

The Long Beach Marina Boat Owners Association (BOA) presented its final 2009 Speakers' Forum on Tuesday night at the Seal Beach Yacht Club. About 50 boat owners attended.

The forum's topics were marina maintenance and the Alamitos Bay Marina (ABM) rebuild.

Speakers were Ramon Arevalo, manager of maintenance operations; Hurley Owens, superintendent, marina maintenance operations, and Mark Sandoval, manager of the Long Beach Marine Bureau.

Marine Safety officer Don Wetteland opened the meeting by thanking BOA and the boaters for helping win funding for the city's Rescue Boat No. 3, which had been threatened with eliminated in budget plans.

Arevalo unveiled a new plan for marina maintenance. He said he will assign four workers to each of the large basins in the Alamitos Bay Marina, for a total of 26 workers. They will have full responsibility for all maintenance work seven days a week, he said.

"I've walked the docks. I've seen the needs," Arevalo said. "You've been very very patient with us. We owe you a lot of service. In the next two months, you'll see results."

Owens echoed his boss's commitment to improve maintenance. "If you have any problems, come to me. If I can't get it done for you, it can't be done," Owens said.

The city spends more than \$3 million a year on marina maintenance, most of it in the Alamitos Bay Marina, which is the oldest city marina and still has decaying wood gangways. Lack of upkeep and repairs has been one of the biggest sources of boaters' complaints in recent years.

Sandoval endorsed the new maintenance approach taken by Arevalo. "The maintenance teams will be taking ownership of the basins," he said.

Sandoval began his update on the much-needed and long-delayed ABM rebuild with the news that a major public meeting on the plan will be held Thursday, Oct. 8, at Wilson High School in Long Beach.

The hottest topic at the meeting promises to be the opposition of the Long Beach rowing community to Sandoval's plan to add slips by extending the gangways in Basins 3 and 4 into the waterway.

This expansion will narrow the waterway, which the rowers say will bar them from staging the larger, six-lane regattas they would like to host. Mixing boaters and rowers in the narrower channel also raises safety issues, Sandoval said the rowers have told him. "Our kids will be in danger," he said the parents of young rowers have said.

Sandoval told the boaters that he has already made changes in the plan to permit five lanes, up from the current four lanes. The rowers are demanding six lanes, he said.

He added that he is optimistic that a compromise can be reached with the rowers. "I don't want a conflict to drag out the rebuild," he said.

Any continuing controversy would slow the progress of the ABM rebuild as it wends its way through the multi-stage approval process, which includes the city Planning Commission, City Council and the Coastal Commission.

BOA Executive Vice President Carl Kirnbauer, who moderated the meeting, asked the boaters to show Sandoval that they supported his rebuild plan. The response was rousing applause.

Sandoval also addressed three other major issues ensnaring the ABM rebuild. They are eelgrass habitat in the marina, mercury contamination in the silt in Basin 1 and funding for the project.

On eelgrass, Sandoval said federal regulations require that three acres of eelgrass be replanted in the marina, to replace the eelgrass removed by dredging and to cover potential eelgrass habitat

He said there is no way he can meet this requirement, which he called unrealistic. He has offered to replant 2,000 square feet of eelgrass in Marine Stadium, but “that’s it,” he said. “Our EIR (environmental impact report) will challenge the policy,” he said, “and I don’t think we’ll lose on the issue.”

On mercury contamination, he said 25,000 cubic meters of silt in Basin 1 contains significant levels of mercury. No source for the mercury has been found by marina staff and consultants. He said it would cost \$4.5 million to dredge the silt and truck it to a landfill in central California, pushing the cost of the project even higher.

Sandoval suggested a possible solution, saying he is working on a deal with the Port of Long Beach to use the mercury-laden silt in port projects.

On financing for the rebuild, Sandoval had some encouraging news. He said the state Department of Boating and Waterways (DBW) had agreed to loan the marina between \$8 million and \$10 million more than the \$19 million already agreed to, bringing the financing for Basin 4 within easy reach.

But, he added, the additional money is contingent on getting the rebuild started quickly. “We need to get the money spent,” he said.

Sandoval said he hopes the EIR will be completed in the next two weeks and before the Planning Commission in December. He hopes to start the rebuild in July or August, 2010.

BOA’s Speakers’ Forums, which address the major issues of importance to the 3,000 boaters in Long Beach’s marinas, are produced by BOA board member Pat O’Connor. The forums will resume next year.

For more information on BOA, go to its website, LBMBOA.org.