

MAYOR
DAVID R. MARTIN



CITY OF STAMFORD, CONNECTICUT
HARBOR MANAGEMENT COMMISSION

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March 10, 2016

Mayor David R. Martin
Stamford Government Center
888 Washington Boulevard
Stamford, Connecticut 06901

Subject: Harbor Management Commission Budget

Dear Mayor Martin:

On behalf of the Harbor Management Commission, I wish to express our shock and dismay upon learning, late last week, of your decision to de-fund the Commission's operating budget (recently a modest nineteen thousand dollars (\$19,000.00) per year) for the upcoming fiscal year. We only learned of your decision, made without any consultation with us, through unofficial channels. This matter was discussed during the March 8, 2016 joint meeting of the Commission's Application Review and Mooring/Long Range Planning committees. Following significant discussion, the committees approved a motion to immediately communicate our concerns to you in the hope that the negative, and perhaps unintended, consequences of this apparently precipitous action may be averted or otherwise mitigated.

As you know, Stamford's coastal area is a jewel of Long Island Sound. Our main harbor has long been a center of recreational boating and the most active port in the western part of the Sound. We are one of Connecticut's oldest and most historic coastal communities; our maritime history is unsurpassed. Numerous waterfront parks and other points of public access are found along our shoreline. Our harbors also provide the city's most significant natural resources, including tidal wetlands, beaches, shellfish beds, fish and wildlife, and other resources. The environmental quality associated with the Stamford Harbor Management Area helps shape our character as a community and is an important determinant of Stamford's overall quality of life.

Recognizing the above, the Board of Representatives in 2004 adopted City Ordinance No. 1021 to establish the Harbor Management Commission. The BOR took this action because it recognized the need for long-range planning and active involvement by the city, acting through

the Commission, working in coordination with the Mayor, BOR, and other agencies, to preserve and enhance Stamford's water and waterfront resources. The Commission labored for more than four (4) years to create the Stamford Harbor Management Plan, a document comparable in scope and complexity to the City's Master Plan. The State of Connecticut approved the Harbor Management Plan and the BOR adopted it in 2009. An important purpose of the Plan is to strengthen the city's influence upon and control over the Harbor Management Area which, prior to the Plan, was subject primarily to state and federal jurisdiction.

By adopting the Harbor Management Plan, the BOR tasked the Harbor Management Commission with being the principal city agency for managing Stamford's coastal waterways and fourteen (14) miles of shoreline. Among many other responsibilities, the Commission is charged with reviewing all proposals affecting the Harbor Management Area and then providing recommendations, consistent with the Plan, to city, state, and federal agencies on a timely basis. The Commission also works closely with the Stamford Police Department's Marine Unit and State of Connecticut Harbor Master to help ensure public safety in our harbors.

Harbor Management Commissioners volunteer hundreds of hours of their time each year to advance the Harbor Management Plan and serve the public interest. Our job, mandated by the General Statutes and City Code, is sometimes complex and technical. However, unlike the Planning, Zoning, and Environmental Protection boards, the Commission does not have the benefit of full-time support personnel provided by the city. We must rely on consultant services and our clerical staff member to carry out a multitude of tasks, including the mandates for application review and the requirement that all meetings be recorded and made available to the public.

Your decision to de-fund the Commission's historically provided budget, with no advance notice and without meaningful discussion of the ramifications of your action is, in our opinion, ill-advised and contrary to proper stewardship of our harbors and coastal resources. Unfortunately, coming as it does on the heels of your unannounced September 15, 2015 appearance before the Commission, during which time you chided us for what you characterized as conflicts of interest and our failure to facilitate the pending boatyard applications, your action at this time may be perceived as punitive in nature.

We have heard your explanation that you have given us everything we have asked for by allowing us to use what you described as the "marina fund". The City marinas do collect rental income but that income does not come to the HMC. You have not given us what we have asked for and your statement is just not accurate. We assume what you meant was the special account that holds the mooring permit fees collected by the Harbor Master, authorized by state law, and proposed, designed, and passed by the BOR to supplement the operating funds provided by the city, has been set aside for purposes of improving the harbors for the benefit of the public. It was never intended to fund the routine governmental operations of the Commission and is not adequate for that purpose. Furthermore, it is unfair to place the burden of operating a municipal

agency on the backs of the relative few who moor vessels in the Stamford Harbor Management Area.

We therefore respectfully request that you immediately reverse your decision to de-fund the Commission's operating budget or provide us with a detailed explanation for your action at the Commission's next regularly scheduled meeting on Tuesday, March 15, 2016 at 6:30 pm. Failing receipt of an official response from you prior to our meeting, we will assume that you intend to move forward with your plan and that we must embark upon an appropriate course to preserve the Commission's integrity and proper functioning.

We proudly serve the City of Stamford and hope that our efforts in this regard will continue unfettered by short sighted and ill-conceived fiscal restraints.

I may be contacted at (315) 651-0070 or dortelli@stamfordct.gov.

Respectfully submitted,

A handwritten signature in black ink, appearing to be 'D. Ortelli', with a long horizontal stroke extending to the right.

Dr. Damian Ortelli, Chairman

cc:

Stamford Board of Representatives

Stamford Board of Finance

Stamford Planning Board

Stamford Harbor Management Commission

Frank Fedeli, Stamford Office of Operations

Mr. Eric Knott, State of Connecticut Harbor Master

Sgt. Robert Monck, Stamford Police Department Marine Unit