

New faces and changes needed on the Harbor Commission

October 9, 2022



Voter ballots are enroute to your mailbox as you read this column. Before you hastily complete and send back your ballot, please take a moment and review the not-so-obscure Harbor Commission election. The mix of candidates running is very interesting. I do recommend changes be considered on this troubled agency.

Two openings with two incumbents and three challengers are pursuing your vote. Seeking re-election is current Harbor president Rick Shepherd and appointed Commissioner Gerhard Weber, who faces voter review for the first time.

The challengers are Kevin Hendrick, Annie Nehmer and Linda Sutter. Before you fill in the bubble, I encourage you to become acquainted with each candidate.

One ought to be very concerned with dubious operations and fiscal irresponsibility by the Harbor Commission. Eye on Del Norte has brought to your attention unethical practices, questionable financial oversight, poor or no tenant maintenance and disdain for the public.

The challengers:

Kevin Hendrick is running for the Harbor Commission. When asked why the chairman of the local Del Norte Democrat Party is campaigning for the Harbor board, Hendrick referred me to his candidate statement. Hendrick lists his title as project manager retired. The declaration cites Hendrick's experience as the director of the Del Norte Solid Waste Management Authority. The public should be advised that \$25,000 of DNSWMA funds went missing in 2013 under Kevin Hendrick's watch. Hendrick took full responsibility for the missing funds. The Joint Powers City-County Authority Waste Management fired Hendrick for the malfeasance. Hendrick espoused, "my project experience will help the Harbor navigate the perilous waters ahead."

Ambiguous, self-serving and very questionable.

Annie Nehmer is an Army veteran and registered nurse. Nehmer co-owns a commercial fishing business with her husband. Nehmer has closely observed Harbor operations since May of 2021. Nehmer declares herself the candidate of WHY. She asks, "Why has the electrical dysfunction continued rampant in the Harbor, post tsunami? Why have potholes not been filled prior to crab trailers being towed into the harbor? Why has there been no inner harbor dredging allowing larger vessels to ingress?" Nehmer continues, "I'm running so these why questions can be acted upon. If elected, I hope to make changes instead of talking about them. I will focus on fishing not tourism. Let's support our fishermen and harbor tenants."

Praiseworthy and commendable.

Linda Sutter has also tossed her hat into the Harbor election. Sutter lists her candidate title as investigative reporter. Sutter is a retired corrections officer with a solid record in community involvement and advocacy. Sutter states she's running because her (perceived) opinion is "...commissioners fail to do their due diligence on fiscal oversight and Harbor operations. " Sutter alleges, "commissioners Shepherd and Weber have no functional understanding of the Tri-Agency," the City-County-Harbor joint powers authority which finds itself in default on a \$277,000 loan in favor of the Department of Agriculture. Sutter acknowledges no surveillance cameras on site to observe on-going theft. She pledges to make changes when elected and committed to bringing back integrity and respect to the Harbor.

Courageous and principled.

The incumbents:

Harbor commissioner and current president, Rick Shepherd declares Harbor dredging to be his top priority. Shepherd shares his frustration in securing permits for dredging but intends to... "see it through." If he's re-elected, Shepherd hopes to maintain the Harbor as a commercial fishing haul-out facility and pledges support for the industry which produces one-half of all Dungeness crab in California. Shepherd also walks a very thin tight rope / balancing act between his stated priority of maintaining commercial fishing and his support for expanding tourist-related projects. Some of Shepherd's votes don't match up with his words. During my conversations with Commissioner Shepherd, he's expressed his concern the Crescent City Harbor is a

“shallow water harbor” implying larger vessel are ill-suited for Harbor ingress or egress. When asked to clarify his statement, Shepherd did not address my direct query. Since major tenant Fashion Blacksmith depends on accessing satisfactory ingress to the inner harbor, one can see Shepherd stated priority to be something less than sincere. During his current four year term, Shepherd and the Commission has been unsuccessful on inner Harbor dredging.

Disappointing and curious.

Appointed commissioner Gerhard Weber, a retired educator, failed to submit in writing (after three written requests) his reasons for running and his vision for the Crescent City Harbor. Weber produced no candidate statement on record in the Election Clerk’s office. His voting record since his appointment has been inconsequential. Weber gathered the local Republican Party endorsement but I’m uncertain this unwarranted approval has any credibility or relevance to Harbor operations. It’s curious how Weber could win the Del Norte Republican Party endorsement with no significant record on his positions. Frankly, it’s embarrassing and reeks of cronyism. Commissioner Weber has and continues to vote yes in joining the 5-0 unanimous Harbor commission. It appears Weber is merely a placeholder on the commission.

Unremarkable and devoid of vision.

The differences between the candidates are clearly polar opposite. Some candidates are committed to focusing funding on keeping the Harbor as a working harbor; other candidates hope to insert tourism into Harbor operations. One incumbent has no record on Harbor positions.

Next week, let’s bring clarity to Measures T and U.

Voting continues through November 8.

Roger Gitlin is a retired Del Norte Supervisor and resident of Crescent City.