

Capitola wonders: will Wharf ever be fixed?

\$550,000 in repair money switched to city's general fund

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CAPITOLA — Capitols and Wharf-goers say they're holding out hope for the repair of the landmark, despite the Council's decision to move the project money into its general fund.

And despite past experience.

"We don't know what's going on," said Joe Urbancic, who has worked for several years repairing boats on the structure. "All that money is gone. It's a strange thing. It seems like there's always a story of why they don't fix it. I hope they will, but it's really hard to tell."

Council decided last week to put \$550,000 slated for interim repairs in October into the general fund as a loan. While accounting experts say the loan is legitimate, Urbancic and others worry it may not be paid back.

Meanwhile, tourists and fisherman stroll

the obviously loose boards that creak beneath their feet as they walk across the oldest West Coast wharf still in use.

They worry that it will soon be too dangerous to use at all.

"Some boards are still higher than other ones," said Mike Hicks, who repairs boats. "Children and people wearing heels are getting caught or tripping on them. If we don't fix those, we're going to end up with lawsuits."

The Wharf should be treated as a valuable asset, residents said.

"I don't know what revenue the Wharf brings in," said Capitolan Tom Murray. "The Wharf is expensive, yes, but it's a very valuable attraction to Capitola."

Cindy Frusetta, of Hollister, was taking her daughters crab fishing for the first time at the end of the Wharf.

She said she comes out to the attraction whenever she can.

"You can see the problems with it," she said. "But this Wharf is one of the highlights of Capitola."

Area merchants said they'd like to see the structure not only repaired but upgraded.

"Margaritaville is more of a pull than the Wharf is," said Debbie Johnson, a manager at Oasis at the Mercantile. "It needs to be developed more as an attraction."

Frank Jordan, who runs Panache lotion and fragrance shop at the Mercantile, also is baffled.

"The council is unresponsive to the needs of the merchants, and trying to make up for things with parking citations," he said. "Merchants are having trouble making it and these people can't fix the Wharf?"

City Manager Dan Pincetich assured the Sentinel on Wednesday that the repair money will be returned in time for the October repairs.

"This will not delay the Wharf," Pincetich said. "This is an administrative thing ... Tomorrow I can put it back in."

City Public Works Director Fred Braun said he is working on the assumption that

the money will be returned and the interim repairs will proceed. But he said the project could be delayed for non-financial reasons, such as design changes.

"It could be that the project scope will change," Braun had said. "We don't know what's going to happen."

Urbancic, meanwhile, pointed out the wood holding up the structure where a type of sea worm species has eaten large holes. He said the matter was taken to council before, but was never dealt with.

"They want to let it fall apart and then make a whole new pier," he said.

City officials say not so. However, engineers warn the structure needs an entire \$3.5 million reconstruction within the next 10 to 15 years.

The work this fall is scheduled to repair only decking and the shaky landward side of the Wharf.

City officials say they are seeking state funding through state Sen. Bruce McPherson's office for the long-term reconstruction, but no one knows if and when that money will come.

"That's kind of pie-in-the-sky at this point — getting state funds to help us," Braun said. "It's a long shot."