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NEWS

Harbor Structural Assessment Limited by Stored Materials and Obstructions

By Linda Sutter October 1, 2026

A $112,612 structural assessment of the Crescent City Harbor is limited by stored materials and obstructions. Photo by Nick Maietta

A Sept. 2 invoice from engineering firm GHD identifies the project as “CCHD Structural Engineering Inspection,” Project No. 12683907, with a total fee of $112,612. Photo courtesy of Nick Maietta

The public-accountability question is whether the Harbor District adequately prepared its facilities so that engineers could obtain the greatest value from an assessment carrying a total project fee of $112,612. Photo courtesy of Nick Maietta

Those photographs show significant quantities of bags, boxes, furniture, trash, and other stored property occupying areas throughout portions of the building. Photo courtesy of Linda Sutter

CRESCENT CITY, CA (MPG) - The Crescent City Harbor District authorized a $112,612 structural engineering inspection project, but the engineering firm's own report acknowledges that stored materials and other obstructions prevented engineers from directly observing some portions of the structures they were hired to assess.

A Sept. 2, invoice from engineering firm GHD identifies the project as “CCHD Structural Engineering Inspection,” Project No. 12683907, with a total fee of $112,612. As of the invoice date, GHD had billed the Harbor District $61,035.22, leaving $51,576.78 remaining. The invoice breaks the project into four components: $ 9,766 for meetings and project management; $14,725 for on-site structural investigation; $60,432 for the structural investigation report; and $27,689 for a marina utility damage assessment.

That expenditure raises questions when compared with GHD's August 21 preliminary structural assessment. GHD engineers conducted their site walkthrough on May 19. According to the report, the inspection was a screening-level visual assessment of structural components that were readily accessible. GHD specifically disclosed that elements concealed by finishes, buried conditions, equipment, stored materials or other obstructions could not be directly observed. The condition of the Harbor District's Abalone Building is particularly noteworthy.

I personally photographed the interior of that facility on May 14 — just five days before GHD's inspection. Those photographs show significant quantities of bags, boxes, furniture, trash, and other stored property occupying areas throughout portions of the building. That raises a basic question for the Harbor District: Why wasn't the facility cleared sufficiently before engineers arrived to conduct an assessment costing taxpayers and the District up to $112,612?

The question becomes more significant because the purpose of GHD's work was not merely to photograph the buildings. The engineering firm said its assessment was intended to identify structural deficiencies and lifecycle risks and assist the District in prioritizing repairs, retrofits, additional investigation, planning and budgeting.

The Abalone Building also presented issues beyond ordinary maintenance. GHD's report discusses living spaces that had been constructed inside the building and states that applicable land-use provisions did not appear to clearly identify a caretaker's unit as an allowed use unless it qualified as Coast Guard quarters. GHD said that if the Harbor District did not pursue additional review, the living spaces should be considered for removal or conversion to commercial or storage-related uses. If the District wished to maintain the living areas, GHD recommended further land-use, zoning, building-code and residential requirements be evaluated.

The issue is therefore not whether GHD performed an assessment. It did. The public-accountability question is whether the Harbor District adequately prepared its facilities so that engineers could obtain the greatest value from an assessment carrying a total project fee of $112,612.

Before the remaining $51,576.78 is billed, the Harbor District should be able to explain whether obstructed portions of the Abalone Building will require another inspection, whether follow-up inspections are included

within the existing contract, and who was responsible for ensuring the buildings were cleaned and cleared before GHD arrived.

When public money pays for professional engineering work, the public has a legitimate interest in knowing whether the engineers were given reasonable access to the very structures they were hired to examine.

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