

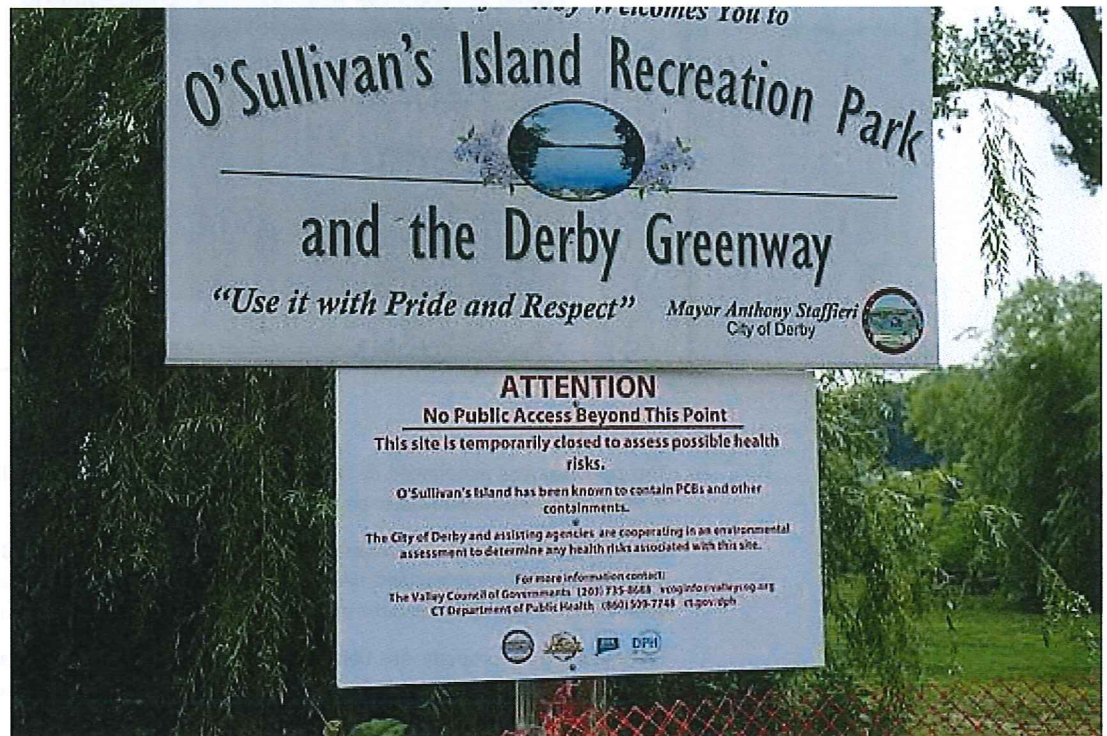
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## Derby Fishing Pier Project Resurfaces

BY **Eugene Driscoll** 1 SEP 14, 2015 3:23 PM

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POSTED TO: Derby



A sign at the entrance to O'Sullivan's Island in Derby.

The O'Sullivan's Island fishing pier project in Derby is moving forward -albeit six years after it was first announced.

Derby Mayor Anita Dugatto said Sept. 1 the city was given a \$325,000 grant through the U.S. Fish and Wildlife Council to build a handicapped-accessible fishing pier at O'Sullivan's Island, a city-owned property under the Route 8 bridge between Derby and Shelton.

"This opportunity, the result of successful collaboration among community partners, brings us one step closer to our goal of restoring recreational use to O'Sullivan's Island," the mayor said in a prepared statement.

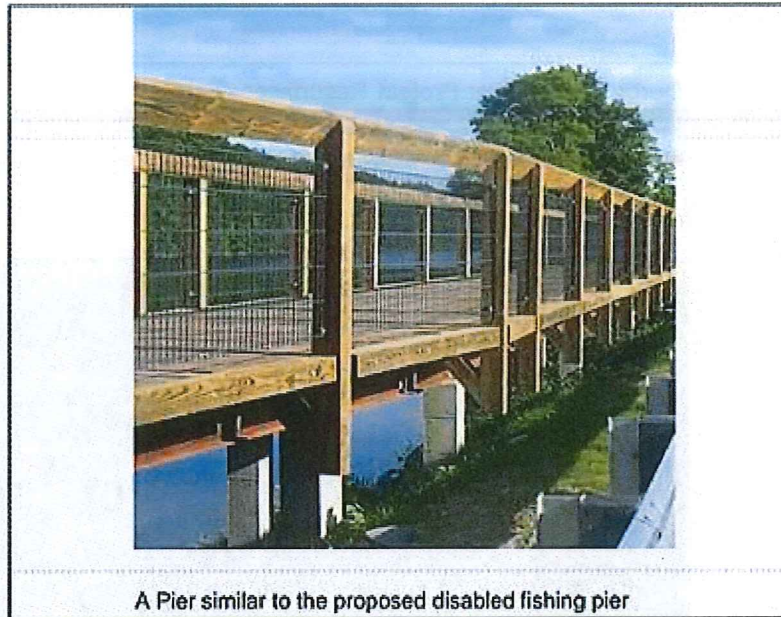
### About that Pier

The fishing pier is a project meant to establish the property as one of the the best places to fish in the state.

A project description authored around 2007 notes the waters along the property have Atlantic salmon, walleyed pike and striped bass. In addition, the property is easily accessible from Route 8 and Metro-North Railroad.

An image from the old project description is embedded below.

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The grant was first announced by Derby City Hall and the Valley Council of Governments in the summer of 2009. Work was supposed to be completed in 2010.

But the project never moved forward, officials said, because Derby couldn't get "certification" from the state saying O'Sullivan's Island, which has a long and varied history of contamination, was good to go — even though it was opened to the public in 2009 after being closed for a number of years.

Technically, if the property isn't being sold and is only being used for passive recreation, Derby does not need state certification, Patrick Bowe, the director of the state Department of Energy and Environmental Protection's remediation division, told the Valley Indy last year.

But a state sign-off is needed if the city wants to declare the property "remediated" and remove it from the state's list of hazardous properties.

So to build a fishing pier or make other improvements, the city needs the state to certify O'Sullivan's Island is clean, as defined by the state's standard.

In addition to being a place to illegally bury barrels full of PCB-infected dirt, O'Sullivan's Island was once used as a dumping ground for residents. Firefighters also had a training facility on the property for decades.

While contractors for the federal Environmental Protection Agency conducted an "emergency removal" of tons of contaminated soil and drums laced with PCBs in 2009, the city never completely investigated or chronicled the other potential contaminants in the ground, according to Rick Dunne, the executive director of the Naugatuck Valley Council of Governments (formerly known as the Valley Council of Governments).

Internal memos between the Valley Council of Governments and former Mayor Anthony Staffieri's administration show there were private discussions taking place over the O'Sullivan Island issues (such as the 2012 memo embedded below), but none of the memos were made public until Dugatto took office.



VCOG to Derby Mayor March 2012 by ValleyIndyDotOrg

O'Sullivan's Island has been closed to the public since Jan. 15, 2014 because of those lingering concerns over soil contamination. Here's video of the Aldermen closing the property shortly after Mayor Dugatto took office.

Since then, the City of Derby and the Naugatuck Valley Council of Governments have been using grant money to test the soil.

The state Department of Health drafted a report on the contamination, which was reviewed by a federal environmental agency.

The basic conclusion -the soil at O'Sullivan's Island is contaminated, but doesn't pose a threat to the public as long as no one digs down into the dirt.

Staffieri's administration pointed out this is the precise information the EPA gave when they did their work in 2009.

But the additional testing, according to Dunne, is why the city was finally able to get the grant money to build the fishing pier. In addition, the additional testing needs to be done to protect Derby from potential lawsuits.

The Board of Aldermen still haven't voted to open the property to the public yet -though the public is constantly out there, especially fishermen. O'Sullivan's Island will likely reopen once the testing is fully complete, assuming there are no surprises.

"It seems to me that O'Sullivan's could be reopened," Art Gerckens, president of the Board of Aldermen, said in an email, "but first I would like to hear from the O'Sullivan Island Advisory Board and then I'd like to schedule a special meeting to discuss with the Aldermen. In my opinion, we're very close to reopening."

The mayor's Sept. 1 statement said the pier will be designed this year, "with construction slated for completion in early fall 2016."

The construction will require extra care because of the contamination.

"We're going to have to dispose of anything we dig up during construction," Dunne said.

Dunne talked about O'Sullivan's Island during an Aug. 31 appearance on "Valley Navel Gazing," this publication's FM/Internet radio show on WNHH in New Haven.

The interview is posted below. The O'Sullivan's Island discussion begins around the 40-minute mark.