

OPEN LETTER TO THE CHICAGO PARK DISTRICT - MARCH 6, 2023
Navigable Water For ALL Boaters at Jackson Park Outer Harbor

On behalf of the South Shore and Jackson Park Communities, we respectfully request that the Chicago Park District (Park District) immediately, and in consultation with affected boaters and stakeholders, establish and implement an annual harbor maintenance plan for Jackson Park Outer Harbor that consistently delivers safe, reliably navigable waters for all boaters every year. We request that rather than avoiding important safety issues caused by inadequate dredging by directing boaters and community members away from their neighborhood harbor to northside harbors, that these safety issues are immediately addressed. And, we request timely implementation of such harbor maintenance to ensure that our harbor opens on time for the 2023 season for the enjoyment of both paying boaters and the local community.

Jackson Park Outer Harbor is in a State-of-Emergency. For decades, excessive buildup of sediment and sand has been allowed to accumulate and raise the harbor and channel and harbor floors so that many boats can no longer reliably enter or use the harbor. Instead of dredging deeper and more frequently, Westrec Marinas (Westrec) routinely sends Jackson Park Outer Harbor customers North to more navigable harbors. Additionally, these northern harbors are significantly more costly to the boaters, further restricting access to members of the local communities.

While this may be a more convenient solution for Westrec, it denies community members the option of enjoying their local harbor rather than being forced to travel to other harbors to enjoy the lakefront. This is in direct contravention of Westrec's harbor management contract with the Park District¹ that states that Westrec must provide "equitable and efficient use of our limited harbor areas while maintaining safe navigation for ALL BOATS and providing many opportunities for public use." We are concerned that these requirements have not been applied to Jackson Park Outer Harbor because the Chicago Park District has neither consistently nor adequately enforced these requirements stated in Westrec's 10-Year Agreement with the Chicago Park District P-14010 dated April 2015.

The Chicago Park District is clearly aware of the long-term consequences of not regularly dredging. as it was stated in the Westrec's own 2016 renewal application for a 10-year dredging permit :

"Much of this sediment has been accumulating over a number of years. If a sediment management program is not possible, sediment will continue to funnel into the harbor due to the littoral setting as described in section 2.0. Access will be restricted, and the harbor will no longer be viable." (AECOM was engaged by Westrec to perform dredging environmental studies and prepare the 2016 Permit Application to submit to the Illinois Department of Natural Resources)

It is important to highlight, with a few examples, the urgency that re-emerged during the 2022 season:

- A sailboat hit the bottom while traveling inside of the harbor. The captain was completely unaware that the seal had broken on the rudder when it hit the bottom. Unbeknownst to everyone on the boat, the cabin below began to quickly fill up with water. It wasn't until a passenger heard the water sloshing around below that the crew and captain became aware.

¹ Chicago Park District Contract P-14010, April 2015, Pg 1, Management Agreement Sec 3.

- A sailboat was dragged out of the harbor on its side by another boat because it was unable to motor out of the harbor without hitting the harbor floor.
- At night, the Captain of a sailboat carrying six passengers found he could not maneuver his boat past the channel of JPOH due to unexpected low-water levels. Consequently, the passengers had to be transferred (mid-water, at night) to a smaller boat to safely transport them into JPOH.
- Due to low-water, some boaters were not able to enter and retrieve their mast stored at the Jackson Park Yacht Club within the harbor. This left the boats unusable for the season.
- Annually, Community and Jackson Park Yacht Club members could not choose or remain at JPOH as their home option and were forced by Westrec to go north to more consistently navigable harbors.

How were JPOH conditions allowed to get to a point where this southside harbor is consistently too unsafe to perform its essential function while other harbor communities consistently enjoy navigable waters?

How low is too low? The extremely low-water levels are the cumulative result of long-term decisions to not annually and adequately dredge the harbor to achieve depths necessary to maintain safe navigation for all boaters. The 10 ft harbor depth expectation for JPOH is published throughout the United States Coast Guard (USCG) Navigation Charts and is relied upon by all mariners who, without reservation, seek harbor access to JPOH for leisure or due to weather emergencies or mechanical failure. (See Chart). As of October 2022, the harbor depth measured 4.5 feet (and less) along critical paths, down 55% compared with 2000. These recordings were taken by multiple boaters (on-board depth finder gauges) who reported the information to the harbormaster, who then confirmed with his own discovery. None of these complaints and incidents are new to JPOH, the Chicago Park District or Westrec Marinas. They have been occurring annually for the past decades.

Correcting the unsafe conditions at JPOH requires a more aggressive plan for 2023 than the plan shared by Westrec. While we appreciate Westrec's proposed 2023 solution, we find it incompatible with "*providing equitable and efficient use of our limited harbor areas while maintaining safe navigation for ALL boats and providing many opportunities for public use*", the expectation established by the Westrec/Chicago Park District 10-Year Agreement (P-14010 dated April 2015). We propose the following alternative plan that restores safety for ALL BOATERS and does not alter the landscaped grounds.

1. In lieu of dredging to 8 feet, dredge a minimum of 12 feet to achieve and maintain 10 feet ALL SEASON. Based on historical weathering patterns, the 12 feet will erode to 10 feet during the season, a depth that will still enable ALL BOATS to safely and reliably access the harbor for the entire duration of the season.
2. Dredge all low spots including the path to the channel, around ALL SLIPS and mooring balls to achieve the 12 foot depth.
3. In lieu of depositing the sediment waste on the southeast bank of the harbor and disturbing our landscape, completely remove the sediment from the grounds of the Jackson Park Harbor.
4. Develop, publish and implement a harbor maintenance plan that reflects an annual dredging requirement for Jackson Park Outer Harbor and the maintenance of a

minimum 10 foot depth.

5. There is a strong perception that the new break-wall design may have accelerated the problem of silt and sand clogging the harbor. This matter should be professionally re-evaluated and the break-wall design corrected if indicated.

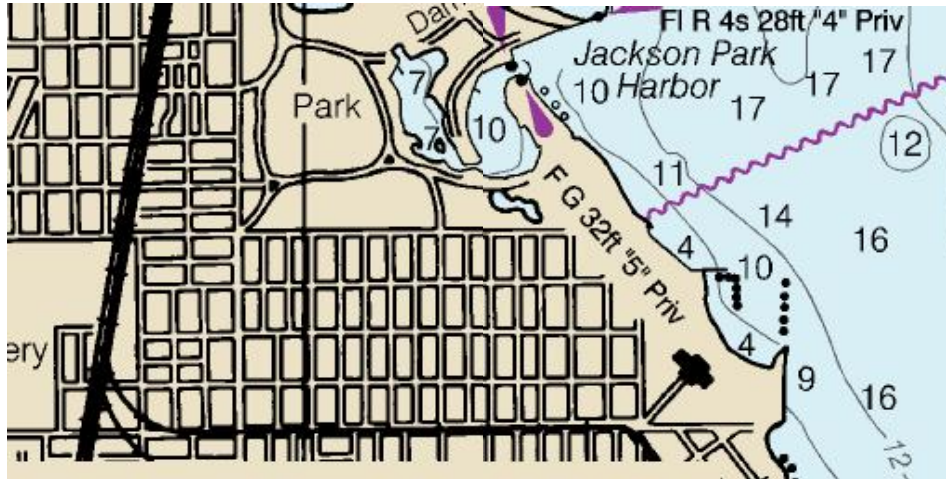
Historical Significance of Jackson Park Yacht Club and JPOH: In decline without the solutions

The 125 year old Jackson Park Yacht Club (JPYC) and JPOH are unique to the City of Chicago. They are the only harbor and boating club in the Chicago Harbor system that demonstrate a consistent history of both welcoming and embracing all Chicagoans regardless of race, gender or ethnicity. This location is notably diverse and represents long cultivated relationships that beautifully blend neighbors, legacy families, the largest contingent of African American sailors in the Midwest-United States, the most active LGBTQ sailing organization in the City of Chicago, a city-wide Women-on-the-Water program, and the largest youth sailing program that directly recruits from the local community. JPYC has a long-standing sailboat racing history that created an environment that nurtures many sailors that otherwise would be excluded from this sport. It is a place where everyone can belong. This environment was not created overnight. It is the result of decades long grinding to refine the diamond that remains. Only people with a shared generous and tolerant spirit take long-term refuge at this familiar space. Over the last decades, JPYC has lost over 50% of its boat-owning membership specifically due to low-water conditions. If this community is to survive, a fully functioning harbor system is essential to stop the on-going erosion of its membership. Westrec must stop turning away JPYC's current and prospective members due to inadequately dredged waters.

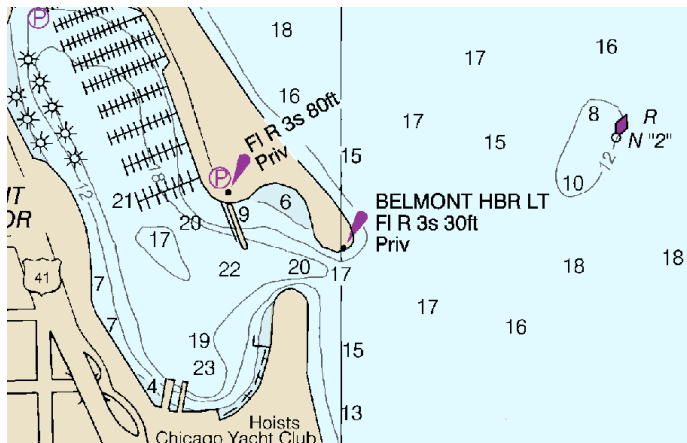
Our Call to Action: We request your leadership to immediately implement a reliably safe and sustainable maintenance plan to address the dredging maintenance problems at Jackson Park Outer Harbor. We want you to ensure, equitably, that the Southside harbor users and prospective users share the option of having a safe and navigable harbor that they too can call "home".

APPENDIX – HARBOR DEPTH REFERENCE CHARTS (US COAST GUARD)

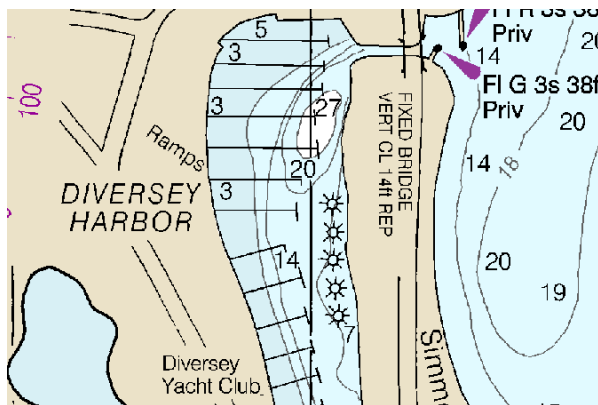
NOAA Chart 14926, Datum in feet ,1983 hydrography



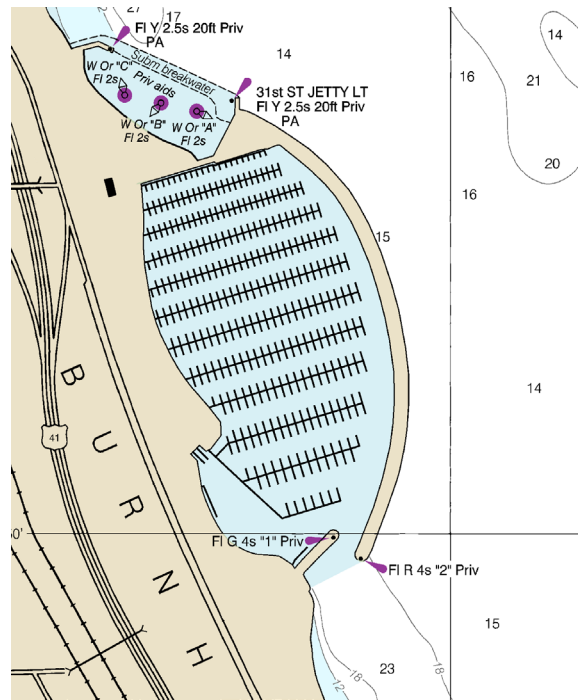
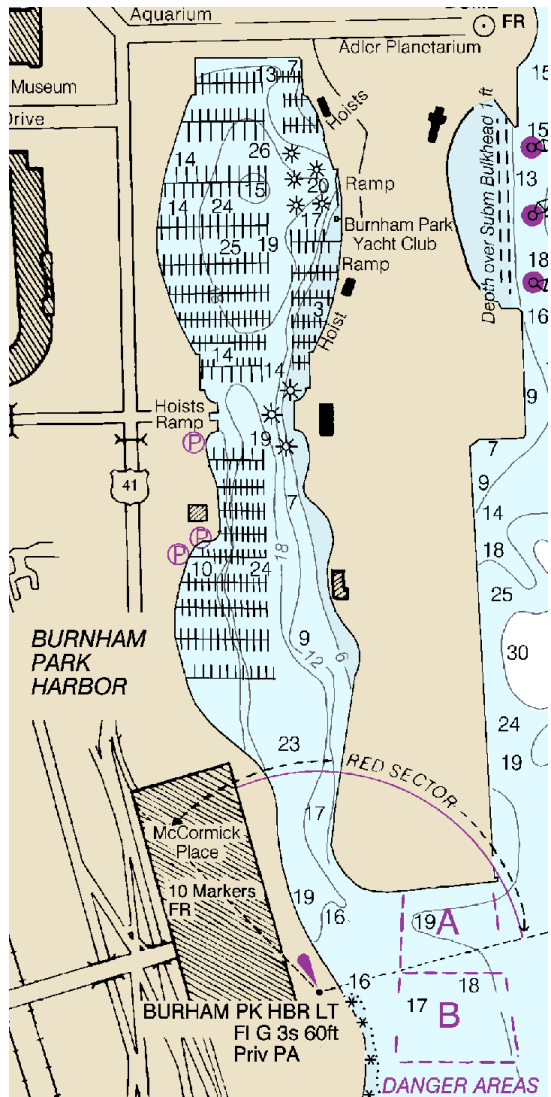
JACKSON PARK YACHT CLUB DEPTH



BELMONT HARBOR DEPTH



DIVERSEY HARBOR DEPTH



31ST STREET HARBOR DEPTH

BURNHAM PARK HARBOR DEPTH