Granite Pier Committee – Letter on Fueling Station at Granite Pier

It is with a unanimous voice that the Granite Pier Committee apposes further assessment of a fueling station of any kind be located at Granite Pier. The GPC contests several of the Granite Pier related findings put forth in the April 2021 ‘Draft Assessment Study’ conducted by Weston & Sampson Engineers. Furthermore, we ask that the Board of Selectman uphold their assertion at the conclusion of the public session of the meeting held on February 25th, 2020 at the Rockport Community House, stating public forums for questions and opinions would be held on the matter of a fueling station in Rockport prior to further action being taken. The GPC has not been contacted by the Community Preservation Act Committee for any input on the matter, however, the CPC internally approved $9,950 for the above-mentioned report without public input. The Granite Pier Committee members are in opposition to the proposal for the following reasons:

1. **Seasonal Congestion:** The report by Weston & Sampson was conducted during April when there is NO traffic at Granite Pier, commercial traffic in April of 2021 was further curbed by state ordered closure of lobstering for right whale migration. During the summer season Granite Pier sees a huge increase in traffic and congestion by nature of being the only public boat launch in the town. This creates a parking constraint which is already an issue on busy summer days. Lower pier parking is residents only and the upper pier is often full during the summer with day trippers with trailers, parking hikers, bird watches and sightseers. A point of congregation, such as fueling station, will create more traffic and passenger loading/unloading of which the pier cannot support during summer months. There are NO public rest room facilities, and this too is already problematic in the summer months. Another serious concern is existing docks do not support the current traffic and launching pace on summer days. Lastly, to the point of congestion, Granite Pier is a commercially functioning harbor the nature of which should and needs to remain part of the immediate area and town. The charter of Granite Pier describes its use to remain in part as a commercial landing. The end walls of Granite Pier are used by commercial lobsterman daily to load and unload gear, bait, and their catch. Seafood vendors, bait suppliers and fuel trucks need access to these deep-water areas of the pier to support the commercial fishing fleet not only for the boats in Granite Pier but by other’s who keep their gear and bait there.

2. **Feasibility:** The lack of requested input by those who have spent years of their lives at Granite Pier is puzzling. The very idea that a fuel line could reach a boat off the southern wall at low tide is implausible. As proposed, the risk to spillage appears extremely high and the method of use is very atypical. We suspect novice and experienced boaters alike would have an issue navigating this mode of fueling. There is currently very limited tie up space at Granite Pier and only about 60 feet of dock accessible by ramp. New infrastructure would be required and there is no mention of this need in the report. The feasibility as a town to undertake this venture does not appear, nor has it been expressed, to make financial sense especially with a season of only 3 to 4 months of the year.

3. **Fact checking:** The GPC feels the Weston & Sampson report has information worth double checking. The GPC argues the FEMA map was not accessed properly and contest that the
proposed location in fact is within the VE (high velocity) Zone 36. Furthermore, the Weston & Sampson report implies that the work proposed in an Army Corp of Engineer’s report was contingent on the town furthering a public landing with “provisions for the sale of motor fuel, lubricants and portable water”. However, this Army Corp report excludes Granite Pier as a location of their study.

4. **Environmental**: There are 3 environmental concerns the GPC brings forth in contest to the proposal of a fueling station anywhere in the Town of Rockport.

   a. Without question there is an inherent risk with a substance such as fuel and the ocean. All boaters take on that risk no matter how or where they choose to fuel their boats. The proposed method of fueling leaves the responsibility, but likely not the liability, of fueling to the customer. These customers are potentially sun baked, distracted, tired and could be under the influence of alcohol. Does the Town of Rockport want the legal and environmental liability of this on its shoulders or in our water?

   b. Noise pollution is a real issue on the water. Whether you are stocking a striper, relaxing on your sailboat or on the back deck of your home; if you are lucky enough to be near the ocean you hear motorboats. In the Summer, the traffic has been increasing in our little bay. The offshore racing boats are not going away, but right now they remain offshore, there is no reason for them to come to Rockport as they head to Boston or Provincetown, why entice them with a pitstop.

   c. The view from shore is all that most get to enjoy. A few of us have the luxury to be on the water looking back. Both directions and all the angles in between are important. Just like the historic downtown has the responsibility to maintain the character close-up, the distant vistas and backdrop for the millions of pictures taken from our shoreline should be preserved. Keeping these backdrops intact is commonly overlooked but will not be forgotten by generations to come who wonder “why did they ever allow that to be there?”

5. **Lost Revenue**: Granite Pier is one of few town income producers. We take this responsibility seriously and want it to be known that, as proposed, a fueling station would impact the current income collected from seasonal trap and boat storage. Furthermore, the parking of cars and trucks with trailers in the upper pier creates 3 times that of a single car. The cost of a fueling station installation, its maintenance and management, insurances etc. obviously needs to be researched and presented to the towns people before further development, however, the above-mentioned revenue is real income the town is already taking in of which would be lost with the proposed being located at Granite Pier. The GPC also wonders if the fuel location, as proposed, would restrict the ability for Rockport to host the “Illumination” fireworks display? This has been a great source of pride and advertising for the town since its inception and it would stand to reason that many commercial people in town would suffer from its absence.
The GPC reiterates its opposition to the proposal and further pursuit of a fueling station at Granite Pier. We ask the Selectman and the residents of Rockport review the subject beyond the immediate convenience of a fueling station. Observe the possibility that this proposal is simply another piece of a puzzle by a small group interested in the commercialization of Rockport. As the pieces come together you will see what looks a lot like a marina at Granite Pier. First a staircase (which the GPC supported for safety reason), a proposed fueling station, then public restrooms and facilities, a gathering pavilion, a floating pier, finger docks. This leads to another costly venture into the idea of enclosing the pier to create a MEGA harbor. If that is the end goal, then it should be presented as such without hiding behind false information of a gas dock promising “income for the town” and “the attraction of tourists”. The preservation of our community needs to be considered, and despite the title of the Community Preservation Act Committee, this group seems to be spearheading a campaign to do the opposite. The cost of to the town here is far beyond dollars and cents. For 50 + years Rockport has been a hub of boating activity, all without a fueling station.

In conclusion, the GPC requests a more open dialogue with all future development ideas, proposals, and ventures of which Granite Pier is considered. This includes any and all changes to the landscape or management of Granite Pier of which we have been tasked to maintain for the town and its residents.