

## \*Sunset Boat Ramp FAQ



Proposed  
Bluewater Yacht Sales  
Expansion

26 Feb 2020

### **Q. Why does Bluewater Yacht want to buy the public boat ramp and parking lot on Sunset Creek?**

A. Bluewater Yacht has been interested in the property for many years. They own the property on both sides of the ramp, and they would like to expand and consolidate their operation. The city-owned land is in yellow (above), and Bluewater's property is in blue.

They have proposed the purchase before but never reached a final sale with the city. A better ramp with more amenities has been proposed since 2005.

### **Q. What does Bluewater do?**

The title of the company is Bluewater Yacht Sales, but they also repair boats. The business has been in Hampton since 1971 and has grown into a full-scale yachting center and marina with nearly 200 slips. Hampton remains the headquarters, but a merger with another company means there are now locations in Baltimore, Grasonville and Ocean City, Md.; Gloucester Point and Virginia Beach, Va.; Wanchese, Beaufort and Wrightsville Beach, N.C.; and South Florida. The Hampton property is off Ivy Home Road on Marina Road.

**Q. What is the proposed expansion?**

The purchase of the land would allow them to add a 150-200-ton crane to service larger yachts. The expansion would add 55-80 high-wage jobs. Bluewater offered to pay the assessed value of the property (\$536,600) and also agreed to do environmental cleanup of the adjacent shoreline.

**Q. Why would Hampton consider selling a public boat ramp in a city that has so many boaters?**

A. The city did not offer to sell, but was contacted by Bluewater with the sales offer, called an unsolicited proposal. The economic benefits, job growth and environmental cleanup were reasons the city decided to consider the sale. Plus, the ramp has been viewed as inadequate by residents for some time. Issues cited since 2005 include limited amenities, parking, and a very long, narrow strip for boat launches that many complained about.

Recent traffic counts show the ramp averaged about 34 users per day, with traffic heavily tilted toward weekends, which saw about 60 boats per day.

**Q. Wait, hasn't this happened before?**

A. Almost. The city's oldest home, the Herbert House, sits on Bluewater's property. It was badly damaged during Hurricane Isabel in 2003, and Bluewater officials were going to demolish it. The Herbert House is a historic landmark that was built in 1757. (The land is especially well known because that's where Blackbeard's head is believed to have been displayed on a pike in 1718.) The city agreement to sell the boat ramp to Bluewater was related to Bluewater's agreement to allow the Herbert House to be saved and renovated. That plan moved forward.

Minutes of the meetings also note that the city's Parks department at the time had "concerns about the adequacy of the current ramp," and money was appropriated for a new ramp.

However, the resolution that City Council approved in January 2005, authorizing the city manager to enter into sales negotiations, had a key clause: The city had to find a suitable location for a new ramp first. As time moved forward, two things happened: The city had not found a suitable site for sale and the assessed value of the ramp escalated, likely increasing the price. A deal was never reached.

**Q. Wouldn't we still need a replacement ramp?**

A. Initially, staff and City Council members thought the Fort Monroe boat ramp would be an acceptable replacement. The fort had been decommissioned in the intervening time, and the ramp at the marina there had been opened to the public. Both ramps are on the southern side

of the city (as opposed to the other city ramps) and offer boating access to the Hampton Roads waterway and the Chesapeake Bay. However, when a public hearing was held, boaters noted that many of them head into the Hampton River, not the bay, and needed better access and more protected waters, particularly for smaller craft.

**Q. Why do we think we can find a new location this time when we couldn't before?**

A. That's why City Council took a step back and formed an advisory task force. Members are charged with trying to find a solution that satisfies boaters, residents and the expansion of a local business, if possible. Also, owners of waterfront land who didn't want to sell in 2005 may be willing to sell now.

**Q. It still seems like the city tried to sneak this through and be less than transparent.**

A. It went through the same process as all city land deals and rezoning. It may have felt different because of the times. The Planning Commission had not been meeting since February due to the coronavirus and this was the first meeting back. They had a lot of requests lined up. The public hearing notice was in the Daily Press **DATE**, the agenda and package were posted to the website June 1, and the proposed sale and public hearing item was listed in the city's electronic newsletter on June 2, in advance of the Planning Commission hearing.

Residents can learn more about what the city is doing and what public hearings are upcoming by subscribing to enews at: <https://hampton.gov/beinformed>.

**Q. Who is on the Task Force? How can we know what they're doing?**

A. Council received emails from many people who wanted to serve on the committee. All of the people who offered to serve were considered, along with other known representatives of the boating community. The goal was to be diverse in terms of boating interests (fishing, pleasure boating, sailing, kayaking); demographics (gender, ethnicity, age); to have some neighborhood representatives (from both sides of Sunset Creek); and to select a group of individuals who could impartially and fairly evaluate the matter. Although there are some technical experts on the committee, the goal was more to hear from members about what they believe would constitute a "win-win" for a potential boat ramp. Technical evaluation will be done by qualified engineers and shared with the Task Force and Council once potential sites meeting the desired criteria are identified.

**Q. What if, again, a good site can't be found?**

A. City Council said in 2005 and again in 2020 that they would not sell the ramp unless a suitable replacement can be found/built.

**Q. Can the city afford to build a new ramp if they do find a site?**

A. We don't know yet. We're taking it one step at a time, but we are looking into potential grants or funding assistance.

**Q. What about the concerns of neighbors about traffic?**

A. Traffic shouldn't increase substantially. The yachts that will be repaired using the giant new crane are so big they're expected to come by water, not on a trailer. Additional jobs at the repair yard would create a few more car trips. A recent traffic count shows about 400 cars per day on Marina Road. The popular seafood restaurant Surf Rider is at the end of that road.

Of course, moving the ramp could reduce traffic on Marina Road slightly, depending on where the new one would go.

**Q. What about other neighborhood concerns, like noise?**

A. The city has some leverage to negotiate conditions on the sale and/or rezoning of the land. If the decision is to sell, the views of residents will be sought.

**Q. How can I keep up with what's going on?**

A. The meetings of this Task Force are open to the public. You can find out about them and check for updates and meeting minutes here: <https://hampton.gov/3781/Sunset-Boat-Ramp-Advisory-Task-Force>.