



CONNECTICUT PORT AUTHORITY

– ready to move in 2019

With a focus on the state's three deepwater ports, Connecticut also looks to foster commerce that leverages offshore wind, shortsea opportunities and local entrepreneurs.

By Tom Ewing

The Connecticut Port Authority (CPA) has been in operation for almost three years, established by the governor and legislature to better coordinate efforts to improve upon Connecticut's maritime economy, including a major focus on the State's three deep water ports: New London, New Haven and Bridgeport. The CPA, though, has a big picture vision and its focus includes small harbor improvements, ferry and cruise opportunities and system maintenance, particularly dredging.

It wasn't always like this. Prior to CPA's establishment, port management decisions and development were housed in the state Department of Transportation. Importantly, however, the CPA is still linked to DOT; in fact, the DOT Commissioner – Jim Redeker – is on the Board of Directors.

Real Progress, More Work Ahead

Giving real emphasis to the state's considerable coastline assets, perhaps for the first time in decades, the CPA has, in a short period of time (a.) introduced a merit-based approach to maritime investment (b.) is overseeing a major redevelopment of State Pier in New London – the largest maritime/port asset within the PA's domain; new State Pier work which may include facilitating a growing Atlantic wind energy market and (c.) CPA established the type of updated management systems expected within a modern state port authority. From a policy perspective, Connecticut is investing to integrate its maritime assets into state and regional transportation systems.

In August, CPA released a Maritime Strategy document – “Connecticut Port Authority Local Waters. Global Solutions” – outlin-

ing big-picture ideas and eight “Strategic Objectives” to develop new maritime opportunities. Many are market-based opportunities, presenting economic advantage; representing low hanging fruit, waiting for action.

Consider, for example, highway congestion and level-of-service problems on I-95. The traditional roadway fix would expand right-of-way and add new lanes, increasingly difficult in urban areas. The Port writes that “congestion on I-95 is not sustainable,” that trucking solutions are limited, and suppliers, reminded everyday that highways are way over capacity, are looking for transport beyond the almost total reliance on trucks.

One new alternative could include freight shipments along CT's coastline, on Long Island Sound, just a couple miles south of I-95. This is within very familiar territory and within a logistical operation that is timely, predictable, less costly and part of the well-established federal Marine Highway System.

In the Strategy document, CPA's first Objective is linked to managerial improvements, particularly at State Pier. CPA wants more bang-for-the-buck from port operations. Change is timely because State Pier's existing operating lease terminates on January 31, 2019. CPA officials call State Pier “an under-utilized state asset.” They are seeking a new port operator ready to “think ambitiously” so that “State Pier can be redesigned to accommodate a wider range of opportunities, including the staging of wind turbine components and the introduction of new commodities like conventional cargo.” A request for proposals for a new operator was issued in June; responses are being evaluated now.



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– Evan Matthews, CPA’s Executive Director



The Hammonasset Beach State Park beach restoration project. Dredge material taken from Housatonic River to restore beach at state park.

New Opportunities

Evan Matthews, CPA’s Executive Director, is hopeful and at the same time, pragmatic. “Our goal is to find an operator who can help us achieve the highest and best use for State Pier and we have no pre-conceived notions about what the highest and best use is,” he told *MLPro*, adding, “The marketplace is helping us answer that question.” A new contract will likely include performance incentives to encourage the kind of creative thinking required to maximize State Pier revenues, activities and the port’s mix of cargo.

The wind turbine focus is a good example of new opportunities. Ocean-based wind energy offers State Pier the chance to be front-and-center for emerging projects linked to legislatively mandated energy generation priorities. CPA highlights the fact that New London is the only major port between New York and Maine that is free of vertical obstructions and offshore barriers – a necessity in the assembly of offshore wind turbines. Again, nothing is settled. Matthews commented that “we see the potential (with wind) but we have not reached any conclusions yet on the highest and best use of State Pier as it relates to wind development. The

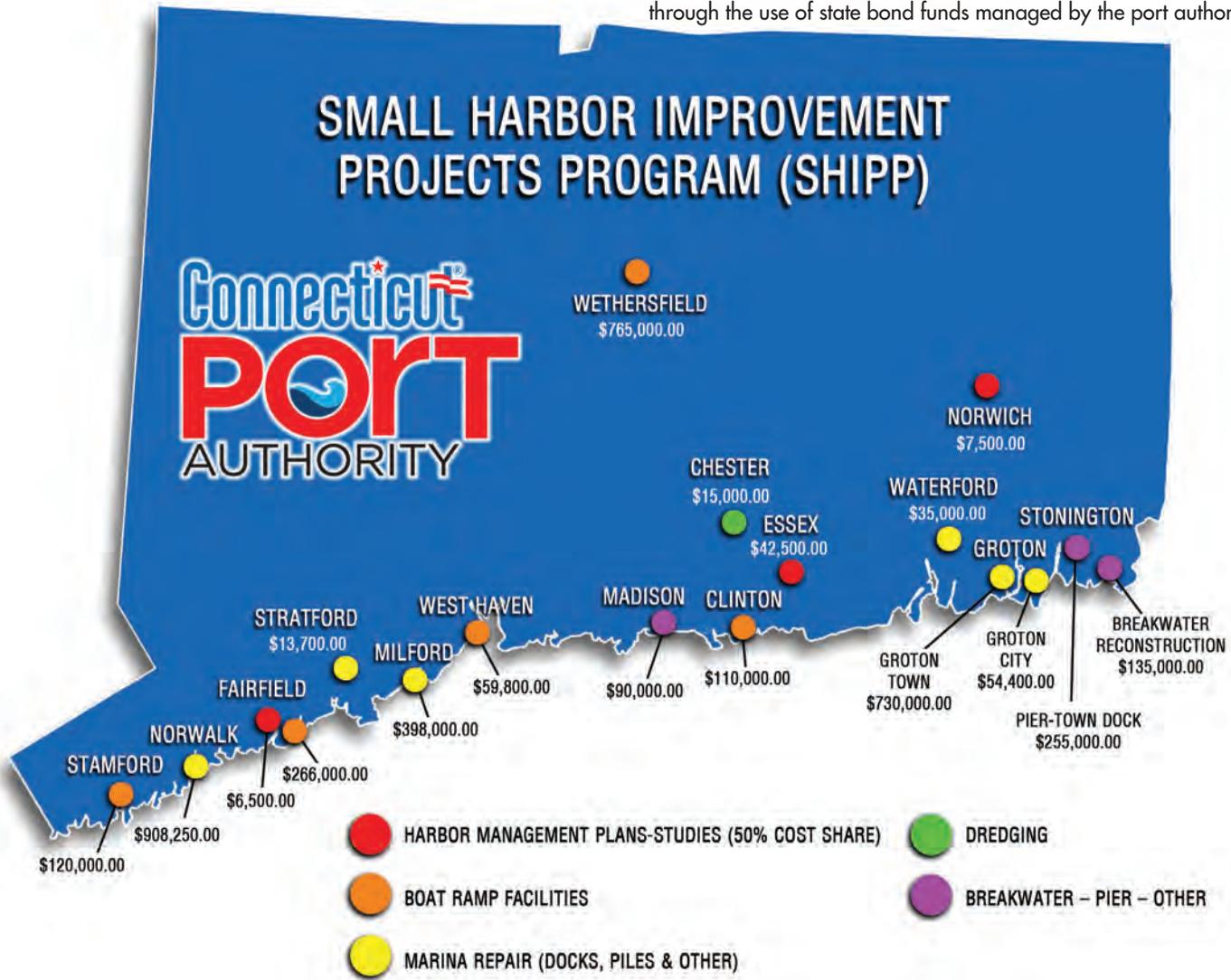
market will help us decide if that is the direction we head in.”

Second, port staging is drawing planners’ attention. Officials will evaluate how increased containerized business could be managed profitably in the state. Currently, break-bulk cargo (other than fuel) dominates CT’s deep-water ports. CPA’s Strategic Object #5 calls for “innovative solutions to enhance intermodal shipping options and identify complementary cargo flows.” Again, containerized cargo could use water transport, moving freely along Connecticut’s coastline compared to trucks stuck on I-95, just a few miles away. That beckons to shortsea shipping solutions fed by niche coastwise feeders.

A new focus on containerization will also include evaluating “inland ports,” entities which could “capitalize on land available outside the port districts for both cargo and container storage.” Currently, Connecticut’s ports are not equipped to handle containers. CPA cites two main reasons: lack of available land for container storage prior to and after shipment and the physical needs of larger vessels in CT’s ports and Long Island Sound.

The Strategy specifically cites new opportunities to move food

The graphic is a depiction of “small harbor improvement projects” statewide funded through the use of state bond funds managed by the port authority.



and perishables, for ports to reclaim a once-important service lost to competitive logistics. Referencing I-95 congestion, Port officials believe that CT’s location, via its waterways, can provide an “alternative entry point for perishable and food products headed to the New England market.” Port officials cite preferences and demands for local, organic and fresh foodstuffs, from apples to fish and meat, products for which brief – and predictable – transit is critical.

One company ready to move into this new/old space is Harbor Harvest, based in Norwalk, CT. HH is a full-service food company: it has a restaurant, a catering service, a brick-and-mortar grocery, it grows and sells herbs and is ready to start up – likely in March – one very unique additional service: maritime transport among farms and farmers in CT and Long Island.

Harbor Harvest Underway

Bob Kunkel is one of HH’s principals and owners. His firm has contracted with Derecktor Shipyards to build a 65-foot all-aluminum catamaran vessel that will be used to pick up and deliver produce, meats and dairy products from local farms on both sides

of Long Island Sound.

Kunkel explained that there are a number of logistical factors favoring his new venture. First, it’s difficult for small, local farms to reach customers farther than 15-20 miles away, despite market demand, which is increasing in his region, Kunkel said. These local shipments are almost always below full truckload scale. “There’s a big difference between local shipping and global shipping,” Kunkel pointed out. Additionally, he said that local officials don’t like 18-wheelers making deliveries in small city centers. The delays and unpredictability on major roadways are, for food, counter to notions of “fresh,” at the heart of higher value.

Kunkel said many CT farms are near rivers and harbors. And, that’s important because his catamaran draws just 3 feet. As cargo, most farm goods are shipped on pallets and moved by forklift or a jack-lift. His boat will have RO/RO capability with refrigerated storage. Capacity is about 28 pallets. His plan: a grower meets him at the dock, say, in Norwalk, and Kunkel ships it east to Bridgeport, or south, across the Sound to Huntington, Long Island. The buyer either picks up the pallets at



Harbor Harvest Under construction

Credit: Robert Kunkel

the dock or Kunkel can arrange for the “last mile” of ground transport. Quicker, predictable, fresher and competitive. Kunkel thinks customers will be drawn to the environmental pluses with his service – decreased ground-based transport impacts along with decreased CO2 emissions since his vessel will be a hybrid battery-diesel combination.

Kunkel was asked about the priorities he would emphasize considering CT’s new Strategy. He said an operation like his looks for support in two ways: development that rebuilds a working waterfront, one that meets commercial needs and harbor access, again for commercial operations, not just, say, for recreational boaters who might need a marina.

For Kunkel, Connecticut’s moves are timely. “Places are looking for this kind of service,” he said, adding that “growth is out there.” He is confident his market could eventually require 12 delivery boats providing service from New Jersey to Rhode Island.

On the Radar

One of the biggest challenges with moving from planning to actual projects is funding: establishing designated revenue streams to pay for large-scale investments in port infrastructure and equipment. It can be difficult to fund non-highway/non-road transportation projects that cannot draw from state/federal fuel tax accounts. Undoubtedly CPA will find some new revenue as CPA reworks expectations from State Pier’s new management team. Money and expenses, and opportunities and challenges, will be clearer when CPA’s 2019 budget is released in early February.

The Coalition for America’s Gateways & Trade Corridors

(CAGTC) is a Washington-based trade organization established to raise public and Congressional awareness of federal transportation funding for freight. One of the Coalition’s core planks is “Give Freight a Fund,” an advocacy effort to develop what CAGTC calls a “National Strategic Freight Mobility Program and Trust Fund (FTF).” CAGTC wants federal officials to “explore sustainable revenue sources across all modes.” They write that this does not have to be “overly burdensome” and they note that capturing just a “small fraction of the value of the commodities moved would generate considerable revenue.” That future value is expected to be strong. CAGTC references Federal Highway’s prediction a few years ago that freight shipments between 2010 and 2040 will grow to an estimated \$39.5 trillion annually, with \$10.3 trillion transported intermodally.

CAGTC suggests a policy goal in which the price of goods support and internalize a “portion of the cost of expanding related infrastructure, such that growth in demand for moving goods delivers proportional funding for related infrastructure improvement.”

Without a doubt, the Connecticut Port authority plans to be active in freight advocacy. Executive Director Matthews explains, “We see it as part of our responsibility in meeting the core mission of the agency as outlined in the enabling legislation. The goal is to enhance Connecticut’s maritime economy to create jobs. Being engaged on a regional basis and nationally is part of that effort.”

The Author



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