

Underslung sewage tank poses problem for wharf

Capitola's Wharf is barely open to the public but City Councilmen and city officials are already worrying about what could be a very serious problem.

The issue is the design and placement of a 1,000 gallon sewage holding tank in the center of the wharf underneath the deck.

City officials were worrying last Thursday night - two days before the formal opening of the wharf to public - that an ocean storm similar to the one that heavily damaged the wharf and closed it to the public in 1978 could destroy the sewage holding tank, pollute the city beaches, and put the wharf concessions out of business for an undetermined amount of time.

The fiberglass holding tank sits on a platform underneath the main deck of the wharf and will, when the concession buildings are built, collect all waste water and liquid garbage from the public restrooms and restaurant operations on the wharf, and when full, pump it into the shore

sewer system.

But Mayor Jerry Clarke and Councilmen Ron Graves and Michael Routh worried that high ocean waves could pound the exposed platform and tank, either tearing it away altogether, or, worse, lifting the tank with enough force to push it through a deck hatch and into a service building that will be built on the deck surface.

The tank will always be at least half full of water and waste when in use, meaning that it will weigh at least 4,000 pounds at all times. But when half empty, its buoyancy will also be at least 4,000 pounds if totally submerged by ocean waves, and that is what worries the city officials now.

City Manager Steve Burrell said the tank is designed to be winched up out of the waves' path when a storm strikes, but conceded that there might not always be time.

"It may not have been the best engineering judgement," City Manager Steve Burrell told the council.

He said quick-disconnect valves and fittings will be installed on the tank once the wharf is formally turned over to the city by the renovation contractor, and a hoist beam will be installed in a maintenance building that will sit on top of the access hatch, making it easier for the tank to be winched out of danger.

"That will make it the first retractable septic tank in history," Police Chief Bob Allen quipped during the meeting.

Burrell said he'll contact the design engineers, Brown and Caldwell, for a re-evaluation of the tank's placement and design.

The council approved a new layout for the concession buildings that will be built this winter by Rick and Jennifer Karleen.

Original plans called for three buildings - a restaurant, bait and tackle shop and maintenance buildings - to be constructed on the wide area of the wharf.

The layout was considered impractical in terms of bringing trailered boats onto the wharf and then launching the boats from the wharf.

The new design moves the restaurant (Chowder Bar) out to the end of the wharf, and incorporates public restrooms and a Coast Guard Auxiliary tower into the design.

The bait and tackle shop and maintenance buildings are merged into one building with the same square footage and located at the north end of the wharf's wide area.

The new design won praise from city councilmen but plans will still have to be approved by the Coastal Commission.