



# BAY BLASTING APPROVED TO MAKE WAY FOR WAR MACHINES

by TIM FAULKNER / ecoRI News

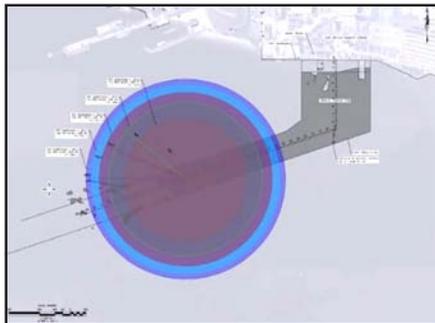


Despite opposition from Save The Bay, the Coastal Resources Management Council (CRMC) has approved blasting a portion of Narragansett Bay to accommodate the construction of nuclear submarines.

The project put forth by the Quonset Development Corporation (QDC) includes a new pier, Navy vessel construction facilities, and a 395-foot custom barge that will move parts of a new class of ballistic missile submarines between Quonset and New London, Conn., for defense contractor General Dynamics Electric Boat.

At its Dec. 8 meeting, the CRMC board gave a full-throated endorsement of using explosives to dislodge undersea rock to complete a new shipping channel, saying QDC had done its homework on the application.

Three CRMC board members, including chair **Jennifer Cervenka**, cited national security as part of their reasoning to approve the project, despite the fact that military readiness isn't something council members are asked to consider when weighing coastal development proposals.



The plan includes a 1,500 foot exclusionary zone around the blast. This area will be monitored for sea life.

National security, Cervenka said, “added support for this project that there is a compelling security interest here.”

CRMC board member **Donald Gomez** said the project should be approved for “the greater good.”

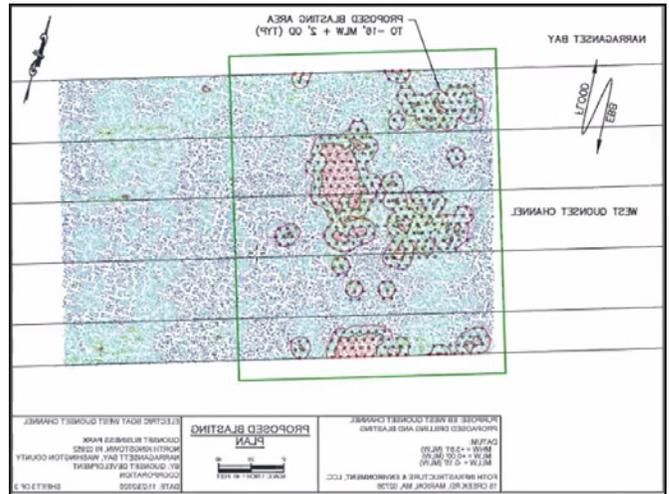
“The greater good is really the protection of the United States and getting so that we are on a parity again with the Chinese and especially the Russians,” Gomez said.

Fellow board member **Michael Hudner** agreed with Gomez’s “greater good” assertion, saying that new submarines serve “a compelling national interest.”

The state’s coastal zoning council is asked to “preserve, protect, develop, and where possible, restore the coastal resources of the state for this and succeeding generations.” Also, “the preservation and restoration of ecological systems shall be the primary guiding principal upon which environmental alteration of coastal resources shall be measured, judged and regulated.”

Cervenka and CRMC executive director **Jeffrey Willis** declined to elaborate as to how undersea blasting for a military project meets that mission.

Save The Bay opposed granting the permission to blast because of the risk of harming or killing marine life, an act often referred to as “taking.”



The location of the charges with the new channel

“There’s no way to guarantee that there will be no takes of marine mammals, specifically seals,” said **Mike Jarbeau**, baykeeper for Save The Bay.

Jarbeau said Save The Bay is discouraged that QDC ignored local knowledge and conditions in the waters within Narragansett Bay’s West Passage. The proposed blasting, scheduled for this month and next, approaches the peak population of seals in the bay and is taking place near Rome Point, the most populated seal haul-out site in Narragansett Bay.

Save The Bay is concerned that pressure to complete blasting before Jan. 31 “has led QDC to ignore the clear evidence that seals will be present and active in the project area,” Jarbeau said. “Based on this information, there is an extremely strong potential for seal harassment or injury.”

He noted that QDC also failed to consider alternative routes once it learned that a rocky area was in the proposed channel. “Despite that, the project proceeded, leading to these last-minute changes to address the rock in time to meet the dredging window,” Jarbeau said.

North Kingstown resident **Arthur Hamilton** noted that there is ample time to find alternatives to blasting since the construction has yet to begin on the new pier and the custom barge is still being built.

A former marine engineer, Hamilton suggested the use of a cutter drill to breakdown the rock. He also said the rocks could be left in place and the barge could navigate the channel during high tide.

“Explosives are the last worst thing we want to do,” Hamilton said.

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