

**TOWN OF COHASSET, MASSACHUSETTS
REPORT ON COHASSET HARBOR AREA**

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COHASSET HARBOR

DESCRIPTIVE SURVEY AND RECOMMENDATIONS

LOCATION AND CHARACTERISTICS OF THE HARBOR

This is a small, crowded harbor which serves local demands and is also a harbor of refuge. The nearest harbor to the south is Scituate, 4.5 miles away, which is even more crowded than Cohasset. To the north there is no nearby harbor which can be reached without rounding the tip of Hull peninsula. Once this is done the harbors of Hingham, Quincy and Boston are all about the same distance, i.e., 16 miles from Cohasset.

The harbor consists of an outer roadstead and an inner harbor entered from the roadstead through a channel improved by the U. S. Corps of Engineers and the Commonwealth of Massachusetts. There are three entrances to the outer roadstead from Massachusetts Bay, each of which is marked with navigation aids. The roadstead is exposed to the full sweep of wind and sea from northwest through north to east.

The entrance to the inner harbor lies about two miles southwest of Minot's Lodge Light and consists of a dredged channel a little more than one-half mile long, 90' wide and 9 or more feet deep below mean low water line. Despite claims to the contrary, this channel is deep enough and wide enough for all present use and for all foreseeable use projected within the scope of this report. The claims that the entrance is inadequate are made almost entirely by skippers of sailing boats who believe they should be able to enter and leave the harbor under sail. When the wind is unfavorable this would require much more than 90' width for tacking and the extra width required for this purpose is not economically justifiable.

The inner harbor receives protection from a breakwater 750' long which was built by the Commonwealth in 1910-11 and through the subsequent years has settled about 5' so that at present the top of the breakwater is approximately awash at normal high tide and may be submerged during spring tides or storms, or both, with subsequent risk to vessels moored back of it. Some boats have been swamped inside the harbor.

Except as noted above, the harbor area behind the breakwater is, in general, well protected and the bottom, except for a few patches of clay and occasional ledge outcrops near the shore, is mostly mud which affords excellent holding ground. No ships or boats have been lost in any of the recent hurricanes or those in 1938 or '44 and the shores have not been substantially damaged by flooding.

At high tide the water area in back of the breakwater comprises 49 acres but at low tide much of the bottom is exposed so that the total water area is reduced at mean low water to just under 25 acres. Because of crowding in the harbor a few of the smaller motor boats may be grounded out at their moorings at low tide.

Such deep water as exists in the harbor has been achieved mostly by dredging. Because silt rapidly accumulates from the swift current emptying into the harbor from "The Gulf" and from other sources, frequent re-dredging is necessary to maintain the required depths.

During the summer of 1960 the harbor accommodated approximately the following totals of watercraft which were constantly kept there. (In addition, visiting boats were present as hereinafter noted.)

- 2 lobster cars
- 2 party boats
- 32 lobster fishermen
- 18 large sailing yachts
- 82 small sail boats
- 19 large motor cruisers
- 155 smaller motor boats
- 9 sailing dinghies and a large quantity of rowing dinghies to serve the above

HARBOR FACILITIES

The principle shore facilities are the Town landings and piers, including Government Island, and the Parker Avenue launching area, the Cohasset Yacht Club facilities, the private piers of Hugo's and Kimball's restaurants, the facilities of a few private estates, Hagerty's factory (beach only), and the Cohasset Boat Yard. The above facilities are described in more detail hereinafter.

FISHING

As noted by the large number of lobster boats moored in the Harbor, this form of fishing constitutes an important part of harbor activities. Other forms of fishing are of very minor importance and other than above-mentioned lobster boats there are no commercial fishing boats based here. However, under bad weather conditions this frequently serves as a harbor of refuge for fishermen who play local waters.

There is no shell-fishing of any importance in Cohasset Harbor or in the adjoining Bailey Creek area.

SWIMMING

Although the water is not polluted and swimming is possible from the Yacht Club and other floats and from the shore line and beaches around the harbor, swimming is not an important activity because the harbor is so crowded with boating activities and because very fine swimming facilities are offered elsewhere in the Town. (See "Recreation")

CHARACTERISTICS OF THE HARBOR IN WINTER

During the winter virtually all boats are taken out of the harbor. A few of these are stored during the winter at the Cohasset Boat Yard but the great majority leave the harbor and its surroundings entirely. The smaller boats are usually taken home on trailers and the larger ones are sailed to winter storage areas in other towns, particularly Scituate, but

also Boston, Quincy, Marblehead, Manchester, etc. Since Personal Property taxes on boats for the State of Massachusetts are levied on the basis of the location of each boat on January 1st of each year, the taxes which accrue by this method are more likely to go to other Towns than to Cohasset.

DETAILED DESCRIPTION OF THE HARBOR BY AREAS

For convenience in description, the Harbor as a whole may be easily divided into four areas, each of which has markedly different characteristics, as follows:

THE COVE

This is the original harbor of the Town, which was fairly well protected even before the breakwater was built. It comprises 7.5 acres at high tide and at low tide there is about 2 acres of water area, with a depth of 2 1/2 - 3'. It was last dredged in 1952, with financial aid from the Commonwealth. The bottom of the deep area is mostly mud but ledge outcrops occur in the vicinity of Kimball's float, at Lawrence Wharf, off Hugo's restaurant landing, and approximately midway between Hugo's and the house on the Cox Estate. The top of the latter ledge is about 3' below mean low water.

Boats usually moored in the Cove include

23 lobster boats, 26-32' long
5 motor cruisers, 20-25' long
40 small boats

There is also a lobster car moored just south of the house on the Cox Estate.

Around the shores of the Cove, beginning at the northeast entrance, are the Cox Estate and, proceeding counter-clockwise, the Margin Street Town Landing (where many tenders are kept and which has 2' of water at low tide), Kimball's restaurant and float, the Border Street seawall, Lawrence Wharf (from which passengers for the party boats are embarked), another Town landing for skiffs and dinghies, the fuel pier and Hugo's restaurant, with its parking area. The fuel pier is reported adequate to meet all existing demands.

In general, boats are not permitted to tie up to the bulkheads and piers surrounding the Cove, but guest vessels are allowed to tie up at Kimball's and Hugo's; 10-15 visiting boats may be seen thus berthed at meal times during the summer season when weather is favorable.

There is nowhere near enough public motor parking around the Cove to meet present demands. However, Hugo's has a private parking space for 81 cars and Kimball's another one for 62 cars. These private parking lots only partially meet the present demands of restaurant patrons. There is a severe shortage of parking for those who wish to embark on the party boats or other boats moored nearby.

MAIN HARBOR AND YACHT CLUB AREA

This comprises approximately 24 acres of water at high tide and 14.5 acres dredged at least 8' deep below mean low water. It is bounded by an old estate now owned by the Trustees of Boston College at the north and then proceeding counterclockwise by the Cohasset Yacht Club, the marshes south of Gleason Road, the Cox Estate, a line running easterly from the Cox Estate to Bassing Beach, Bassing Beach and the breakwater. The dredged area of this portion of the harbor, which appears on the accompanying map, is bisected by the main channel leading to the Cove.

In the portion of the dredged area between the channel and the Yacht Club were moored in the summer of 1960 82 racing class sailing vessels and 8 motor cruisers, varying from 30 to 42', all owned by members of the Yacht Club. This completely filled the available deep water mooring space here. On the other side of the entrance channel were moored 18 large sailing vessels of from 36-62' length and 22 private boats of all kinds whose owners did not necessarily belong to the Yacht Club, and here also anchored, mostly near the breakwater, all large visiting boats except those which tied up to the restaurants. The number of such visiting boats ran as high as 20-30 during weekends with good weather and some of them were 50 or 60' long. The larger visiting boats anchor near the breakwater, which is not a very safe anchorage, because there is no other deep water space available within the harbor. Altogether, the number of large vessels with Yacht Club ownership has risen from 72 to over 140 in the last six years.

The foregoing description of the shores of this portion of the harbor, together with a glance at the map, makes it clear that the only direct access from the shore is at the Cohasset Yacht Club. All other methods of access are by dinghy from more remote portions of the harbor.

Motor parking space for Cohasset Yacht Club members is much too small near the Yacht Club and although an additional parking lot off Gleason Road has been recently acquired, this also is much too small for the Yacht Club. Consequently, Mr. and Mrs. Cox have generously provided parking space at the northwest corner of their property for Club use during times of peak demand. There is no certainty how much longer this courtesy will be extended.

The privately owned stretch of marsh frontage 350' long between the Yacht Club and the Cox property could easily be filled in to provide adequate parking for the Yacht Club but this suggestion has met with no favor from the owner, whose view would thus be severely damaged.

HARBOR AREA BOUNDED BY GOVERNMENT ISLAND, BASSING BEACH AND COX ESTATE

This area, which comprises most of the inner harbor except for the Cove, is bounded on the northwest by the Cox Estate, on the west by the Cove, on the south by Border Street, the Cohasset Boat Yard and Government Island, on the east by Bailey's Creek mouth and Bassing Beach, and on the north by the deep water anchorage previously described. It consists of 11.5 acres at high tide and approximately 8.3 acres at low tide. Of the latter at low tide, 4.3 acres is at least 8' deep, 1 acre 6' deep and 3 acres 2 1/2 - 3' deep. Most of the shallow area is northeast of Border Street or just off the Cox Estate.

In this harbor area during the summer of 1960 were consistently moored 3 num buoys, 1 lobster car, 2 45' party boats, 6 motor cruisers from 30-42', 8 lobster fishermen from 26-34', and 53 smaller boats of all kinds, whose owners did not belong to the Yacht Club. In addition, the Community Sailing Club conducted its operations from Government Island with six boats, each 9'-8" long. These were tied up at the float during good weather and hauled ashore during bad weather. The Community Sailing Club now has 135 members and is expected to own a total of 25 or more of these boats, in the near future.

The Town-owned Government Island contains, in addition to the above mentioned Sailing Club, a town pier used principally by lobstermen, two residences rented by the Town to private families, the Minot Light Memorial and a large amount of high ledgy land between Border St. and the Harbor.

Within the area under discussion there is adequate parking for the present uses of Government Island and Town Wharf but not enough parking at the Boat Repair Yard.

BAILLEY CREEK AREA

This area is bounded on the west by the previously described Harbor Area, on the south by Government Island, the Hagerty Company and the Parker Avenue launching area, on the east by the edge of the deep water in Bailey Creek, and on the north by the inner face of Bassing Beach. It comprises 6 acres of open water at high tide and at low tide approximately 25 acres which is at least 6' deep. The deep water area was very recently dredged with financial assistance from the Commonwealth of Massachusetts. The remaining 3 acres of shallow water cannot easily be dredged any deeper because it appears to be mostly ledge, most of which is in front of the Hagerty Company.

Within this area during the summer of 1960 only 1 large boat was moored; a lobster boat of somewhat over 23'. In addition, some 40 small outboards were anchored or moored here, none of whose owners belong to the Yacht Club. No purely sail boats are kept here because it is too difficult to sail from here into the main harbor.

In addition to the boats normally kept here, nearly all trailer-borne craft used in the harbor were launched from the ramp at the north end of Parker Avenue.

The Hagerty Company which manufactures reproductions of Colonial furniture has its plant on the south side of this area between Government Island and Parker Avenue. The main building of this plant which was formerly a boat shed is approximately 270' long and averages 60' wide. The Hagerty Company has no need for waterfront facilities in connection with its manufacturing operations. It is also true that the Hagerty Company does not provide sufficient parking for most of its employees; they are permitted to use Town-owned Government Island for parking their cars.

The only access to the Hagerty Company for deliveries and shipping is Parker Avenue, which is also the only access to the boat launching area. Parker Avenue is primarily a narrow, residential street which must serve a substantial cluster of year-round homes; nevertheless parking is allowed on one side of Parker Avenue opposite these homes. The residents on Parker Avenue have frequently protested the parking along the street and at the trailer launching area and they have also protested the truck traffic running back and forth to the Hagerty Company.

To the east of the Parker Avenue launching area is a spit of sand and marsh approximately 700' long and 100' wide which borders the south side of Bailey Creek and is not used for any particular purpose.

PROPOSED IMPROVEMENTS

The improvements hereinafter proposed are intended to achieve the following results:

- 1) Improve the safety of the present Harbor.
- 2) Increase substantially the deep water mooring area.
- 3) Provide a better Town Landing with adequate parking.
- 4) Provide central facilities to service lobstering activities.
- 5) Provide better public boat launching area with adequate parking and approaches.
- 6) Eliminate the present Town Landing at the head of the Cove.
- 7) Improve facilities at Government Island.
- 8) Improve and provide more parking on Border Street.
- 9) Provide a small park at the head of the Cove and proposed James Brook Reservation.
- 10) Return Parker Avenue to entirely residential use.
- 11) Provision of swimming facilities at Bassing Beach for both Cohasset and Scituate.

It is to be noted that it is not a function of this report to attempt to solve the parking problems of private groups such as the Yacht Club or of the Harbor Restaurants, except as may occur indirectly through recommendations for the general welfare of the Town which will somewhat relieve parking pressures by moving some public functions such as the Town Landing, to new locations.

DETAILED RECOMMENDATIONS

1. Improve the Safety of the Present Harbor

This is to be accomplished mainly by raising the top of the Breakwater by five feet to bring it back to its original effectiveness during storms or spring tides or both. To do so would require placing about 3200 tons of heavy rock on top of the existing rock.

2. Increase the Deep Water Mooring Area

The two areas which it seems practical to enlarge for this purpose are first, at the bend of Bailey's Creek on the inner face of Bassing Beach and second, by enlarging to the east the present dredged area opposite the Yacht Club and back of the breakwater.

It is not considered desirable to attempt to dredge further in the Cove which has already been dredged to ledge outcrop along most of the south side and along the north side further dredging would probably cause the sea wall of the Cox Estate to collapse. Further dredging between Hugo's Lighthouse and the Cohasset Boatyard is hampered by ledge outcrop and in any case would produce very little water area. Dredging in Bailey Creek on the north side of Hagerty's factory has already been carried to the ultimate limit unless blasting is to be done.

A description of the proposed areas to be dredged follows:

Bailey Creek Small Boat Basin

As previously noted, there is already a dredged basin at the end of Parker Ave. of about two acres which accommodates at present approximately 40 small boat moorings. The dredging in this area was completed in 1960.

It is easily possible to dredge out an additional 7.5 acres in the bend of the river within the Cohasset town limits as shown in the plan. If Scituate is willing to cooperate by allowing dredging on its side of the town line, this area could be easily increased to a total of 13 acres. To insure the cooperation of Scituate some agreement would have to be reached as to who would pay the cost of the work on the Scituate side of the line.

If the dredging on both sides of the town line as described above is carried out, the usable deep water in this area will be increased by more than five times its present size. Furthermore, this new anchorage will be adequately protected from wind and sea by the surrounding land areas which in themselves would be made more substantial by depositing the dredged material upon them.

This new Harbor area would be easily reached by the new roads and serviced by the new facilities and parking areas hereinafter described.

Increase Present Harbor to the East

In our opinion, Bassing Beach must always be retained as a breakwater between the present main Harbor and the proposed Bailey's Creek Boat Basin. If Bassing Beach were completely removed waves would have a chance to build up across the entire width of the Harbor and, in our opinion, would become dangerously large in the vicinity of the Yacht Club and the Cove. However, it is possible to narrow Bassing Beach to about half its present width by dredging a new triangular area with its apex at can buoy D off Government Island and its base constituting an extension of the present straight line of the dredged area between can buoys 7 and A. This extension would be approximately 400' long and would increase the present Harbor by 5.5 acres. If this can be accomplished in connection with raising the top of the breakwater a very fine anchorage for large visiting yachts will be provided.

3. Provide Better Town Landing with Adequate Parking

With the provision of a large deep water mooring area by dredging of Bailey Creek, it is recommended that a new Town Landing with accompanying parking facilities be provided. As shown on the plan, this facility should include necessary bulkhead construction with floats and gangplanks in order to provide loading and service space for the boats moored in the basin.

A large paved service area and parking space for 100 cars are also shown adjacent to the Town Landing. The parking area can easily be extended to the south to provide for additional parking spaces if necessary.

Access would be provided by a new road from Border St. to the landing located along the easterly boundary of Government Island. This road would serve as access to the Town Landing as well as the boat launching facility and to the proposed development at Government Island west of the old Hagerty Factory as hereinafter described.

It should be noted that in the event that a decision is made not to acquire and alter the use of the Hagerty factory and property, the above-mentioned access road would have to be located so as to run to the west of the factory and between the shore of Bailey Creek and the factory and thence to the proposed launching ramp and new Town landing development. This relocation would necessitate minor revisions in the design of the proposed development of the general area.

4. Provide Central Facility to Service Lobstering Activities

It is recommended that although existing and future lobster boats remain in their customary mooring positions in the Cove area and off Government Island a central servicing facility be provided at the existing Town Wharf located at the northwest corner of Government Island. This facility would be reserved for use by lobstering activities solely and would provide for bait and gear storage, fueling and related services.

Access to this area would be by way of the existing roadway from Border St. where shown on the plan, and would be reserved for use by lobstermen only. The existing house should be removed and adequate parking provided for vehicles of the lobstermen in the near vicinity.

5. Provide a Better Public Boat Launching Area with Adequate Parking and Approaches

With the increase of boating activity in the enlarged Bailey Creek Basin, adequate boat launching facilities should be provided. As shown on the plan, these would be located in the vicinity of the proposed Town Landing and would include sufficient paved areas to enable easy launching or hauling-out of boats. Adequate parking for vehicles and trailers and a small landing float and gangplank for access to boats would be provided. Access to the area would be by way of the proposed road as described under Item 3.

6. Eliminate Present Town Landing at the Head of the Cove

With the provision of a new Town Landing in the Bailey Creek Area, it is recommended that the Town Landing at the head of the Cove be removed, both because it is poorly located in relation to service to the greatest number of boats in the harbor and because parking space for people using this landing is severely limited. For similar reasons and because improved facilities for lobstermen are proposed at Government Island, it is recommended that docking and fishing activities at the Town Landing on Border Street be limited to short term use.

7. Improve Facilities at Government Island

It is proposed that Government Island be developed to include facilities for public docking and service of private and party boats owned by residents or visitors to the Harbor, quarters and docking facilities for the Community Sailing Association, a suitable setting for the existing Minot Light Memorial and development of the remainder of Government Island for Town use as a picnic and general recreation area. Parking facilities would be provided to serve all facilities.

The proposed Community Sailing Association and Marine Supply Store might be constructed by public or semi-public funds, or the land leased from the Town and the building constructed by private interests. The public dock would include provisions for fueling and other type marine services for all boats in the Harbor.

The existing sea wall should be repaired and a new bulkhead constructed, as an extension of this sea wall, to provide space for the above-mentioned boating facilities.

The existing house and garage should be converted to serve as a residence for a caretaker and his family who could thus more easily provide supervision and maintenance of the facilities.

8. Improve and Provide More Parking on Border Street

It is proposed that a new sea wall along Border St. be constructed as shown on the plan. This would enable the widening of the street, the provision of short term parking along its south side, and construction of a pedestrian esplanade and tree belt between the wall and the street.

9. Provide a Small Park at the Head of the Cove with the Proposed James Brook Reservation

As indicated elsewhere in the Master Plan Report, the existing Fire Station located at the head of the Cove is scheduled to be abandoned. It is recommended that this structure be razed and a small park and sitting area be constructed on its site. The park would be connected to the esplanade described above and would consist of a small landscaped area with suitable planting, paving, sitting areas and an appropriate central feature such as sculpture or a fountain. This park would be opposite, and visually connected with, the proposed James Brook Reservation across Elm Street.

As indicated in the Recreation Section of the Master Plan the marsh land at the rear of the properties along Elm St., South Main St. and Summer St., through which James Brook flows should become a Town Reservation. In order to visually connect this area with the proposed park at the head of the Cove and to provide an open attractive setting for this area, it is proposed that the Town-owned American Legion Building, the small unattractive block of business structures and the building containing offices and apartments be removed. This area would then be suitably landscaped and the marsh land cleaned up and made accessible to the residents of Town as an attractive natural open area. It also has the further merit of being a good storm water retention basin during periods of very high tide when the drainage culvert from this marsh into the Cove is not operable.

10. Return Parker Ave. to Entirely Residential Use

As shown on the plan, it is proposed that through traffic be eliminated by construction of a turnaround at the end of Parker St. When this is done general parking of cars and boat trailers by the public using the facilities in Bailey Creek should be prohibited.

11. Provision of Swimming Facilities at Bassing Beach for Both Cohasset and Scituate

As indicated in the Recreation Section of the Master Plan Report, the only large swimming beach in Town available to the residents of Cohasset is at Sandy Beach on Atlantic Avenue. However, this beach has reached a saturation point with no reasonable possibility of expansion. Because of this fact and in view of the anticipated increase in population in Cohasset the provision of future swimming beaches should be planned for at this time.

The proposed waterfront park at Pleasant Beach on Atlantic Avenue (see Recreation Report) might in the future provide for limited swimming facilities. However, this beach is stony, small in size and would require costly groins or breakwaters to eliminate the dangerous surf and undertow.

It is recommended, therefore, that long-range plans in coordination with Scituate be initiated to acquire and develop Bassing Beach between the Cohasset Harbor breakwater easterly toward Briggs Harbor. This area has approximately 2100 feet of beach frontage and could be developed in several stages consistent with the demand for space and facilities.

Some of the advantages of this beach are as follows:

- A) Excellent location to serve both Cohasset and Scituate.
- B) The area has not been privately developed extensively, therefore requires no costly land and building acquisition.
- C) The beach provides for a large area of safe shallow water for use by young children. Those wishing to swim in deeper water could use the Outer Harbor area beyond the sand flats or a lagoon might be dredged out to provide for a large warm water swimming area.
- D) There is sufficient space available for construction of ample parking, bath house, play areas or other recreation facilities.

Access to this beach would be provided by an extension of Otis Avenue across Bailey Creek to the high ground east of the Creek and thence to the outer harbor side of Bassing Beach.

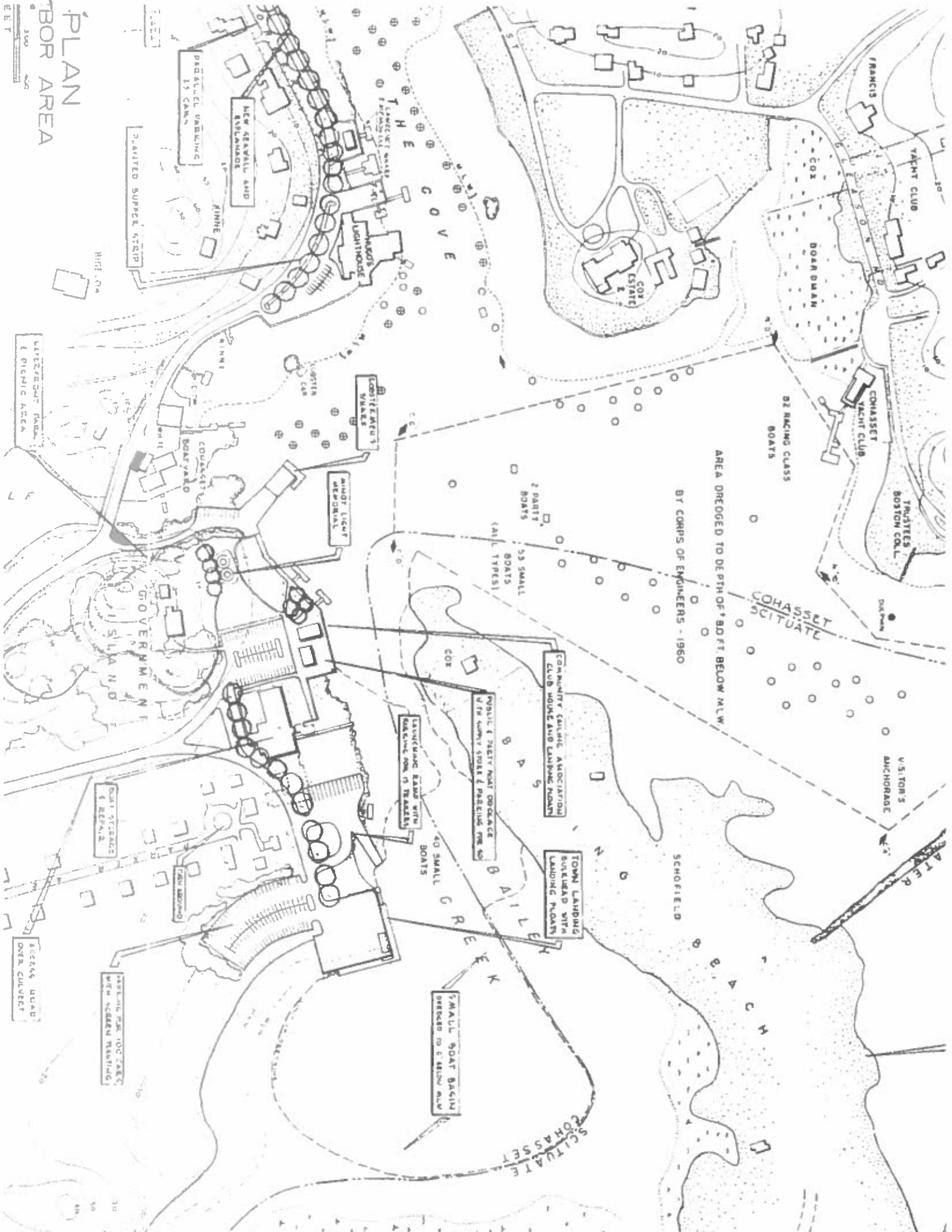
In estimating the cost of the foregoing improvements to Cohasset Harbor and surroundings, financial assistance from the Commonwealth of Massachusetts may be expected, and has been allowed for in the Capital Budget Program section of the Master Plan Report, on the following basis:

- A) Proposed dredging and disposition of dredged material in the Rear vicinity - 75% of the cost by the State 25% by the Town.
- B) Construction of improvements, including bulkheads, new sea walls or repairs to existing, increasing the height of the breakwater, boat landings, etc. - 50% of the cost by the State, 50% by the Town.

Although no Federal assistance has been allowed for, under certain conditions financial assistance from the U. S. Corp of Engineers may also be available and the possibility of obtaining such aid should be thoroughly explored.

PLAN BOR AREA

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