

CONTROVERSY SWIRLS AROUND BODEGA HARBOR (PART 5)

Local Journalist* Prevails and “Settles” Bodega Harbor Controversies

By 1957, after eight years of the ten years allotted to complete substantial improvements had passed by Sonoma County’s capacity to acquire Bodega Harbor appeared to be in jeopardy. In the 1950’s, Bodega Harbor was bustling with jobs. Busy fisheries processed robust catches, yet the required improvements for Bodega Harbor appeared distant. The “Bodega Dream” was deemed “arrested in development.”

Waterfront owners had advanced dozens of plans for moorage facilities. The demand for fully utilized moorage was urgent with “a long waiting list of boat owners from points 100 miles away and farther.” People were ready. The State was only two years away from granting ownership to Sonoma County. But by failing to adopt policies for leasing the Harbor’s tidelands, the Board of Supervisors had stood in the way of developing improvements required by California State to turn over the tidelands to the Sonoma County.

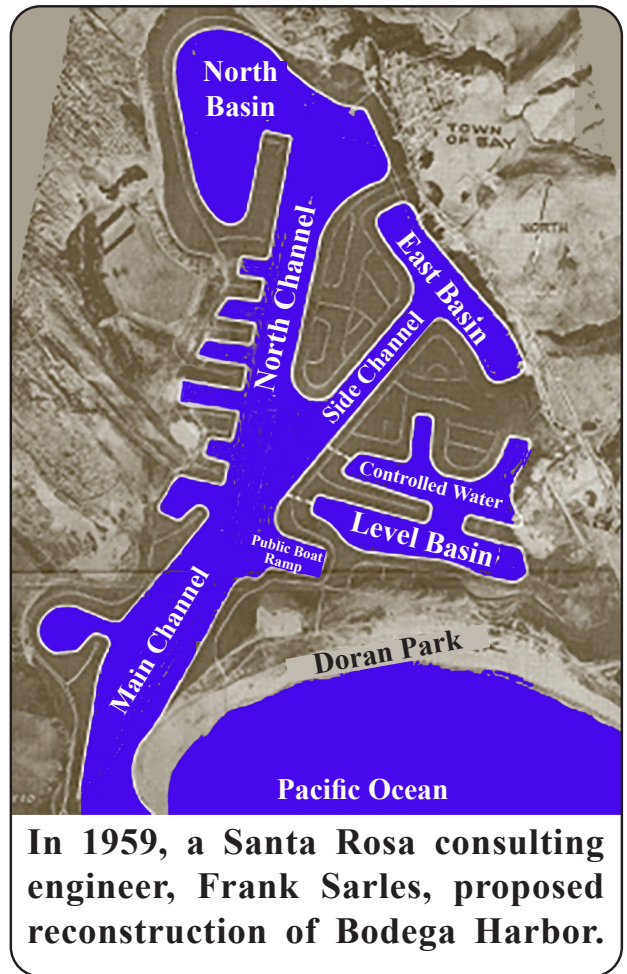
The Army Core of Engineers was authorized to dredge and maintain the harbor, but Federal funding priorities were dependent on the level of commercial activity. Bodega Harbor was bypassed as an anchorage with no permanent moorings in place. Sounding depths were down to only two feet.

In January 1958, Fred Fletcher’s seven-part exposé in the *Press Democrat*, rang the alarm for Sonoma County Supervisors to get moving before time ran out on the transfer of Bodega Harbor’s Tidelands from California State to Sonoma County. “Dust had gathered” on the 1955 Master Plan.

Less than a month later in early February, Sonoma County’s interests began to coalesce.* California State’s Chamber of Commerce North Coast Manager urged Santa Rosa’s Chamber of Commerce to review proposals for four other points around the County. Bodega Harbor Development was deemed an “urgent, county-wide problem.” Bodega Bay’s recreational facilities would be used by people from all parts of the county and the port at Bodega Bay is a major part of the county’s industry.”

In the months following Fred Fletcher’s series in the *Press Democrat*, rather than expecting the embroiled Bodega Harbor landowner and representing Supervisor Nin Guidotti continue holding the reins, the Board of Supervisors acted together to:

- create a County Harbor Commission with a paid Executive Officer.
- appointed seven harbor commissioners



In 1959, a Santa Rosa consulting engineer, Frank Sarles, proposed reconstruction of Bodega Harbor.

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- adopted a new Master Plan for Sonoma County's Small Boat Harbors. ¹
(Petaluma was fostering harbor plans.) Top priority was a give to Bodega Harbor.
- The newly formed Harbor Commission held their first meeting on May 7, 1958.
- voted funding to improve the airstrip on Doran Park. ²
- adopted a \$30,000 budget for Harbor Commission operations including a \$10,000 loan from the State to pay for consulting engineers.
- hired an engineer from Southern California to be Development Director and Executive Officer to the Harbor Commission.
- hired an aerial survey for mapping Bodega Harbor as a basis for Bodega Harbor's tidelands management.

By September 1958, Fletcher declared "the Bodega Dream is no longer a dream in arrested development." Exactly one year later, in Sept 1959, Fletcher was appointed to and became a Commissioner of the Sonoma County Harbor Commission.

Just nine days later, approved by the new Governor of California, Pat Brown, and filed with the State of California, the County of Sonoma was granted the right, title and interest to all of the tide and submerged lands in Bodega Harbor. ³

Of course, the people of Bodega Bay would not settle its hot controversies with the stoke of a pen creating State Law. Where to put the road and Frank Sarles' plan were under fire. The law itself was amended in 1961 to reflect clarification of drilling rights. ⁴

Enter PG&E and the heat was turned up even more. And today, the fairness of the Tidelands Leases is fair game for revision. "*A Title Wave of Opposition Washed the Bodega Bay Plan 'On the Beach.'*" ⁵ But that is another story....

This is the conclusion of the five part series of Controversies swirling around Bodega Harbor in the 1950's.

Footnotes

*Editor's notes:

a. Support local journalism

b. Sonoma County coming together is relevant today. Bodega Bay is in contest with County Supervisors and other fire district's interests regarding procuring funding for the Bodega Bay Fire Protection District. It is estimated that 80% of the calls to the Fire District are from non-residents. Keeping CA Route 1 & State Parks safe, draining limited local resources in Rancho Bodega. The expenses need to be spread over a larger municipality, most obviously, all on Sonoma County.

1. Petaluma's representing Supervisor Leigh S. Shoemaker fostered plans for a turning basin in Petaluma.

2. The airstrip on Doran was sidetracked a few months later by Supervisors' agreement with Pacific Gas and Electric Co to seek a different airport site. PG&E offered to consider financing the move as part of PG&E's plan to build a steam electric plant on Bodega Head. Bodega Bay's Future No Longer a Dream, Fletcher, Press Democrat 22 Sept 1958

3. Chapter 1064 Approved by Governor June 19, 1959. In effect September 18, 1959.

4. Chapter 799 Approved by Governor June 12, 1961. In effect September 15, 1961.

5. *On the Beach* is a 1959 American film that depicts the aftermath of a nuclear war. The post-apocalyptic science fiction drama film starred Gregory Peck, Ava Gardner, Fred Astaire, and Anthony Perkins, a film is based on Nevil Shute's 1957 novel of the same name. ■