Del Norte Triplicate

NEWS

Big Win for Harbor…Ice Plant Re-Opens

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The Harbor District August 27 meeting was a mix of celebration and sobering reality. After a year of uncertainty, the Harbor's ice plant has come back to life, with Ocean Gold Seafoods stepping in to restart operations.

Instead of relying on a taxpayer bailout, Harbor staff pursued a market-based solution. Harbormaster Mike Rademaker negotiated an agreement requiring the reopening of the ice plant as a condition of awarding a hoist lease, creating a framework to restore the service without taxpayer expense.

Commercial fisherman have long struggled with the headache and expense of trucking ice from other ports. The reopening is a game changer. The plant quickly sold 50 tons in a matter of a few days. Rademaker reports the price remained steady at $140 per ton, the same rate charged when the plan closed last year.

Commissioner praised the outcome. "This is just great news," said Harbor Chairman Gerhard Weber. Commissioners John Evans and Rick Shepherd concurred.

Black cod and shrimp boats were already taking advantage of the supply.

The expectation is the ice plant will provide a major boost to fishing operations and reduce barriers for smaller vessels that rely on affordable ice.

Rademaker gleamed when he remarked the accomplishment as “a major win” heading into the crab season.

Tough news also was disclosed following last month’s tsunami.

A survey by the Army Corps of Engineers revealed about 20,000 cubic yards of silt deposited in the federal channel, may result in costs estimated about $3 million. The sobering cost triples the $1million cost originally projected. Those expenses will be born by Washington, DC but does not bode well for debris spread across the non-federal waters.

Last week, H Dock was successfully refloated. Special appreciation is recognized for Commissioner Shepherd for the use of his vessel in re-attaching H Dock.

Lots of new ideas were shared at last month’s meeting.

• Introduction of a simple, low cost system to assist fishermen market their catches to the public.

• On the financial side, staff reported the harbor is on track for a balanced budget.

• Insurance premiums remain vexingly high.

• Tsunami-related damages remain largely unknown until divers inspect all docks.

“It’s going to be up and down for while but I’m confident if Commissioners work together, this community asset will not just survive but flourish,” said the harbormaster.