

NEWS

Grand jury keeps the heat on harbor district

BY EMILY MIBACH
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A San Mateo County civil grand jury report published yesterday questioned why an embattled harbor district has not yet been dissolved.

The San Mateo County Harbor District for years has been dealing with massive turnover, an unbalanced budget, harassment lawsuits and meetings in which police have been needed to keep the peace, among other things. All of this led to a civil grand jury in 2014 recommending to the county Board of Supervisors that the Harbor District be dissolved.

Called on the right track

Virginia Chang Kiraly, vice president of the board, said she believes that despite the setbacks, the Harbor District board is getting back on track.

Kiraly said the board approved paying off \$5 million in loans to the California Division of Boating and Waterways, approved a switch for workers compensation insurance, saving the district \$78,000 annually, and began an "open gov" website, which helps provide financial transparency, something Kiraly has been advocating.

Kiraly also said that she feels like the report was questioning the county Board of Supervisors more than the Harbor District board.

Questions why agency hasn't been dissolved

According to the report, the grand jury wonders why so little action has been taken by the Board of Supervisors and other agencies that would have a hand in dissolving the district. However, Kiraly says that what is missing in the report is the fact that county Supervisor Don Horsley and the board gave the Harbor district board 18 months in July 2015 to "correct the ship."

The civil grand jury, a group of citizens convened by the courts to investigate local government operations, pointed to a pattern of dysfunction, including problems with the district's finances. The harbor district is funded by San Mateo County residents through property taxes for a total of \$5 million a year.

New manager

Kiraly and the new general manager of the Harbor District, Steve McGrath, have tried to correct the board after being brought on in November 2015.

She said the Harbor District has since November "been on a good path. Prior to that it was on a very, very different path."

This November, four of the five Harbor District board seats are up for election. That includes the seat held by Kiraly, who was appointed in November 2015. Commissioner Sabrina Brennan, is another one of the four up for re-election. In March 2016, Brennan came under fire when she submitted over \$1,000 in expenses for a two-night trip that she was never asked to attend or had submitted any prior paperwork for. Furthermore, a harassment case was brought against Brennan by a former harbor master.

High turnover

From 2014 to January 2016 there was high turnover among the presidents of the board, roughly one every six months and there was also a revolving door among general managers.

The civil grand jury report states that the district has a history of dysfunction, going back at least to 2001, when commission meetings turned into shouting matches. Even as early as 1963 county voters agreed to dissolve the district, but a court overturned the decision.

The district was established in 1933 as an independent agency that operates two facilities — Pillar Point Harbor in Half Moon Bay and Oyster Point Marina in South San Francisco. It has a \$10 million budget, funded by property taxes and commercial activities.

Man hit in stomach by gunfire

A 28-year-old man was injured in a shooting early yesterday morning in East Palo Alto, a police sergeant said.

The shooting occurred around 1 a.m. in the 2200 block of Oak-

wood Drive. The victim, an East Palo Alto resident, was hit in the abdomen area by the gunfire and was taken to a hospital, police Sgt. Angel Sanchez said.

The victim's injuries are not

considered life-threatening, according to authorities.

No arrests have been made in the shooting and no suspect information was immediately available yesterday morning, Sanchez said.



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