

There have recently been a number of online postings regarding the treatment of individuals living in vessels on the Richardson's Bay anchorage that are misleading and inaccurate. The misleading postings have implied that individuals have been removed from their vessels, had their vessels destroyed and were subsequently made homeless amidst the COVID-19 pandemic. None of this is true.

If you are not familiar with Richardson's Bay, it is a 72-hour anchorage that is a shared resource enjoyed by Sausalito, Belvedere, Tiburon, Mill Valley, Marin County and the larger Bay Area community. Additionally, Richardson's Bay serves as a key stopover for birds to rest and feed while on their migratory routes, as well as providing an ideal habitat for a critical stand of eelgrass that serves as the keystone for a much broader ecological system that supports multiple types of sea life and animals.

Complaints from community and business owners about Richardson's Bay have greatly intensified over the last few years due to the proliferation of inoperable and unseaworthy vessels in Richardson's Bay. The complaints include sunken vessels releasing rubbish and petrochemicals into the bay, vandalism at various public locations and private marinas directly attributed to individuals on vessels anchored in Richardson's Bay, hostile and threatening behavior towards mariners seeking to use the anchorage, dumping of sewage directly into the bay, and dumping of trash directly into the bay and along the streets of Sausalito. Local residents, members from the environmental and business communities, as well as visitors from outside the area were finding it increasingly difficult to enjoy the bay with their families, for recreational and commercial activities, and as a place of refuge. After observing the problematic impacts the vessels were having on the environment as well as to the public health and safety, proactively managing vessels anchored in the bay became a high priority.

As Bay Area natives and long-time residents know, people have lived in boats on Richardson's Bay for decades. Some work in maritime services or other land-based industries, and others are retired, disabled or have settled there due to the challenge of finding affordable places to live. Families with young children also live on boats anchored out in the water. In many cases, living on the anchorage is an alternative to living on the streets.

Life on the water is challenging due to ever changing tides, unpredictable weather conditions, the wear and tear of rowing distances to the shore, and the lack of access to safe, secure tie-ups and services (water, showers, laundry and postal service). Sausalito pastors and faith community members have been ministering to this community for many years, providing dinners and bagged, take-away lunches, a warm place to congregate and a kind, caring reception. More recently, the mobile shower program in MarinShip Park has been serving the anchor-out community.

In June of 2020, the [Richardson's Bay Regional Agency](#) (RBRA) adopted a [Transition Plan](#) designed to provide guidance for the ongoing management of the Richardson's Bay anchorage. The Transition Plan is the result of a multi-year process that included community meetings,

public hearings, and extensive outreach. The goal is to ensure that Richardson's Bay is a safe, healthy, and well-managed anchorage while realizing a declining number of occupied vessels over time.

The Transition Plan included introduced a new program called the [Safe and Seaworthy Program](#) which would allow eligible vessels that are brought up to a seaworthy condition to remain in the Richardson's Bay anchorage for an additional limited period of time. To be eligible to participate in the Safe and Seaworthy Program and obtain "legacy status" the vessel must have been present in the Richardson's Bay Anchorage during the Marin County Sheriff's Office August 2019 vessel census. The Safe and Seaworthy Program has already launched with the distribution of information to eligible vessels.

Vessels must submit an enrollment application for the Safe and Seaworthy Program by no later than October 15 to begin the process to obtain legacy status. Submitting the enrollment application also qualifies vessels to be considered for a limited pool of grant funding for minor repairs. The RBRA already has received eight enrollment applications and is continuing to coordinate with other individuals who have expressed interest in participating in the program. Vessels that fail to comply with program requirements and other criteria, and vessels whose occupants decline to enroll in the Safe & Seaworthy program, will become an enforcement priority and subject to removal. The Safe & Seaworthy program will allow the RBRA to better manage the safety and health of the bay by ensuring that vessels from the August 2019 census that are allowed to conditionally remain are seaworthy.

A key component of the Transition Plan acknowledges that some individuals on vessels in the anchorage may prefer to live on land but could not find affordable housing. The Transition Plan includes policies (and continues existing practices) to connect people living on vessels with agencies and organizations for assistance with finding alternative housing and to encourage expansion of housing opportunities.

The RBRA contracts with social service professionals to identify and assess the most vulnerable individuals living on the most precarious vessels in the anchorage. Outreach teams have been working with the RBRA since June of 2019 to assess and address individuals' needs, as they work with them to find safe alternative housing. The most vulnerable individuals on the most vulnerable vessels were identified and efforts are currently underway to secure alternative housing for these individuals.

During the outreach process, it was surprising to discover how many individuals possessed more than one vessel anchored in Richardson's Bay. We initially determined there were approximately 100 people living on vessels in Richardson's Bay (note that there were approximately 190 vessels anchored in Richardson's Bay when we started this effort). It was alarming to discover there were as many as 90 unmanned and inoperable vessels on Richardson's Bay; these vessels present a threat to the environment, nearby mariners and the surrounding communities of Richardson's Bay.

These threats are real. During the winter storms of late 2019 and early 2020 over 50 vessels went adrift uncontrollably and/or sunk. The overwhelming majority of these vessels were unoccupied and caused some form of damage to the environment and/or private property. Between July 2019 and July 2020, the RBRA removed over 80 derelict vessels from Richardson's Bay - none of these vessels were occupied, and at no point did the RBRA forcibly remove anyone from their primary vessel.

Finally, the Transition Plan includes policies to manage and enhance ecological resources in Richardson's Bay with specific emphasis on eelgrass protection. The RBRA has contracted with Coastal Policy Solutions to begin the process of identifying zones that would protect ecological resources while also preserving the recreational uses of the bay. The process will include collaboration with public and private agencies, organizations and stakeholders to develop a plan that identifies opportunities to protect and enhance both ecological and recreational resources.

Throughout the creation of the Transition Plan, we have worked hard to balance the interests of the community with our compassion and empathy for those experiencing challenging life situations. We have engaged and listened to our community partners to learn about the very real concerns within the community regarding the crime, hazards and safety related to the anchorage. And we have engaged with individuals who are anchored-out to understand their very real needs and challenges. The RBRA will continue to work towards creating a safe, healthy, and well-managed Richardson's Bay.