

Town of Charlestown
Office of the Harbormaster

May 20, 2024

Notice:

As Harbormaster, it is my duty to bring to your attention some major changes that have occurred within our waterways this past year. These changes, although natural, will affect navigation during the 2024 boating season. It is our sincere hope that early notification, and the sharing of information, will help alleviate some of the preventable problems on these popular waterways.

Heavy coastal storms rocked the south coast of Rhode Island in late 2023 and early 2024. These storms resulted in significant changes to our coastal features. The Charlestown Breachway, and to a lesser extent the Quonochontaug Breachway, have been altered in such a way as to affect boat navigation. Extra caution should be taken when using these waterways this season.

The most notable change boaters will experience is in the Charlestown Breachway. This breachway has seen significant deposition of sand within, and in front of the channel. These large sand deposits are a result of heavy erosion along the coastline that has migrated into the breachway. Boaters will also notice that the West wall of the Charlestown Breachway (the East Beach side) has been compromised where it meets the shoreline. On any given day or tide you will now likely experience a cross current that flows into and out of the breachway over the eroded wall near the beach.

The navigable channel within the Charlestown Breachway changes slightly every year. However, this year the navigable channel has changed significantly. Be patient, use caution, and be respectful of other boaters when using these waterways. Depth to maneuver within the channel has diminished, so plan your route and look far ahead for oncoming boat traffic or obstacles.

There is a large sandbar in the center of the channel between the State campground and "Elbow Beach". This bar requires that boaters keep to the West side of the channel and navigate closest to the shore. Boaters, please beware of this hazard and keep to the West side until these conditions change. The edge of the sandbar is marked with a red buoy.

We ask that those boaters typically accessing "Elbow Beach" to consider alternative locations to anchor and recreate. Anchoring a vessel at "Elbow Beach" will likely now cause the boat or anchor line, to be within the navigable channel. This creates a hazard to navigation and is preventable. The Harbormasters and police will be in this area this summer, please comply with their directives in an effort to help us keep this area safe for all users.

Lastly, there is now a large sand deposit in front of the Charlestown Breachway, just off shore. At low tide this sand bar may be visible and boaters can run aground if they don't pay attention. Use caution when exiting or entering the breachway to avoid this hazard.