

Museum submarine nears its end, but will it be sunk or scrapped?

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The U.S.S. Clamagore has been closed to the public for more than four years (Image: Patriots Point)

A derelict former museum submarine in Charleston Harbor is likely experiencing its final years afloat. But the question of what will happen to the World War II-era vessel remains unanswered. Officials at Patriots Point Naval and Maritime Museum have warned since 2012 that they can no longer maintain the USS Clamagore after more than 35 years, nor possess the resources for the comprehensive repairs the submarine needs. A longshot effort by a nonprofit to relocate the vessel to Tennessee also never really got past the conceptual stage, according to museum executive director Mac Burdette.

“As much as we would love to see that happen, we don’t see any hope that is going to occur,” Burdette told South Carolina Radio Network.

An environmental consulting group visited the Clamagore last month to see the extent of cleanup it needs before it can be either sunk to create an artificial reef or transported to Brownsville, Texas for scrap metal. The company will present its report within the next three weeks.

Burdette said museum officials would prefer to see the sub turned into a reef, preferably off South Carolina’s coast. However a Florida city has expressed its willingness to pay the entire cost to sink the vessel off its own shores. That city has not yet been publicly identified.

“We all would like to see her go to a future use that’s still going to benefit this country,” he said. “And there’s pride in that.”

At issue will be the cost. The Clamagore requires an extensive removal of hazardous chemicals, asbestos and equipment before it can be placed along the ocean floor. While the formal estimate is still underway, museum officials are using a ballpark figure of roughly \$3 million to sink it off South Carolina. Burdette said Patriots Point is working with the state Department of Natural Resources to see what other funding sources are available for the museum.

The Florida option would be less costly for the museum, but city councilmembers there are also awaiting the formal estimate before approving any funding. Whatever option the Patriots Point board chooses must also be approved by the US Navy.

Burdette said a final decision is needed soon, however, and preferably within the next year. While the Clamagore is still able to sit at a dock near other museum ships, Patriots Point officials worry it could sink should a major hurricane hit the Charleston area again.

“Another Hurricane Hugo could very easily fill her full of water and down she’d go,” he said. “Then we not only have a problem of raising her, but we probably have an environmental issue to deal with, as well.”