COHASSET HARBOR

The waterfront and shoreline have a special place in the heritage and identity of Cohasset. Cohasset Harbor has long been at the center of the Town’s history. The area was first visited by English colonists in 1614, when Captain John Smith explored the coast of New England and was reportedly attacked by native Algonquins from what was later called John Smith Rocks. Native Americans used to spend summers in the Harbor area hunting and fishing until they moved inland in the winter.
Although the Town has 6.12 miles of shoreline, only 3.4% of that shoreline is publicly owned, creating the smallest percentage of public coastal frontage of any municipality in the South Shore region from Weymouth to Plymouth.
Fishing activities and shipbuilding continued during colonial times. The Town Pier on Government Island is about 100 years old. While the Harbor was safe, ledge along the coast posed significant dangers to shipping, with reportedly 40 vessels sunk in a period of nine years before 1841. Minot’s Ledge Light was built and completed in 1850, then destroyed one year later by a major storm with the loss of two lightkeepers, who are memorialized in a monument on Lighthouse Lane in Government Island. Rebuilt and completed in 1860, Minot’s was at the time the most expensive lighthouse built in the United States, and as a historic landmark, still marks proximity to the Harbor.

The Yacht Club, founded in 1892, added recreational boating to the existing fishing and shipbuilding activities. Today, recreational boating is the dominant summertime activity in the Harbor, limiting the space available for commercial fishing and supporting activities. Finding a workable balance between commercial fishing and recreational boating was an important aim of the latest Harbor Plan, completed in 1980, and continues to be a priority for current Harbor planning efforts.

Those Cohasset residents who do not live directly on the water gain physical access to the shoreline at Sandy Beach (owned by an association but open to all Town residents), Bassing Beach (also a private association for Cohasset residents located in Scituate), and Cohasset Harbor. Management of Cohasset Harbor is a delicate balance between its small size and multiple interests, including commercial fishing and water-dependent uses, such as a historic Marine Railway, lobster pound, docks and piers; recreational boating and public access; its status as a scenic, historic, recreational, and natural resource; the desire for economic development, including boating and the links to the Village; the needs of nearby residential neighborhoods; and the ability of the Harbor to exacerbate or mitigate the impacts of climate change.

The remaining pages in this section provide a picture of the Harbor, including the historic assets, the civic and nonprofit uses within the Harbor, the infrastructure related to commercial fishing and recreational boating, existing means of public access, and the protective elements in the Harbor including a mix of soft edges and constructed infrastructure.
After this introductory section, this report examines the different elements of the Harbor in more depth, including the watersheet, the edge where water and land meet, the landside conditions and uses, and the connections between the Harbor and Cohasset Village.

Finally, this report presents the recommendation for implementation and modifications to the regulatory standards of Chapter 91 and the consistency between the recommendations of this plan, the policies of CZM and the requirements of Chapter 91.
Note: Check locations with Historical Commission; photocopy of map hard to read.

The Cohasset Historical Commission produced a map of the Captain’s Walk, which identifies some of the historical buildings, structures, and places within the Harbor and provided details about the signage at each station on the walk.

LEGEND

STATION NUMBER ON CAPTAIN’S WALK
SPONSORED BY COHASSET HISTORICAL COMMISSION
Modern names of sites provided in parenthesis if different from the historical names

Supplemental information from Massachusetts Cultural Resource Information System (MACRIS)
TOWN AND CIVIC ORGANIZATIONS IN THE HARBOR

- Cohasset Yacht Club
- George H. Mealy American Legion Post
- Cohasset Harbor Inn
- Olde Salt House
- Atlantica
- Harbormaster
- Lightkeepers Cottage
- Cohasset Sailing Club
- Cohasset Lobster Pound
- James Brook
- The Gulph
- Government Island
- Main Harbor
The Town of Cohasset is fortunate to have many nonprofit organizations that draw people to enjoy the Harbor and the water. Harbor businesses are also a draw, although opportunities exist to enhance the possibilities for more activity on the land to supplement the vibrancy of the water uses.
COMMERCIAL FISHING AND RECREATIONAL BOATING

- Town Pier/ Margin St.
- The Oaks
- Atlantica
- Town Landing/ Lawrence Wharf
- Fishermen's Wharf
- Cohasset Yacht Club
- Harbormaster
- ELM STREET
- MARGIN STREET
- SUMMER STREET
- BORDER STREET
- JAMES BROOK
- GOVERNMENT ISLAND
- MAIN HARBOR
- JAMES BROOK
- THE GULPH

COMMERCIAL FISHING AND RECREATIONAL BOATING
Commercial fishing and recreational boating share similar needs in the Harbor; the challenge is to support the commercial fishing fleet by providing for certain unmet needs while ensuring that recreational vessels of all types are able to safely navigate with minimal conflicts.
Public access to the water includes the ability to walk alongside the water and the ability to be on the water itself. Chapter 91 of the Massachusetts General Laws (The Waterways Act or Chapter 91) protects the rights of public access to Commonwealth tidelands. These rights were first established during the Colonial era and allow public access for fishing, fowling, and navigation. Today, Chapter 91 requires Facilities of Public Accommodation to allow the public to access areas under the jurisdiction of Chapter 91.
Hard infrastructure, such as sea walls or the breakwater, may protect the Harbor and its assets from flooding, but such infrastructure must be maintained on a regular basis, and must be evaluated for the projected increase in regular tides and storm surges based on current estimates of sea level rise.

Streets and pathways may be damaged by flooding, leading increased maintenance costs. However, some pathways along the water’s edge may be designed to flood and allow the floodwaters to recede on a regular basis.

Soft edges, such as tidal flats, marshes, and other wetlands, allow for the absorption of water from flooding but may be less effective if subject to pollution, siltation, infill, or other degrading impacts.