Homer, Alaska
HOMER NEWS

NEWS

Homer Harbor expansion project shares updates on $4.2 million feasibility study

The purpose of the meeting was to share updates on the feasibility study and garner public comments.

By Chloe Pleznac Homer News • March 20, 2025 2:30 am

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City of Homer Special Projects and Communications Coordinator Jenny Carroll points to a posterboard of one of the proposed harbor alternatives while talking with community members during the Homer Harbor Expansion public meeting on Saturday, March 15, 2025 at Kachemak Bay Campus. (Chloe Pleznac/Homer News)

The Homer Harbor Expansion project held a public meeting on Saturday, March 15, at Kachemak Bay Campus. Representatives from the City of Homer, the U.S. Army Corps of Engineers, and HDR Alaska were all in attendance.

The purpose of the public meeting was to share potential future harbor layout designs with the community and garner feedback and ideas for improvements.

The Homer Port and Harbor was built in 1964. The harbor expansion project argues that the demand for moorage far exceeds the capabilities of the current harbor space, with more than 400 vessels on a waitlist and a 42% growth of the local fishing fleet noted between 2008 and 2018, according to information provided at the meeting.

A feasibility study currently underway seeks to identify solutions to this issue that not only increase the harbor's future capacity but also have a low impact on the Spit's overall geography. Due to the National Environmental Policy Act of 1969, a "robust environmental review process" is mandated before any construction can begin. During the feasibility study, either an environmental assessment or environmental impact statement will be completed to help provide environmental context for the proposed alternative designs and guide decision-making.

Ronald McPherson of HDR Alaska outlined the project's scope, including the role of HDR in providing engineering and strategic communications support. He pointed out that the importance of this project is huge, especially when considering the ways Homer Harbor connects rural communities to necessary infrastructure.

"This potential harbor expansion is not about just the community itself," he said, on Saturday. "The port harbor actually works as a hub and spoke port harbor for over 130 rural communities that are not on the road system. This is a vital piece of infrastructure for well beyond just the community."

The collection of geophysical and geotechnical data helps support planners identify potential problems for each alternative option, helping guide the final decision-making process. McPherson also emphasized that geotechnical data collection is key to understanding how realistic some of these alternatives are.

"We go down to soil borings and figure out exactly what the sediment grain size happens to be, and learn a lot more about the overall geovisible, or geotechnical conditions within the soil," said McPherson, referring to the next step in the data collection process. "Obviously, understanding the depth of the water is huge, but understanding what sediment is below the water is really critical from a design standpoint, for putting any one of these big structures out there. We really want to understand what those costs are, because that obviously plays into the economics and figuring out whether this is going to be a viable product or not."

Using imagery collected in 2024, Lauren Campbell of the Corps of Engineers said the feasibility study has also worked with a research development center in Mississippi to create a vessel simulation that will allow Homer mariners to test the usability of the proposed harbor layouts.

"During the week or two that we're down there, the feedback that we get from our pilots regarding things like the orientation or the entrance channel or the maneuverability in the harbor, their feedback will be implemented while we're there and the design will be retested," Campbell said Saturday.

The presentation also featured examples of wave modeling that have been performed. Wave modeling helps to determine wave conditions, both regionally and locally, as well as storm surge and tidal currents, and can be used to better understand how different alternative designs could handle waves without adversely impacting the existing harbor.

Alternative 1A and Alternative 1B both focus on meeting the immediate needs of large vessels moorage.

Alternative 2 addresses the current needs of the harbor and some of the waitlist, with the ability to accommodate more than 300 vessels.

Alternative 3 aims to accommodate future growth by increasing the number of slips and other facilities substantially. Focused on accommodating likely growth over the next 50 years, this option would see a total capacity of more than 600 vessels in the new harbor location.

As community members lingered near poster boards of potential future harbor layouts, one boat owner and current slip holder remarked about the lack of parking already evident on the Spit.

“That’s the one thing nobody is talking about, you know? Because there’s no room,” he said. “You can add space on the water but you can’t add land.”

The study is funded through a cost-sharing agreement between the City of Homer and the Corps of Engineers, with each entity expected to pay 50% of the “roughly $4.2 million total cost.” The State of Alaska has funded half of the City of Homer’s share.

The initial Federal Cost Share Agreement for the study was $3 million. According to information provided by the project on Saturday, “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.”

The additions to the study added about $1.2 million to the original $3 million cost, although the project cites the fact that lack of geotechnical data has yielded unfavorable results in prior design and cost estimates completed for both Valdez and Kake harbors, and “could result in a 26 percent or greater increase in total breakwater material.”

The 30-day public comment period for the Homer Harbor Expansion draft report will begin with the public release of the feasibility study’s draft report on Sept. 1 and will close on Sept. 30. McPherson emphasized that while the city has been great about running public meetings throughout the feasibility study process, the official public comment period is the last chance community members have to provide feedback on the feasibility study.

“The fact that we’ve had three public meetings with the community is 100% driven by the city and their dedication to having community outreach,” said McPherson. “This is not part of the USACE process, this is very much driven by the city.”

More information on the Homer Harbor Expansion, including a full timeline breakdown and opportunities to engage in the future, can be found online at homerharborexpansion.com/get-involved.

Reach reporter Chloe Pleznac at chloe.pleznac@homernews.com.

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< Previous
Karen Mary Maloney