



Homer Port Director Bryan Hawkins. (Photo provided)

Opinion: The importance of the Homer Harbor expansion

Alaska's marine trades and service businesses must be on a competitive playing field with other ports and harbors.

By Bryan Hawkins

Friday, March 14, 2025 12:30pm | **OPINION** **HOMER** **OPINION** **POINT OF VIEW**

Homer Harbor supports jobs tied to more than 1,000 commercial fishing permit holders, 600 commercial fishing vessels, and 90 freight shipping vessels, not to mention thousands of service and indirect jobs created by commercial fishing, freight movement and tourism. A well-functioning harbor is foundational to local businesses, family incomes and Homer's economic vitality.

A study from the Alaska Department of Commerce, Community, and Economic Development reiterated the need for investment in maritime infrastructure, stating that to take advantage of new opportunities, Alaska's marine trades and service businesses must be on a competitive playing field with other ports and harbors. To do so, we need to invest in our harbor infrastructure.

As someone who works at Homer Harbor daily, I see firsthand how it serves as a regional economic hub, with spokes reaching out to hundreds of coastal Alaska communities. Initially constructed in 1964, a lot has changed for the maritime industry, including technology, safety, environmental compliance, and markets. While vessels have evolved over the past 60 years, our harbors in Alaska have not. It's like trying to park a new, heavy-duty pickup in a garage designed for a Model T. We have the opportunity to build a harbor that will meet the needs of Alaska's current and future fleets.

Homer Chamber of Commerce Executive Director Brad Anderson concurs that much of Homer's economy is driven by the marine industry and that expanding the harbor would directly impact many businesses by expanding the type of services offered to residents and visitors. "The commercial fishing industry has a long history in Homer and this (expansion) would go a long way in keeping that a viable industry for Homer."

Rory Stark of Homer Marine Transport agrees. "Many (fishing businesses) are based in Homer," says Stark, "because the marine services are extensive and (the harbor) provides a lot of needs, including the infrastructure for commercial fleets as well as tourists."

There are challenges, though. Stark thinks the Homer Harbor needs a better commercial ramp, boat launch, and better facilities to accommodate the significant number of operators currently using the harbor. "It would be

awesome if there was a pier to tie onto, and the ability to pull on the beach to keep boats in gear,” adds Stark.

Even small improvements can make a big difference in how the harbor operates, and we’re working to identify those improvements, large and small.

The Homer Harbor Expansion General Investigation is studying the potential for a new harbor basin for larger vessels next to the existing small boat harbor. The team is considering a lot of issues, including vessel traffic, environmental impacts, safety, economics and design. The Study is advancing nicely, and there’s still plenty of opportunity for you to share your ideas! Your input now can help shape our harbor’s future role in a successful, sustainable, Alaska-based maritime industry.

Attend our public meeting on March 15 to hear study updates and visit www.homerharborexpan.com.

Let’s shape the future we want today.

Bryan Hawkins, port director, began his Alaska maritime career in 1978. With a Merchant Mariner license, he worked at sea as a commercial fisherman and a captain for hire for more than 22 years. In 1999, he took a position at the Homer Port and Harbor as a harbor officer. He was promoted to deputy harbormaster in 2004, then to port director in 2008. Bryan has lived in the Homer area since 1979 with his wife, Jennifer, and their three sons, Jake, Van and Ben.



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