

Norwalk harbor officials press DOT on bridge runoff

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IMAGE 1 OF 3

Runoff pipes underneath I 95 on Hendricks Ave. on Tuesday October 25, 2016, in Norwalk Conn.

NORWALK — The city's **Harbor Management Commission** is vowing to hold the **Connecticut Department of Transportation's** feet to the fire on keeping oil and other pollutants from entering Norwalk Harbor from Interstate 95 and the Yankee Doodle Bridge.

The DOT plans to repair the bridge and repave and overhaul Interstate 95, replacing the grass median with a standard-height concrete barrier between the bridge and the Saugatuck River in Westport.

At issue for the Harbor Commission is what stormwater drainage improvements the department will incorporate into the work. The bridge along carries 44 unfiltered drains that feed runoff into the harbor.

"Why are municipalities being held by a different standard than the state?" asked Commissioner **John T. Pinto**, distinguishing between mitigation requirements for municipalities and those for the DOT.

Commissioner **John T. Romano**, owner of swimming pool business, concurred.

"I have to pay \$1,000 for a license to discharge a pool," he said.

To move forward with the projects, the DOT needs approvals from the **Connecticut Department of Energy** and Environmental Protection. On Wednesday evening, the harbor commission withheld its support of the DOT's plan for the highway portion.

Instead, the panel recommended that the DOT combine the highway overhaul and bridge rehabilitation and submit a single permit application to the DEEP.

"The work on the I-95 bridge should be included in this application, because drainage from the I-95 bridge goes down into the area that they're working on as part of the (highway work)," said **Geoffrey Steadman**, planning consultant for the commission.

Steadman noted that Interstate 95 slopes downward well east of the Yankee Doodle Bridge and all roadway runoff likely flows into the harbor through a large outfall pipe at Hendricks Avenue.

The commission also wants the DOT – prior to applying to the DEEP – to sample and test sediment in and near the outfall pipe, and quantify the water-quality improvements of the proposed work. Lastly, the commission wants the department to delineate the catchment area draining into the harbor through the pipe.

On Monday evening, the DOT's consultant engineer presented to the commission's **Application Review Committee** its water-quality improvement plan for the highway overhaul. A 1,000-foot vegetated channel and upgrades to the outfall pipe are key elements of the plan.

Pinto praised the concept but asked if the measures will adequately keep oil, gasoline and other

pollutants from entering the harbor.

"Is that going to handle the concentration that's going to come off that bridge or effluent from the side roads?" Pinto asked. "You have a mishmash of chemicals that are coming off the road and the DEEP holds our feet to the fire with regard to heavy metals, hydrocarbons, etc."

Kimberly Lesay, Northeast Manager of **Environmental Resources** for **BL Companies**, said the designer of the proposed system is working on water-quality measurements.

"Do I think we're going to meet the standards in the book?" Lesay said. "No, probably not. Again, keep in mind the scope of the project and that this is a safety and a rehabilitation project."

She said it would be a "completely different ballgame" if the DOT were rebuilding the roadway from scratch.

"Now, we've got room. We can change pipes, we can (create) our drainage systems," Lesay said.

The highway overhaul entails 14 acres of road surface and the state lacks adequate right-of-way land to fully address the amount of drainage, according to the DOT.

Commissioners on Monday located one area they consider ideal: a large, DOT-owned retention pond on the west side of the bridge.

According to the DOT, the pond lies outside the scope of the bridge overhaul and the bridge slope would prevent using the pond for runoff from the east side of the bridge.

As for the unfiltered bridge drains, the DOT has stressed that the bridge overhaul will not alter the geometry of the drainage system. Draining the highway to ensure safe travel is foremost when considering the drainage system, according to the DOT.

For the commission, keeping oil and other vehicular pollutants out of Norwalk Harbor isn't only about protecting shellfish beds and keeping the harbor clean. The city had to contribute \$220,000 to the recent dredging of the harbor to bury pollutants.

The DEEP found the dredged material from beneath the bridge too contaminated to be buried in Long Island Sound. The city money was used to create special disposal cells within the harbor.

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