



Working together with our community

Council-In-Committee Meeting – June 12, 2025

Subject: Marina Business Sustainability Plan
Report Number: CAO-25-067
Division: Office of the Chief Administrative Officer
Department: Administration
Ward: Multiple Wards
Purpose: For Decision

Recommendation(s):

That the Marina Business Sustainability Plan be received as information, and

That \$10,000 be allocated to removing the remaining derelict/abandoned boats at Port Dover Harbour Marina, and

That \$2,000 be allocated to advertising seasonal and transient marina slip availability and winter storage space availability, and

That \$2,000 be allocated to initiating a security camera and ramp payment pilot program for the launch ramp at Port Rowan Harbour Marina, and

That the unbudgeted expenditures be funded from the 2025 Operating Surplus/Deficit marina budget, and

That the following Action Items be referred to the 2026 Budget:

- Annual marina advertising budget
- Annual derelict boat removal budget
- Port Rowan Pier inspection
- Port Rowan automated gate and digital payment technology
- Port Dover dock gates

Explanation: This report outlines preliminary findings suggesting a Municipal Development Corporation could provide a viable path for marina operations, but formal sustainability recommendations will await Urban Metrics' December 2025 Municipal Development Corporation (MDC) feasibility study and complete 2025 operational data including the impact of increased user fees. The recommended budget allocations will address 2025 action items identified in the attached report and refer 2026 items to the 2026 budget.

Executive Summary:

Purpose of the Report: To present February 2025 marina public engagement results, update Council on marina status, share preliminary sustainability findings pending the 2025 season outcome and MDC feasibility study, and outline a path forward for 2025 that establishes the foundation for a potential MDC transition subject to Council approval.

Background and Context: Norfolk County Council retained ownership of both Port Dover Harbour Marina (PDHM) and Port Rowan Harbour Marina (PRHM) in October 2024, recognizing the need to address their long-term financial sustainability.

Key Findings and Analysis: This report presents preliminary findings from staff analysis, indicating that achieving marina sustainability will require innovative governance solutions and strategic partnerships that go beyond traditional municipal operations. From initial review, an MDC structure offers the most promising path to marina sustainability. An MDC would enable Norfolk County to maintain public ownership of the marina assets while providing the operational independence needed to pursue partnerships, attract private investment, and respond to market conditions with business-focused governance rather than municipal processes. PRHM may be better suited for integration with Norfolk County's parks system, recognizing its primary role as a public waterfront amenity. However, an MDC structure may provide greater flexibility to explore creative partnerships and alternative revenue streams that traditional municipal operations cannot pursue. The feasibility study and business case expected in December 2025 will provide the detailed analysis required to assess this governance model's viability and implementation requirements.

Conclusions: Port Dover Harbour Marina has strong potential for enhanced financial sustainability, but requires substantial capital investment that cannot be met through traditional municipal funding or user fees alone. Preliminary analysis indicates a Municipal Development Corporation structure would provide the ideal framework to facilitate private partnerships and achieve long-term sustainability while maintaining public ownership.

Port Rowan Harbour Marina functions primarily as a community waterfront park with limited commercial potential, requiring continued municipal support despite modest revenue enhancement opportunities. The site could either be included under an MDC to explore partnership options or reclassified as a waterfront park under Norfolk County's Parks department, with both approaches preserving public access while maximizing its tourism and community value.

Preliminary analysis suggests an MDC is emerging as the optimal strategy, as the current municipal model lacks the flexibility and financial capacity for necessary long-term investments at both marinas. An MDC structure could maintain public ownership while enabling private capital investment to drive commercial development at Port Dover Harbour Marina and transform Port Rowan Harbour Marina into a vibrant

community and tourism asset, all with the assistance of a local oversight governance model.

Discussions:

Staff have identified Action Items for 2025, most of which can be addressed with existing staff resources. However, some items will require budget allocations, including:

- **Marketing and advertising** seasonal and transient slips and winter storage availability to improve revenue generation and area tourism;
- **Removal and resolution of derelict boats** at Port Dover Harbour Marina:
 - Staff note that this is an annual occurrence throughout the marina industry that requires ongoing budget allocation;
 - There are legal and operational costs associated with boat removal;
 - PDHM had 20 abandoned boats on site at the beginning of the 2025 season;
 - At the time of this report, our Marina Manager has accomplished the removal of 7 of these boats at no cost;
 - The remaining 13 will require legal processes and/or removal fees.
- **Security and payment improvements** at Port Rowan Harbour Marina: staff recommend installing a security camera at the launch ramp to improve fee compliance and investigating the implementation of QR code technology for digital fee payments (if feasible) for 2025, and tracking the results to determine impact.

For 2026, staff recommend:

- Continued allocation for **marketing** and **derelict boat removal** budgets
- **Pier condition assessment** at Port Rowan to evaluate structural condition, identify deficiencies, and forecast capital expenditure requirements. The inspection could also assess the feasibility of adding seasonal slips and/or boat house waterlots to improve marina revenue;
- **Enhanced access control**: automated gates and digital payment systems at Port Rowan's launch ramp (if feasible), and security gates at PDHM dock entrances to provide secure boat owner access as the marina becomes more publicly accessible.

See attached Marina Business Sustainability Plan for the complete report.

Financial Services Comments:

The unbudgeted expenditures identified within this report, including marketing and boat removal at PDHM, and security/payment improvements at PRHM, totaling approximately \$14,000 are recommended to be funded from net marina revenues (surplus/deficit) for the season. This will reduce the surplus amount contributed to the marinas reserve but will not impact the General Levy.

Capital items identified within the sustainability plan will be included within the Proposed 2026-2035 Capital Budget and Plan for Council's approval, including but not limited to: Port Rowan Pier inspection, Automated Gates and Digital Payment Technology in Port Rowan, and Dock Gates at Port Dover. The funding structure for marinas capital will be re-evaluated at that time as part of the budget development process based on more current information.

Any direction received on user fees based on the analysis presented within the sustainability plan will be incorporated in the annual user fee update in the fall for Council's review and approval and included in the Proposed 2026 Levy Budget accordingly.

Annual Levy Budget allocations for advertising and derelict boat removal will be included within future Levy Budgets if supported by Council. Ongoing requirements are not expected to be material.

Implications arising from the ongoing MDC study will be assessed upon completion later this year.

Interdepartmental Implications:

2025 action items will be addressed collaboratively by cross departmental staff. Findings and recommendations will be reviewed by Senior Leadership and reported to Council in Q4 2025.

Consultation(s):

This report was developed collaboratively with input and review staff from across Norfolk County, including the Chief Administrative Officer, General Manager of Operations, Marina Manager, Finance and Economic Development staff, with research contributions from Norfolk County's summer students.

Public consultation was conducted in February 2025, with feedback integrated into report findings. To establish benchmarks and identify best practices, staff consulted with municipally-owned marinas throughout Ontario, as well as privately-owned marinas within Norfolk County for comparative analysis and benchmarking of user fees and operational models.

Research methodology also included reviews of previous marina reports and strategies, complemented by site visits to both marina locations to assess implementation feasibility.

Strategic Plan Linkage:

Choose an item.

Empowering Norfolk – Putting the tools and resources in place to ensure our businesses and residents success.

Attachment(s):

- Norfolk County Marinas: Business Sustainability Plan Update

Approval:

Approved By:
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Reviewed By:
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