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Docks, Fun Facts to Know and Tell

During the real estate boom years of 2005 through 2007, waterfront homes on San Juan Island appreciated around 8-10% per year and homes with docks appreciated around 13%. Docks have always been a coveted property amenity as they truly allow easy access to boating; the reason many want to live on an island.

Many, many years ago, docks were easy to obtain and were often used for making a living such as fishing, crabbing, commercial boat use and marinas. In today's environment, docks are very difficult to obtain. The last few residential docks that were constructed were shared and took 2+ years with most of the delays within the Corps of Engineer's various departments. Total costs for the legal fees, hard and other soft costs were in the range of \$200,000-\$400,000. Reportedly, the legal fees were in the range of 25%-40% of the total but this varied based on the amount of opposition and delays.

Even if you have the funding, there is no guarantee that your dock application will be approved. It is possible, but you must have a strong desire, be stress resistant and have deep pockets.

I pretty much tell my clients that processing a dock permit is a difficult option; they need to buy a home or lot with an existing dock, if having one is in their criteria. Further, considering one of the public marina facilities is another solid solution.

The property owners on the non-ferry serviced islands without community moorage have a less difficult time obtaining permits as the County can't argue they have a feasible alternative, however, they may view a mooring buoy as an alternative. The process for an outer island dock is the same and their cost of construction is similar but their attorney's fees may be less due to less opposition.

We have many different sizes and types of docks in the islands as all are custom-built. The older docks are mostly wood with creosote pilings. Newer docks include grated plastic material on the piers, floats and aluminum ramps to let in the light. The pilings are all concrete/metal. These new docks are all environmentally friendly based on current technology.

Docks that were installed prior to the creation of our permitting department in the mid 1970 (s) are considered grand-fathered-in and permitted repairs can be made. Any structure repairs such as piling and float replacement must be permitted. Smaller repairs such as replacing a few boards also requires a permit.

Under the Shoreline Management Program, if you are replacing 33% or more of the structure, or 200 square feet, it is necessary to bring the replacement section of the structure up to current code; i.e. g. using functional grated materials.

Over the years there has been concern over the “porcupine” effect of docks on our shoreline; we didn’t want to become Lake Washington. As per the assessor’s records, we currently have 460 piers in the County, located on our 2,489,800 lineal feet of shoreline. Other than manually counting, I was unable to determine how many of the 460 piers are public or marina facilities, such as Roche Harbor, Port of Friday Harbor and other County piers. The assessor conducted their survey by counting the piers; not floats ramps or slips.

The majority of the private, shared or community docks are located in the protected bays, however; there are some seasonal docks in the channels. The seasonal docks have their

floats removed during the winter season and their ramps elevated to protect them from the winter storms.

It was estimated that 10% percent of the total are deep water docks. In the real estate industry and at the assessor's office, we consider 6 feet at zero tide to be a deep water dock; and that typically can handle *most* power and sail boats, except at the minus tides that we have during the year in the summer. During those tides, some owners must move their boat to a mooring buoy located in deeper water, or go to Roche Harbor for lunch during the tide change.

The rest of the docks vary in depth and many go dry during the low tides. It is common practice with those docks to just trim up the motors and let the boat nestle in the mud. You fish around the tides anyway, so the impact to the owner isn't a major event.

When the tax assessor's office revised how they valued docks from cost approach to market approach, they measured the **approximate** depths and recorded the information in the County assessment records. Now they have a sophisticated formula to assign market value to each dock based on size and type of materials used. In my opinion they are still behind

market value, but I am confident that anyone undervalued, will report themselves to the assessor's office.

If you are buying or listing property and need to know the dock depth, you can now contact the assessor's office for that information.

The County assessor website records also reflect the size of your piers, ramps and floats. Further, I have been told that the Friends of the San Juans also recorded dock sizes throughout the County to aid in monitoring changes made without permits.

As an agent, when we value a dock for marketing purposes, we consider the amount of listings with docks currently on the market and formulate that into the equation. Further we know that it is extremely difficult to obtain a dock, so the existing docks are very valuable, even if they are in poor condition. I typically assign a value of \$300,000 to a private dock with pilings, even if it has deferred maintenance. If it is in good condition and has a boat house, the value goes up. If it is shared, the value is divided by the number of users.

If the dock lacks pilings and has just an anchorage system, it is of less value.

If the property is assigned a slip on a shared dock, I value that similar to one of the condominium boat slips at the Cannery or Warbass; about \$1250 per foot in length, subject to market conditions and the location of the slip. This is based on the average price per foot of the last few slip sales.

If the property has a community moorage such as Brown Island or Cape San Juan, additional value is assigned as well.

Currently there are waiting lines at many of the resort marina facilities as boating is truly a popular past time of islanders.

Mooring buoys are a good alternative although it can be difficult to make the transition from your dingy to the larger boat on the buoy. Age and flexibility must factor into the process for some of the boat owners. The County favors buoys over anchorage due to the lack of destruction to aquatic vegetation from pulling the anchor.

You can install a registered mooring buoy for around \$1500-\$2000 that meets the Corps of Engineers and County standards. New registered buoys must be in 16 feet of water.

Another viable option, when the beach is suitable, is installing permitted beach access stairs with a platform to store your dingy or kayak. As long as the platform is above the ordinary high water, this structure is not considered a dock. Beach stairs are also more favorable to the environment as they consolidate the people traffic on the stairs versus having numerous trails down the beach that can contribute to erosion.

Docks will always be in demand and will elevate the price of homes that already have them by at least the cost to install one, if not more. In years past, I only assigned \$100,000 to the value of a dock but times have changed.

I am one of the fortunate property owners that have a dock; of course it is shared and my fees to attorney Stephanie O'Day were only \$6000 and the cost to construct was only \$30,000. This was in 1992, so a lot of changes have happened in the last 25 years.

We have attorneys and consultants in our County that have been successful in processing dock permits and those individuals are referenced below.

I have noted that the Canadian Geese deem the eel grass one of their favorite foods and are a cause of depletion. In

reviewing dock applications, that information isn't recognized in the process of whether a dock should be approved. It makes sense that docks are viewed as the source of harm to the environment not nature as the government can do something about the docks but not nature. The regulations have functioned as designed; the consequences, whether intended or not, have made docks cost more, take longer and are more difficult to obtain.

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