



SUMMARY REPORT

Agenda Date: 9/23/2025

To: Sonoma County Board of Supervisors

Department or Agency Name(s): Sonoma County Regional Parks

Staff Name and Phone Number: Bert Whitaker, 707-565-2041

Vote Requirement: Majority

Supervisory District(s): Fifth District

Title:

Introduction of Ordinance updating the Governance, Financial Structure, and County Code for Sonoma County Marinas

Recommended Action:

- A) Receive the *State of the Marinas* presentation and the Economic Development Commission Marina Assessment. ☐
- B) Approve the elimination of the individual enterprise funds for Spud Point Marina, Mason's Marina, and Sport Fishing Center and create a unified County of Sonoma Marina's Enterprise Fund for fiscal year 2026-2027.
- C) Adopt a Resolution to amend Resolution No. 84-2421 establishing the County of Sonoma Marina Advisory Committee.
- D) Adopt a Resolution introducing, reading the Title of and Waiving Further Reading of proposed ordinance amending Chapter 20, Article VIII, of the Sonoma County Code related to marina governance and operations and directing staff to schedule the proposed ordinance for consideration of adoption on or after 10-28-2025

Executive Summary:

This item presents a comprehensive package of updates intended to improve the governance, financial transparency, and operational integrity of the County of Sonoma owned and operated marinas. Informed by a detailed *State of the Marinas* presentation, staff recommends a series of coordinated actions for finance, advisory structure, and County code to better serve the commercial, recreational, and public interests that rely on these assets.

1. Receive Staff Presentation on the "State of the Marinas" Presentation.

Staff will present an operational and financial review of Sonoma County's three marina facilities: Spud Point Marina, Mason's Marina, and the Sport Fishing Center. The *State of the Marinas* presentation includes data on occupancy, revenues, maintenance needs, and climate resilience considerations. The presentation includes the pilot project from the Economic Development Collaborative of providing an economic report on specific Board items. The Marina Assessment and presentation provides context for the following recommended actions and establishes a foundation for long-term infrastructure and governance planning.

2. Approve the elimination of the Spud Point Marina, Mason's Marina, and Sport Fishing Center

enterprise funds and create a unified County of Sonoma Marinas Enterprise Fund.

The current fragmented funding structure restricts flexibility, limits capital planning, and complicates financial reporting. Each marina enterprise fund currently generates revenue from berth rentals and the amenities offered at that specific facility. All administrative costs, including staffing, are budgeted through the Spud Point Marina enterprise fund and later allocated to each marina fund, creating tracking and budgeting challenges. In addition, surplus revenue in one fund cannot be used to address needs in another. For example, if Mason's Marina experiences a strong revenue year from dock rentals wharfage, while the icehouse at Spud Point suffers an unexpected, costly breakdown, Parks cannot use Mason's surplus to repair the icehouse, even though the icehouse is essential to the leased operations at Mason's Marina. A consolidated County of Sonoma Marinas Enterprise Fund will streamline financial oversight, improve transparency, and enable pooled reinvestment across all three marina operations. This change supports long-term fiscal health and operational efficiency.

3. Adopt a new resolution amending Resolution 84-2421 establishing the County of Sonoma Marina Advisory Committee.

Originally created under SB 1096 in 1984 and codified in California Harbor & Navigation Code Section 71.7.5, the existing Spud Point Marina Advisory Committee no longer represents the broader user base or operational realities. The proposed new seven-member County of Sonoma Marina Advisory Committee expands representation to include four commercial fishers, one recreational fisher, one charter operator, and one at-large member. The updated structure complies with state law by being representative of the marina users while ensuring more inclusive and balanced input to the Board of Supervisors.

4. Introduce and read for the first time an ordinance amending Chapter 20, Article VIII, of the Sonoma County Code related to marina governance and operations.

This ordinance modernizes local regulations governing marina safety, berthing, public use, pollution control, enforcement, and infrastructure management. It renames Article VIII to reflect oversight of all County of Sonoma Marinas, updates key definitions, and clarifies the authority and responsibilities of the Park Authority and Marina Supervisor. These changes bring the County Code in line with current operations and best practices.

5. Continue the ordinance to a date at least 30 days later for second reading and adoption.

As required for all County Code modifications, this ordinance must be introduced and read once and then brought back no fewer than 30 days later for formal adoption. This ensures compliance with legislative procedures and allows for public transparency and engagement.

Discussion:

Sonoma County's marina system (Marina System) is composed of Spud Point Marina, Mason's Marina, and the Sport Fishing Center. The Marina System requires structural reform to ensure operational stability, financial sustainability, and relevance to today's marina users. Originally developed with a strong focus on supporting the commercial fishing fleet, the Marina System is now serving a broader and evolving customer base. However, the financial, governance, and regulatory frameworks remain rooted in past assumptions that no longer apply.

Background

Spud Point Marina

Opened in 1980 with substantial funding assistance from the California Department of Boating and Waterways (now the Division of Boating and Waterways), Spud Point Marina was developed to support Bodega Bay's commercial fishing fleet and related maritime uses. State support included a construction grant, and a long-term loan authorized under the California Harbors and Navigation Code, which together funded roughly \$6.8 million, about two-thirds of the total estimated project cost. The remaining third was never funded, resulting in the elimination of several planned improvements, including expanded parking, and multiple revenue-generating facilities such as a restaurant, grocery store, and additional visitor-serving retail. The absence of these amenities reduced the marina's potential non-slip revenue streams from the outset, limiting its ability to offset fluctuations in commercial fishing income.

Governance was established under Senate Bill 1096 (1984), codified in Harbors and Navigation Code §71.7.5, requiring Spud Point Marina to maintain an advisory committee representative of marina users. Sonoma County implemented this requirement through Board Resolution No. 84-2421, creating the Spud Point Marina Advisory Committee. The original loan terms with the State were later restructured to extend repayment and stabilize operations following periods of reduced fishing activity. Today, Spud Point Marina offers 234 berths, fish processing and offloading facilities, and ice production to serve both commercial and recreational vessels. Spud Point Marina has been a critical hub for the regional fishing economy.

The icehouse at Spud Point Marina is a critical component of harbor operations. It is the only ice production facility between San Francisco and Fort Bragg, making it indispensable for local fishermen and fish processors. However, the facility is well past its expected lifespan and in significant disrepair, raising real concerns of catastrophic failure during key crab or salmon seasons. Recognizing its importance, the County of Sonoma has repeatedly sought funding to address these issues, including federal infrastructure budget allocations as well as local and state grant programs, and continues to search for funding. While these efforts have encompassed broader harbor improvements, the icehouse has remained a consistent priority given its central role in sustaining the commercial fishing community and regional economy.

Mason's Marina

Mason's Marina, originally constructed in the early 1970s as a private marina, was later acquired by Sonoma County to expand public access and support small commercial operators. The marina has a total capacity of 130 slips or tie-ups. Currently, one-third of the slips are unavailable due to 2024 storm damage. At the time of transfer to County ownership, the facility had significant deferred maintenance needs, including aging docks, utility systems, and shoreline stabilization, much of which is still needed. Mason's Marina primarily serves smaller vessels and local recreational boaters, with revenue generated from berth rentals and the long-term lease of the adjoining commercial dock.

Sport Fishing Center

Opened in 1991, the Sport Fishing Center was designed to centralize charter fishing operations and improve public access to Bodega Bay's sport fisheries. It houses multiple charter businesses, parking, and restrooms. While the Sport Fishing Center has generally operated with stable occupancy among its charter tenants, the infrastructure is aging and in need of periodic reinvestment to maintain safety, functionality, and customer

service standards.

Challenges and Opportunities

While Mason's Marina and the Sport Fishing Center have generally operated on a self-sustaining basis, Spud Point Marina remains financially volatile due to the uncertainty of commercial fishing seasons. Late or canceled crab seasons and the collapse of salmon fisheries have reduced revenue and created operational strain, making it difficult to keep pace with needed reinvestment in maintenance and infrastructure. To stabilize the system, the County of Sonoma has provided over \$1 million in support over the past five years throughout the marinas, including tideland funds, deferred maintenance allocations, infrastructure funding, and commercial berthing relief. Spud Point's fiscal stability continues to rely heavily on strong commercial seasons, and the recommended actions would create a more reliable financial foundation that ultimately supports and benefits the marinas and community.

At the same time of financial uncertainty in the fisheries, the customer base has shifted, with fewer active commercial vessels and more slips occupied by recreational boaters and small commercial operators such as charter services. These changes do not reflect a challenge, but a natural evolution in marina use that requires corresponding updates in representation, policy, and operational expectations. The current governance model, however, has not kept pace. The existing Spud Point Marina Advisory Committee, established in 1984 under SB 1096, was designed around a commercial-only framework and no longer includes proportional input from the full range of marina users.

County of Sonoma Marina Advisory Committee

The Spud Point Marina Advisory Committee has met multiple times to review the proposed expansion of the advisory committee and has formally approved the draft resolutions and ordinance changes. The proposed seven-member County of Sonoma Marina Advisory Committee will expand representation to include four commercial fishers, one recreational fisher, one charter operator, and one at-large member. These changes are fully consistent with Harbors and Navigation Code § 71.7.5 and will continue to provide Spud Point Marina with an advisory committee that meets state requirements.

Overall

This package of actions aims to establish a sustainable foundation for operations and reinvestment, regardless of fluctuations in commercial fishing. By merging the enterprise funds, the County can streamline financial oversight and plan strategically across all facilities. By restructuring the advisory committee to include commercial, recreational, and charter stakeholders, the County ensures that user input reflects the current operating reality.

Additionally, the proposed ordinance amending Chapter 20, Article VIII of the County Code will modernize outdated policies to support safer, cleaner, and more equitable marina operations.

The proposed ordinance amendments modernize and expand existing marina regulations to improve operational efficiency, financial flexibility, increased recreational revenue opportunities and public service across all County-operated marinas. Key updates include:

- **Expanded applicability:** Applies the marina regulations to all County-operated marinas, including Spud Point Marina, Mason's Marina, and the Sport Fishing Center, rather than limiting them to Spud Point Marina alone.

- **Operational authority:** Clarifies the roles and responsibilities of marina staff, including the Park Manager and designated marina personnel, in enforcing rules, managing berths, and overseeing safe and efficient operations.
- **Diversified revenue opportunities:** Authorizes and supports the use of short-term and visitor-serving berths, low-cost accommodations for overnight stays, transient moorage, and other flexible berth arrangements to better respond to seasonal demand and generate supplemental revenue.
- **Pollution prevention and environmental compliance:** Updates and aligns rules with current state and federal standards to prevent pollution, protect water quality, and manage hazardous materials.
- **Enforcement and penalties:** Strengthens enforcement mechanisms and clarifies procedures for addressing violations, including fines, loss of berth privileges, and removal of non-compliant vessels.

Collectively, these reforms will allow Sonoma County to support its historic working waterfront while adapting to emerging uses. Over time, with smaller investments into revenue generating infrastructure, good fishing years will become a welcome boost for reinvestment, not a prerequisite for basic solvency. This approach ensures that the marina system remains resilient, inclusive, and well-positioned to meet future needs.

Strategic Plan:

This item directly supports the County's Five-year Strategic Plan and is aligned with the following pillar, goal, and objective.

Pillar: Resilient Infrastructure

Goal: Goal 1: Strengthen operational effectiveness, fiscal reliability, and accountability

Objective: Objective 1: Align the Board of Supervisor's strategic priorities, policy, and operational goals with funding and resources.

Racial Equity:

Was this item identified as an opportunity to apply the Racial Equity Toolkit?

No

Prior Board Actions:

1984 - Adoption of Resolution No. 84-2421 establishing the Spud Point Marina Advisory Committee and defining the structure and purpose of marina oversight at that time.

FISCAL SUMMARY

Expenditures	FY25-26 Adopted	FY26-27 Projected	FY27-28 Projected
Budgeted Expenses			
Additional Appropriation Requested			
Total Expenditures			
Funding Sources			
General Fund/WA GF			
State/Federal			
Fees/Other			

Agenda Date: 9/23/2025

Use of Fund Balance			
General Fund Contingencies			
Total Sources			

Narrative Explanation of Fiscal Impacts:

The recommended actions do not result on their own in fiscal impacts. The proposed merger of the Spud Point Marina, Mason's Marina, and Sport Fishing Center enterprise funds into a single County of Sonoma Marinas Enterprise Fund is a structural realignment with no net fiscal impact. This change, if approved, will be implemented as part of the FY26-27 budget adoption, and will streamline accounting, support consolidated financial planning, and enhance the County's ability to allocate revenues and expenses across marina operations more efficiently.

Amendment of Resolution No. 84 2421 and establishment of a new Marina Advisory Committee will be managed within existing staff capacity and will not require additional resources. Similarly, introduction of the amended ordinance to update Chapter 20, Article VIII of the County Code does not generate a direct fiscal impact but supports long-term cost control through improved enforcement tools, clarified operational authority, revenue generating opportunities and more efficient management.

Staffing Impacts:			
Position Title (Payroll Classification)	Monthly Salary Range (A-I Step)	Additions (Number)	Deletions (Number)

Narrative Explanation of Staffing Impacts (If Required):

N/A

Attachments:

State of the Marinas
Advisory Committee Resolution
Ordinance Update
Merger Resolution
Bodega Bay Marinas Assessment

Related Items "On File" with the Clerk of the Board:

N/A