineers (USACE) in cooperation with the City of Homer (City), has been initiated to address Homer Harbor's capacity challenges and identify solutions that accommodate both existing and future demand for moorage. It will also address the navigational hazard the small boat harbor entrance represents for large vessels. The study is meant to:

- Identify means to accommodate large marine vessels presently tied three abreast on the transient float in the small boat harbor, as well as other large vessels that wish to homeport at the Harbor but are currently turned away because there is no room.
- Address the need to moor the U.S. Coast Guard Cutter Aspen and potentially provide short-term moorage for their new fast cutter fleet for layover, provisioning, and repair work.
- Assess a range of potential impacts that the proposed alternatives design solutions would have on the environment.
- Simultaneously identify and evaluate the local or non-federal support and infrastructure needed to move the project forward should an expansion be recommended by the study. Assessments will also be made regarding potential impacts on supporting infrastructure and the community.
- Consider community input throughout the study, as your feedback will be crucial. Please visit the website to learn about upcoming public engagement opportunities.

2. Won't the harbor expansion and potential growth in large boat traffic increase the likelihood of environmental problems?

A robust environmental review process mandated by the National Environmental Policy Act of 1969 (NEPA) is required prior to the start of any construction. A NEPA document (e.g., environmental assessment, or environmental impact statement) will be developed to provide an analysis of the proposed alternatives designs and any associated environmental impacts.

3. Why does Homer Harbor need more space?

For years, demand for moorage in Homer's Small Boat Harbor has far exceeded the harbor's capacity. An expansion would support a robust future for Homer's maritime community, including navigational safety and regional connectivity.

- Harbor staff have creatively utilized the current harbor float system to meet demand. They accommodate 40 large vessels (86 to 180 feet) by rafting them three deep to transient floats. Staff members can fit 1,400 small vessels into about 900 stalls and 5,000 linear feet of transient side-tie moorage; however, there is still a significant waitlist for small vessel space.
- While staff have found ways to creatively utilize the existing port and harbor to its fullest extent, doing so comes with costs that include accelerated depreciation of the harbor's float systems, vessel damages and delays, and navigational hazards in the harbor's narrowed travel lanes.
- We are at risk of losing vessels in our harbor, which could have negative economic consequences including job loss and reduced revenues.

- Expanding the harbor will support the region's strong and diverse economy by meeting today's needs, promoting job opportunities in the marine trades and support sectors, and positioning Homer Harbor to flexibly meet future needs.

4. What issues will the Homer Harbor Expansion (HHE) study address?

The HHE study and concurrent efforts will assess several key aspects, including:

- Alternative approaches and designs to solve identified challenges, including the impacts of a no-build option:

The design alternatives will address increased demand for harbor space, navigational safety risks in the harbor's narrow travel lanes and at the mouth of the harbor, and improved ability to serve the diversity that commercial fishing, barge operations, research vessels, charter services, and recreational boat owners bring to Homer's economy.

- What will be evaluated in each alternative design approach:
  - » Impacts that changes to the harbor would have on the local community and infrastructure such as roads, traffic, and the electrical grid
- Economic opportunities and risks associated with changes to the harbor design
- Potential costs associated with changes to the harbor design
- Potential ecological impacts that the harbor's proposed design would have on Kachemak Bay and surrounding areas, and the mitigation measures that might be required to address them
- Potential impacts the recommended changes to the harbor design would have on other uses of the Homer Spit such as the tourism and fishing industries
- Whether the benefits of the project merit federal investment in construction

5. If the harbor expansion happens, does this mean Homer will host large cruise ships and freighters?

No. This study will look at how the harbor could accommodate more and larger boats. However, local and regional market conditions, combined with the state of other infrastructure around the harbor such as electrical transmission lines and roads, indicate that Homer is not designed to accommodate huge ships such as those serving the ports of Vancouver, BC, or Tacoma, WA. There are foundational market, geographical, and community factors that will likely continue to limit the size of vessels serving Homer.

6. Who is paying for the HHE study?

There is a cost-sharing agreement between the City of Homer and USACE. Each entity is expected to pay 50 percent of the roughly $4.2 million total cost. Half of the City's contribution has been funded by the State of Alaska.

7. Have all the necessary funds for the harbor expansion study been allocated?

The City has secured its share of the funds. USACE funding is allocated on an annual basis, with the intent that appropriate funding be allocated during each budget cycle to facilitate the study activities for that fiscal year. The USACE has allocated funding to support the study through 2025, and we are confident that they will allocate the funding needed for the remainder of this important study.

8. How long will the study take? I thought it was supposed to last 3 years.

Feasibility studies of this kind typically take about 3 years to complete however the pace of the Homer Harbor Expansion (HHE) study was slowed temporarily due to a federal funding gap for Fiscal Year (FY) 2024. All USACE new start general investigation studies (GIs) funded through a FY 2023 congressionally designated appropriation, including the Homer Harbor Expansion Study, experienced similar funding gaps. The procedure for securing continuation funding for this Study in the FY24 federal budget (either through a second federal appropriation or through inclusion in the USACE workplan) was unclear, and no funding for FY24 was initially included. This has been remedied, and the Homer Harbor Expansion study has been fully funded for 2024 and 2025. Due to the slowed pace of the study while awaiting resolution of the funding uncertainty, we now expect the HHE study will take a totally of about 5 years, likely concluding in 2027.

9. When will the study findings be made public and how can I stay informed?

The study will take approximately 5 years to complete, with a final USACE report and recommendation anticipated sometime in 2027. There will be several opportunities over the course of the study for the community to review progress and provide input. Your feedback is important to ensuring the study's outcome is aligned with the community's needs. Stay involved by joining our mailing list to hear about the latest updates and share your input!

10. The harbor is overcrowded now and unable to accommodate the existing demand; will the study help improve this situation in the short term?

The harbor expansion study is an important first step to determine how the overcrowding issue could be addressed, along with identifying changes that could allow the harbor to accommodate future demand. The study alone will not solve the current problem of the harbor's overcrowding; addressing this challenge will take several years.

11. Besides USACE and the City of Homer, what other entities are involved in this study?

Residents, local elected officials, City staff, and business leaders have been and will continue to be involved through education and engagement opportunities. Additionally, the State of Alaska is supporting the study through a funding match to the City.

12. If the study concludes that an expansion of the harbor would be beneficial, when would construction start, and how long would it last?

At this point, it is too soon to speculate on possible construction schedules, costs, or harbor design options. Completing the current feasibility study is an important step, but the study alone will not result in any short-term harbor construction, nor does it indicate certainty that a harbor expansion will be pursued. The study will evaluate the opportunity, and the results will guide next steps.

13. Why were Alternatives with floating breakwaters not carried forward?

Alternatives with exclusively floating breakwaters were not carried forward due to the typical wave conditions/characteristics of Kachemak Bay. A floating breakwater would need to be excessively large to create a tranquil harbor. The 40-mile-long bay is problematic for constructability and cost, as well as the potential environmental footprint. Alternatives carried forward may include floating breakwater as part of the harbor structure (less exposed areas). The type of structure(s) such as floating breakwater, rock breakwater, sheet pile wall, etc. are used to create the various alternatives harbor configuration has not been determined at this time.

14. Has the project development team already selected a preferred design or construction materials to be used for the new harbor?

No, preferred design or materials have not been selected for the harbor expansion. The Homer Harbor Expansion Study is currently focused on assessing the feasibility of building a new harbor basin for large vessels and addressing the environmental considerations of building that basin. From evaluation and screening of design alternatives identified at the public design charette in May 2023, the project development team has been conducting fieldwork, preparing key models to help assess the impacts of alternatives, and advancing alternative design based on community impact and the results of other data collected to date. Alternatives are still in a conceptual design stage, and the team has not yet advanced to the point of recommending construction materials.

15. Did USACE, the City of Homer, and HDR (the project delivery team) consider an alternative that limits expansion of the harbor to the current surface footprint (not expanding outside the Homer Spit) to reduce impacts on the environment?

Yes, this was considered and evaluated as both a standalone alternative (Alternative 4) and a measure that could be implemented with other alternatives.

As a standalone alternative, excavation to increase available fleet space within the current harbor's footprint would not provide enough acreage to meet the study's needs or objectives, and the currently

installed infrastructure would need to be removed and replaced at an excessive cost to the City. Additionally, the existing harbor does not address the needs of larger vessels, including deeper draft and improved safety for ingress and egress. Creating a deeper draft within the current footprint also raises significant concerns regarding the stability of existing breakwaters.

An alternative similar to this was assessed in a previous study, but it did not provide the overall benefits required to advance the project. Furthermore, uplands property is a valuable economic driver for the City and the sustainability of the community's maritime economy. Uplands are used for harbor patron parking, shipping and receiving, lease revenue, and industry support for the fleet. An alternative that requires excavation and removal of current uplands would have adverse economic consequences while not fully addressing fleet needs.

To minimize the footprint of a new harbor basin, an expansion of the current harbor basin was also considered as a measure in combination with other alternatives. This would pose the same issues as a standalone alternative, while not significantly reducing the size of the new harbor basin's footprint and the associated potential impacts on the environment.

16. Why did the project cost increase?

The initial Federal Cost Share Agreement for the General Investigation (GI) study was for $3 million. Upon reaching the Alternatives and Measures Milestone and reviewing the existing geotechnical data for the area, the USACE project development team reconsidered the tasks to be completed during the study and added geophysical analysis and ship simulation to the scope of work to better inform choices about the materials, design, and locations of alternatives. These new elements add about $1.2 million to the study's original cost of $3 million.

- Geotechnical analysis is a necessary component of all USACE harbor designs and was added to the feasibility study stage so that the study delivery team would have sufficient data to:
  - » Inform choices about the materials, design, and location within the study area of the preferred alternative; and
  - » Produce a more accurate design and more reliable cost estimate on which to base decisions regarding advancement of the Homer Harbor Expansion.
- Based on the USACE Alaska District's experience with the Valdez and Kake Harbors, design and cost estimates completed during the GI phase without the benefit of geophysical data have yielded unfavorable results. Lack of geotechnical data could result in a 26 percent or greater increase in total breakwater material.