

Conservation Advisory Council | City of Newburgh, New York

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November 3, 2016

Mr. Craig Lapiejko
Waterways Management Branch at Coast Guard First District,
408 Atlantic Avenue
Boston, MA 02110

RE: Docket USCG-2016-0132 Proposed Barge Anchorages

Sir:

The Conservation Advisory Council (“CAC”) of the City of Newburgh is adamantly opposed to creating permanent anchorages for commercial barges in the navigable channel of the Hudson River. We join the many Hudson River communities and private citizens calling for the Federal Government to reject the proposal.

It would be a perversion of justice for your Agency to approve this proposal that will absolutely reverse the public benefits achieved over decades of cleaning up and protecting the Hudson River. This proposal is antithetical to the shared interests of the City of Newburgh and all of the other communities that these sites would impact.

Your Agency states that, “We are considering this action after receiving requests suggesting that anchorage grounds **may improve navigation safety**allowing for a safer and more efficient flow of vessel traffic”. Where is the evidence leading to this suggestion? Those requests were from the Maritime Association of the Port of NY/NJ Tug and Barge Committee, the Hudson River Port Pilot’s Association, and the American Waterways Operators. Their implications are self-serving.

The proposed Newburgh site calls for 5 permanent anchorages covering 345+ acres of our Hudson River, mid-channel between the Cities of Newburgh and Beacon. It calls for 1800’ swing circles to compensate for barges shifting with the tides, storms or wave disturbances caused by river traffic.

1. Cleanup of our Hudson River has been a decades-long effort with the goals of increasing safe public recreation, preserving natural habitats and increasing our tourism economy. As the result of these efforts, we in the City of Newburgh now celebrate:
 - Ward Brothers Park and our renowned Newburgh Rowing Club. Ten years ago a toxic skim remained on oars dipped into the river. Now Newburgh Rowing Club competitions are safe for our children and Northeast regional competitors. Is it safe for 5 anchorage sites to sit off Ward Brothers Park?
 - The Newburgh-Beacon Swim is an annual fundraising event, drawing hundreds of swimmers, kayakers and volunteers, demonstrating the benefit for communities of a cleaner Hudson River.
 - The Orange County Triathlon includes the Hudson River swim. This never could have happened without a determined commitment to clean up our Hudson River.

- The newly-opened Waterfront Trail along our City's shoreline offers 180 degree views of the Hudson River – south to West Point, and north past the Newburgh-Beacon bridge. The trail is a significant achievement of public access to unparalleled scenic beauty and the shoreline's natural habitat. Historically significant views are now enjoyed, unobstructed, by our residents and tourists. .
 - The growth of tourism, supporting our local water-related businesses such as marinas and tour boats, restaurants, and a burgeoning cultural hub for art and music.
2. Natural Habitat Damage from Anchor Drag: The facts are that anchors naturally shift, churning up the river bed. These barge parking lots will constantly be in motion; anchor drag will disturb the Hudson River bed. River bed disruptions are life-threatening to sturgeon, shad, stripers and the entire aquatic food chain. River bed disturbance will also dredge up pollutants such as PCB's, cadmium, mercury, dioxin, PAH's....pollutants that have remained buried until now. We cannot allow this.
 3. Light Pollution. The proposed anchorages will have 24/7 stadium lighting, allegedly to prevent accidents with river traffic. (See the perpetual lights on the barges between Manhattan and New Jersey). For the City of Newburgh, stadium lighting is a disruption at the expense of hundreds of properties (businesses, public parks, households) whose quality of life and tourism values rely on the ambient view shed.
 4. Industrial Noise & Air Pollution. The tug boats accompanying these barges run diesel engines on a continuous basis. Once again, environmental degradation at the expense of the public. Pollution from diesel fuel, incessant engines.....the public must not be subjected to the consequences of private interests' perceived needs.
 5. Where is the Public Benefit? Special interest groups are proposing anchorage sites at the expense of the public interest. Restricting recreational use of thousands of acres of Hudson River for the benefit of the oil industry? Risking our major asset? Just one leak in a barge hold. Just one spill, just one accident. The public cannot afford the risk. Sensitive river ecosystems cannot tolerate the risk. We should not be asked to make these sacrifices. It is your responsibility to protect the public's interests.
 6. Environmental Justice for The City of Newburgh. Bakken Oil trains run north/south along our shoreline, virtually unregulated. The Pilgrim Pipeline is exerting extreme pressures to insert a 'spur' from the west to our southeastern border to connect with Global Oil on the Hudson River. Our CAC has already joined many other communities in opposing petroleum product-carrying trains and the Pilgrim Pipeline. Now that land opposition is so intense, are we to be held hostage by permanent anchorages in our navigable channel? Is there no relief from the oil industry? Is it 'Too Big to Fail' and 'Too Cheap to Pay'? We've not been offered compensation for the hazards we are facing; to be clear, **no amount of money is worth jeopardizing our community**. Private industry could apply to the Army Corps of Engineers to dredge their own properties for barges to "park" at their own docks. Dredging also means 'dredging up' – further environmental problems which might cost the oil industry money. Private industry's dilemmas must not become the burden of communities along the Hudson River.

Respectfully submitted,

Chuck Thomas, Chair

Cc: City of Newburgh City Council
City Manager