



## STAFF REPORT ON PROPOSED LEGISLATION

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To: Mayor Gavin Buckley

From: Michael Mallinoff, City Manager

Date: February 4, 2025

Subject: O-7-25: City Docking for Dinghies and Other Small Vessels

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### **Purpose of legislation**

The purpose of this legislation is to update City Code regarding the docking of dinghies and other small vessels at public facilities on the City's waterfront by moving the rules and restrictions for docking dinghies and other small vessels from the chapter on Distressed, Sunken, Damaged, Derelict, Disabled, Neglected or Abandoned Vessels and placing it in the chapter on Operation, Anchoring, and Mooring of Vessels in City Waters; allow boats with a maximum 17-foot length and a maximum 90 horsepower motor to dock at street ends, dinghy docks, and other designated public mooring; update Title 15 definitions to conform to the new sections; and generally related to mooring of vessels in City waters.

### **Impact of legislation on operations**

There are 18 areas in the City where dinghies potentially can be accommodated. Conditions vary greatly in these areas. Some are simple bulkheads, others have floating docks, and others have been improved with fixed docks. The number of dinghies that may be accommodated varies at each area. Some of these areas cannot accommodate a 12 foot dinghy and most cannot accommodate a 17 foot vessel due to water depth, type and/or size of docking area, and space for maneuvering. Grant encumbered docks may impose restrictions on changes to the number of vessels that may be moored at docks.<sup>1</sup> The Harbormaster team will need to perform an assessment of docking areas to determine 1) which areas can currently accommodate

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<sup>1</sup> DNR grant-encumbered docks: Truxtun Park, Lafayette Park, Cheston Avenue, Shipwright Street, Hawkin's Cove, 6th Street, 4th Street, Amos Garrett Park.

vessels up to 17 feet in length and 2) which areas could accommodate 17 foot vessels with improvements and what types of improvements will be needed. Any necessary improvements would require funding, design, and permitting.

Dinghy docks provide docking space for transient boaters on mooring balls, annual mooring ball customers, locals, and water taxi landings (in Spa Creek and Back Creek). Currently, the City Code allows only one vessel per every 10 linear feet of dock space. Based on this requirement, most of the current dinghy docks accommodate eight to ten 12 foot long dinghies. Use of the dinghy docks varies over the course of the year and by proximity to the downtown portions of the City. During the peak season from April to October, the closest dinghy docks become full and during special events become overcrowded, necessitating direct management from the Harbormaster's Office (usually from seasonal staff).

Larger boats will take up more space at these landings, limiting space for the dinghy dock users.<sup>2</sup>When larger vessels are docked, there will not be enough space for each of the 46 annual mooring ball customers to have a dinghy at a nearby street end to access their moored vessels. Users of the 76 transient mooring balls would be competing for the same space, particularly at the busier docks. (Often, all of the transient mooring balls are occupied during peak boating season, sometimes turning over up to three times per day.) More occupied dock space will make landings for the water taxi more difficult, especially at most street end docks.

There are some potential unintended results of the proposed legislation as written. Currently, visitors to Annapolis are accustomed to the 12 foot limitation on dinghies. Therefore, in the immediate future, the legislation is not expected to have a significant impact on dock space. However, the legislation will encourage boaters to purchase larger dinghies, taking up more available dock space as time goes on. Also, annual mooring customers will be incentivised to purchase a second runabout that would be able to be moored legally on a street end and would be covered by the \$1,200 resident/\$2,000 non-resident annual mooring ball fee, which is significantly lower than annual slip fees at local marinas.

#### Operational Considerations:

1. Enforcement may be challenging with different docks having different dinghy size limitations. The proposed change will take extra time for enforcement (monitoring, writing tickets, court appearances) and education of boaters. Violators will reasonably assert that they misunderstood which landings permit certain sizes of dinghies. With less available docking space, it is expected that there will also be violations for exceeding the limit on the number of vessels allowed at docks. There are 6 favorite street end docks due to their proximity to amenities. When a dock is full, boaters tend to tie up anyway and crawl over other dinghies to reach shore or attempt to tie up to neighboring properties.

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<sup>2</sup> An average 12 foot dinghy has a beam (widest point on a vessel) of 4.7 feet wide. A 17 foot dinghy has a beam between 6.5 feet and 7.5 feet wide.

2. A Code revision will be needed with respect to how many feet of dock are allocated to each vessel since 17 foot vessels are significantly wider than a 12 foot dinghy.
3. The Annual Mooring Application (Contract) will require revision by the Office of Law since it currently precludes the use of dinghies exceeding 12 feet. Time will be spent by Harbormaster staff and the Office of Law to obtain signatures on revised contracts.
4. New dock signs reflecting new size limits will need to be designed and installed. Signs will also need to state "bow-in only" to fit the number of allowed dinghies, especially since certain street ends have limited room around the pier (e.g. 4th Street and Burnside Street).
5. An additional half-time employee will need to be added to the Harbormaster staff to assist with monitoring, enforcement, and education of boaters. Current Harbormaster staff are utilized at 100 percent.

*Prepared by Victoria Buckland, Assistant City Manager with input from Jacqueline Guild, Deputy City Manager for Resilience & Sustainability and Beth Bellis, Harbormaster.*