



HANNAH WEIKEL / THE ARK

Water covers the curbs on the south side of Cove Road Place in Belvedere and is ankle deep on the north side on April 18 after a water main broke around the corner at Beach and Cove roads.

Burst pipe floods roads, knocks out water service

Same pipeline in Belvedere broke just seven months ago

By **HANNAH WEIKEL**
 hweikel@thearknewspaper.com

An April 18 water-main break at Beach and Cove roads released some 26,800 gallons of brownish water into the street in about

30 minutes, flooding a low area on Cove Road, leaving about 100 homes and businesses without water and reducing water pressure throughout Belvedere and much of southern Tiburon.

The break, which was reported

by a resident about 4 p.m., occurred in an 8-inch cast-iron pipe near 2 Cove Road that was installed in 1950, said Emma Detwiler, communications specialist with the

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Sam's reopens with fresh new look - and a live music permit

Tiburon council denies appeal, OKs daily music on deck

By **DEIRDRE McCROHAN**
 dmccrohan@thearknewspaper.com

Sam's Anchor Cafe will get to have live amplified music daily on its outdoor deck.

In an April 17 appeal hearing that lasted about an hour and a half, the Tiburon Town Council heard from a Belvedere couple and several of their supporters who said long hours of live, loud rock music would interfere with the peaceful enjoyment of their homes. The council ultimately voted unanimously to deny the appeal, allowing the restaurant, which reopened the next morning after a six-week remodel, to offer daily music from 11:30 a.m. until 9 p.m. Fridays and Saturdays and until 8 p.m. Sundays through Thursdays.

But the Tiburon Planning Commission's original January approval of live music, and the council's decision last week to uphold it, hinged in part on an understand-

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ELLIOT KARLAN / FOR THE ARK

Sam's Anchor Cafe welcomes patrons arriving by sea with an old refrain from original owner Sam Vella now painted on the waterfront facade. The restaurant reopened April 18 after completing a major six-week renovation.

99-year-old eatery undergoes major nautical renovation

By **DEIRDRE McCROHAN**
 dmccrohan@thearknewspaper.com

Bootlegger Sam Vella used to tell people to "tie up to the pier," urging them to visit his Tiburon

waterfront restaurant by sea, where the docks below his dining deck could accommodate up to 12 boats.

On April 18, 27 Main St. eatery Sam's Anchor Cafe reopened to the

public after a major six-week renovation that sought to enliven and revive the near-century-old spirit of the establishment — and, now

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Cops: Four residential burglaries in Tiburon appear linked

By **HANNAH WEIKEL**
 hweikel@thearknewspaper.com

Tiburon police are canvassing neighborhoods south of Ring Mountain Open Space Preserve for leads after two residential break-ins were reported in the area last week that appear connected to another pair of burglaries reported in March, authorities say.

Residents across Tiburon received notices from Alert Marin on April 19 warning of the rash of burglaries and asking homeowners to turn on alarm systems when leaving the house and notify police of any suspicious activity.

All four of the houses that have been broken into abut Tiburon open spaces, and all were broken into between 6 and 11 p.m. while the homeowners were away, said Tiburon police spokeswoman Laurie Nilsen. She said the burglars stole watches and jewelry from the homes.

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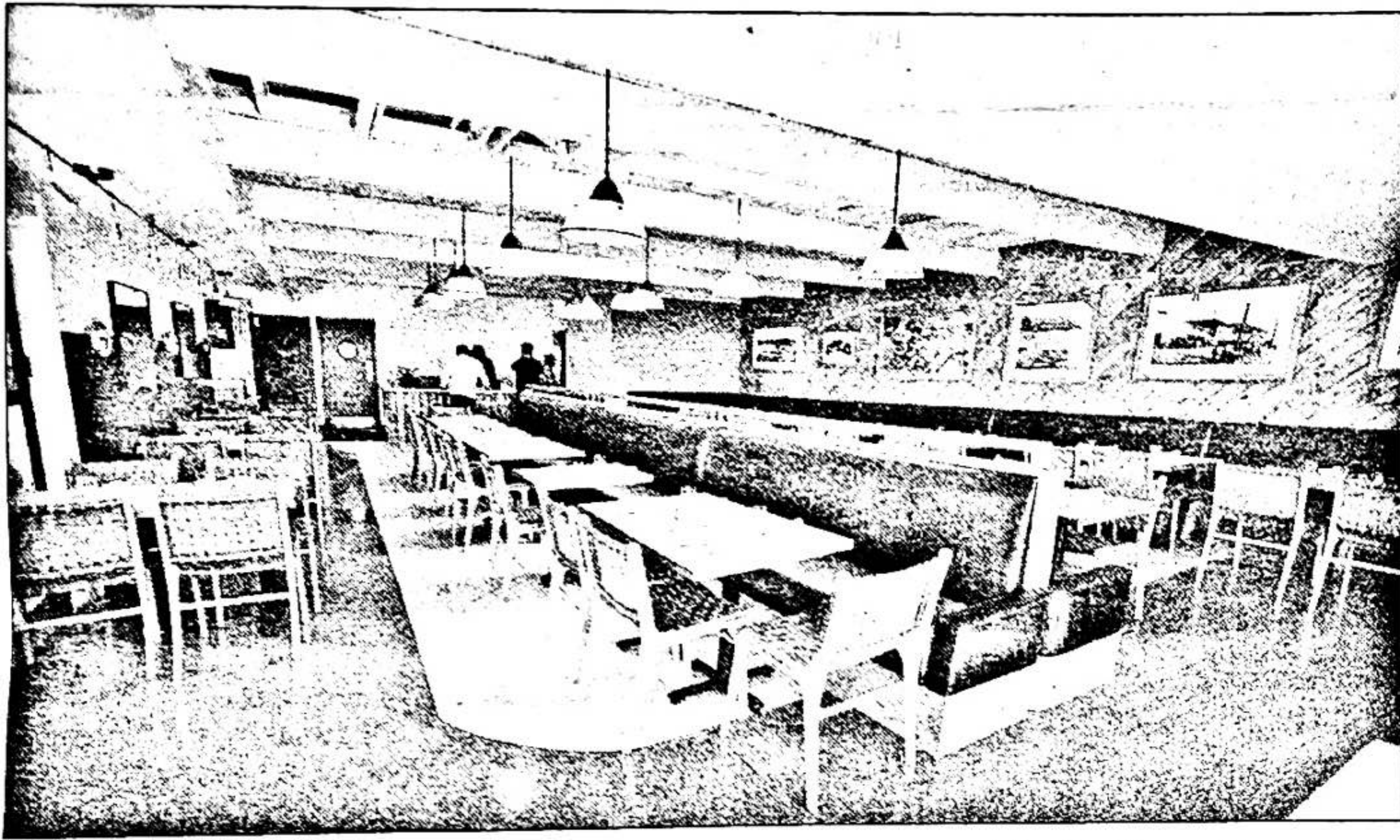


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Kathleen Brady & Bryan Beaver



Above, the eastern dining room at Sam's Anchor Cafe has been renamed the Boathouse Room, where round tables and polished dark wooden chairs have been replaced with rows of booths upholstered in navy, wood tables edged in brass and wood chairs with saddle-colored woven leather lattice. The windows have been replaced with glass doors that exit out to the communal patio tables and outdoor bar. At right, the front bar has fresh paint, navy bar stools and a new terrazzo floor.



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emblazoned in large type on the rear façade above the deck, Vella's slogan once again invites mariners and ferrygoers from across the San Francisco Bay.

The design team hired by co-owner Conor Flaherty of Tiburon, San Francisco design firm ROY, leaned into the nautical theme throughout the remodel, down to waiters in new light-blue T-shirts sporting the slogan "The cheapest yacht club in Marin."

Land-based diners entering through the front door have always had to pass through the bar, which had a vibe reminiscent of Sam's days as a Prohibition-era speakeasy, when Vella, a Maltese immigrant and sailor, used his race boat to meet ships from Vancouver off the Farallon Islands and smuggle whiskey back to the mainland.

That dive-bar aura has been washed away by coats of fresh white paint, and navy-blue bar stools now slide under the bar counter on terrazzo floors that feature a brass inlay, "est. 1920" — back when Sam's was just a tent on the beach, where he served sandwiches from a wooden plank balanced on two sawhorses.

Preserved in the facelift was a local fan-favorite, the popcorn machine, which still sits on a counter just past the bar.

At the back, the eastern dining room has been renamed the Boathouse Room, replacing round tables and polished dark wooden chairs with four rows of booths upholstered in navy, wood tables edged in brass and wood chairs with saddle-colored woven leather lattice. Framed black-and-white photos of Tiburon hang on the walls.

"The aim was to have really nice design in a comfortable environment," Flaherty said.

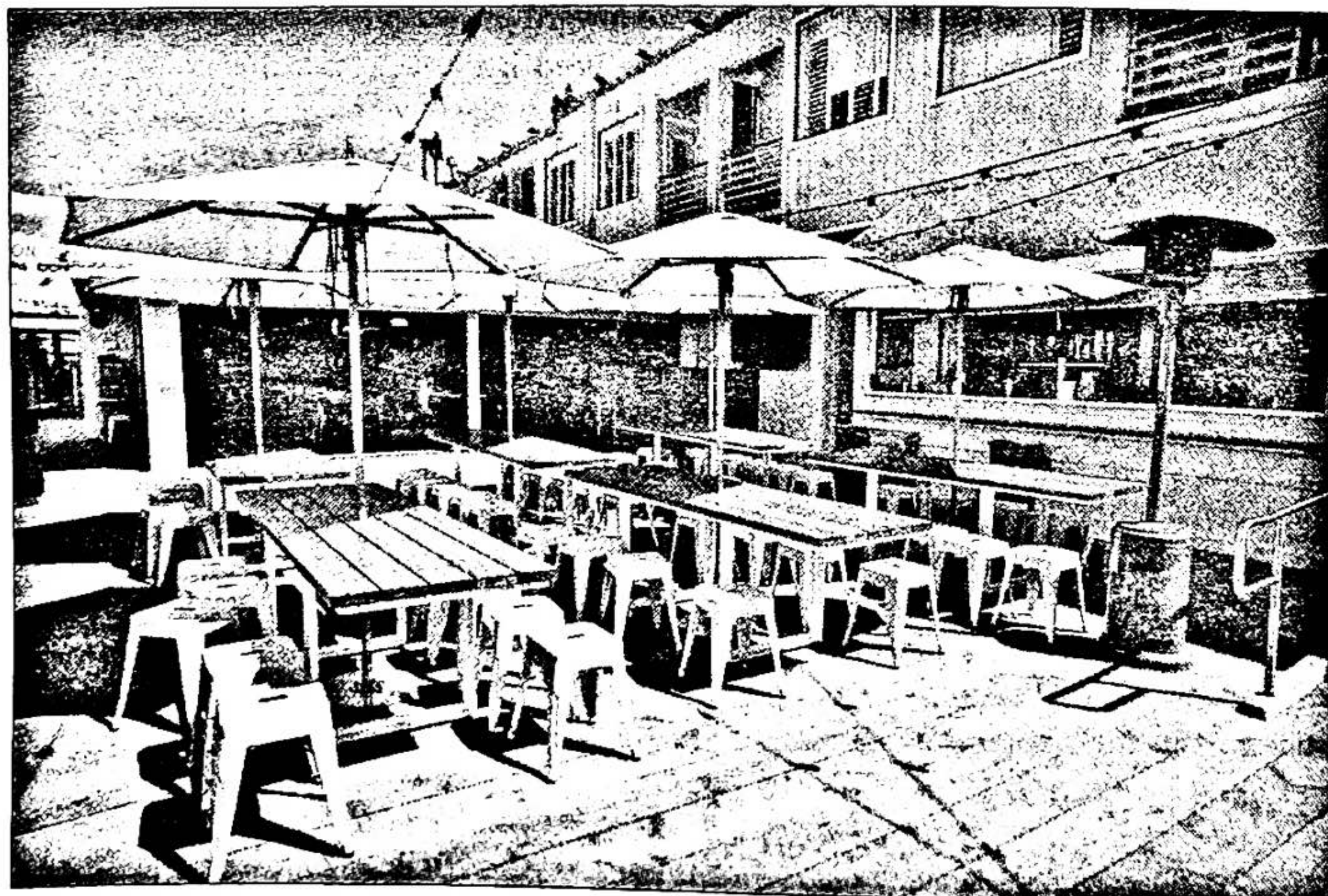
The old windows to the Boathouse Room have been replaced with floor-to-ceiling doors that can be opened wide and folded out the way, bringing the outside in on nice days and allowing commingling with patrons on the more communal eastern portion of the rear deck, which now includes umbrella-shaded wooden communal tables with white metal stools near the restaurant's outside second bar.

Across the hall, the western dining room has been converted into the Blue Room, which Flaherty describes as a lounge area that can also do duty as a meeting room. Two 70-inch televisions have been mounted on the wall so patrons can watch sporting events or presentations. Light fixtures also



ELLIOT KARLAN PHOTOS / FOR THE ARK

The decking has been entirely replaced on Sam's Anchor Cafe's back patio. On the western side of the deck (above), round dining tables with gingham tablecloths have been replaced by polished-wood dining tables. On the eastern side (below), small round tables for open seating have been replaced with communal wood tables and stools, with open access to the eastern Boathouse Room.



have been chosen with an eye to the mariner aesthetic.

Most patrons regard the western side of

the rear deck as the main attraction, where warm days can draw waits for al fresco dining. There, the deck planking has been com-

pletely replaced, and the round tables with waterproof gingham coverings and plastic chairs are gone. Instead, rows of polished-wood dining tables now sit under patio umbrellas.

A service island that was positioned at the top of the gangway from the docks has been moved back and out of the water view.

Before the renovation, the indoor rooms had 172 seats and the outdoor deck areas had 266 seats. Plans on file at the town show the renovated restaurant now has 118 seats indoors, eight of them wheelchair accessible, and 171 seats outdoors, 11 of them wheelchair accessible.

Sam's will continue to offer seasonal seafood, with a focus on raw items like ceviche, poke and oysters — including a mobile oyster cart. But the signature menu item for the reopening is an old Sam Vella favorite: champagne and a hamburger.

Other favorites — including the crab

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ing by town officials that Sam's waterfront neighbor, Waters Edge Hotel, was in support.

The morning of April 19, Waters Edge Hotel General Manager Justin Flake approached The Ark, saying he didn't know about the hearing and that he had just learned the permit is for amplified music — which he says he would not have supported.

"This could be disastrous for the hotel," he said. "I'm a little sick over it."

Amplified? Waters Edge didn't know

Flake says he blames himself. He said Sam's co-owner Conor Flaherty reached out to him last fall to tell him he'd applied for a live-music permit.

"He didn't tell me, and I didn't think to ask, if the music would be amplified," Flake said. "I just assumed it wouldn't be because Sam's has a small deck, and I didn't think they would need to amplify the music."

Flake said that when he sent an email of support for the permit to Tiburon Community Development Director Sung Kwon last December, he was still under the impression that Flaherty only planned to have acoustic music, without amplification.

In fact, Flaherty has objected to news reports that indicated he was seeking music that would be amplified, saying as recently as mid-March that, in the permit application he filed with Tiburon last November, he specifically did not indicate he wanted amplified music.

Kwon has since confirmed the town has always understood Flaherty was seeking amplified live music.

Flake and Waters Edge have objected to amplified recorded and live music on the Sam's deck before, back in 2016 when the previous owners sought to install a canopy that hotel and town officials thought might amplify sound created by restaurant patrons and music. The canopy was never installed. So when Waters Edge appeared to be in favor of live music this time around, town officials pointed to the apparent change as one reason to get behind the music request.

Flake says it didn't occur to him to circle back with Flaherty until a few weeks ago, when construction noise from the Sam's renovation got him thinking about the impact on his guests in the busy summer months. When Flaherty told him music would be amplified, Flake said he didn't reply because he thought it was already too late.

"We just have to rely on Conor's goodwill, unless the council is willing to rehear the matter based on this information," he said.

After the meeting, Flaherty indicated he would be away for the holiday weekend and could not be reached for comment about Flake's concerns.

Partial victory for appellants

The appeal considered by the Tiburon council was filed in February by Belvedere couple Steve and Meryl Wisenbaker, who

live on the southern end of Beach Road, in direct line of sight of the restaurant across Belvedere Cove.

While they were the only appellants on record, more than 50 Tiburon Peninsula residents ultimately signed a petition opposing the permit for live outdoor music, including more than three dozen Belvedere residents. That petition was taken to the Belvedere City Council, which took the unusual step at its April 8 meeting of voting to support its residents and to send a letter to the Tiburon council urging Tiburon to take heed.

But the Tiburon council came down on the side of trying to help Sam's do what it could to attract new patrons to the 99-year-old waterfront restaurant and bar — the peninsula's longest continuously operating restaurant and arguably the anchor attraction to Tiburon's downtown — as commercial vacancies are up and Sam's sales are down.

The council did, in part, rule with the Wisenbakers by imposing additional conditions that the town keep a log of complaints "to be shared with appropriate elected officials" and that the Planning Commission will hold two reviews of the music permit over the next year — one in six months and one in 12 months — rather than just a single review in six months.

"We're disappointed," Meryl Wisenbaker said after the meeting. "We felt what we were looking for was very reasonable. We asked for a decibel limit so they'd have some means of enforcement, and we asked to reduce the number of hours and days that music could be played. This is a precedent. No other restaurant in Tiburon is allowed this."

Flaherty didn't appear to harbor any ill will toward the Belvedere residents who opposed the music permit.

"I'm also mindful of being a good neighbor," Flaherty said after the meeting. "I'm excited about the opportunity."

Though he said it's unlikely there would be live music during all the hours in which it's allowed, he's also thinking big: Flaherty said he would like to try to capture some of the musical talent that comes to the Bay Area for Outside Lands and other music festivals, perhaps hiring them to perform in the bands' off days.

"There's a lot of very talented musicians that perform at high-profile places," he said. "We're hoping we can leverage our new fantastic venue to attract them" — a reference to a major nautical-themed renovation that closed Sam's for six weeks as the bar, dining rooms and rear deck were remodeled and the menu updated.

Residents make their case

During the appeal hearing, Wisenbaker led off her comments by arguing that Sam's doesn't need live music to be successful.

She mentioned its "amazing waterfront location" accessible to boaters and that Sam's already has the ability to have live music for occasional events with a special-event per-

mit. The previous owners have said they always obtained special-event permits for live music and, at the meeting, Town Manager Greg Chanis noted he had granted four special-event permits to Flaherty last summer for live music at Sam's.

Wisenbaker also noted the conditional use permit approved for the Michelin-starred executive chef Michael Mina's new restaurant planned down the street, at the former Guaymas spot at 5 Main St., allows only "soft ambient music."

She asserted the conditional use permit approved by the town doesn't conform to the Tiburon General Plan, saying the quality of neighborhoods should be protected against unreasonable noise — a conclusion town planning staff disagreed with — nor does it follow the provisions of the California Noise Act, codified in the state's Health and Safety Code.

The Wisenbakers also objected to the fact that the town had not required an acoustic study and had put in no method of enforcement.

Several residents spoke against the permit during the public-comment period, including Tom Purdy, whose family owns residential and commercial property a few doors away.

"We are totally for Sam's. It's a big draw," he said. But he added that several times when Sam's has had live rock music, all he could hear was a loud, thumping bass.

"I'm all for reinvigorating Tiburon," said Albert Richards of 266 Beach Road. "I don't think music is necessary to that. Good food will."

He said the Corinthian and San Francisco yacht clubs have occasional live music that doesn't run late.

"Let's do this in a measured way," Richards said. He suggested limiting the music to 15 hours a week, lowering the decibels and shortening the trial period.

"We clearly want a vibrant Main Street," he said. "We just don't want Bourbon Street."

Owner, supporters weigh in

In his remarks at the hearing, Flaherty noted "store vacancies are up and Sam's sales are down" 14 percent.

"When Sam's does well, the town does well," he said.

Flaherty said he had agreed to reduce the total permissible hours of music to 45 hours per week and to angle the live music speakers toward the restaurant, not facing outward toward the water.

"We need live music to cultivate an experience to get people to come here ... and to make Sam's viable for years to come," he said.

Former Sam's co-owner Steve Sears, who is president of the board of the Tiburon Peninsula Chamber of Commerce, was among the supporters.

"The downtown is a challenge," he said. "Conor is trying to work with you."

DeAnn Biss, the chamber's executive director, said the music permit has the cham-

ber's support.

"Sam's has always been a responsible member of the community," she said. "A vibrant downtown is critical ... and Sam's is the cornerstone of our downtown. The trial period will ensure mutual satisfaction and the vitality of the town."

Tiburon resident Dana Hemberger said it's in Flaherty's interest to be sensitive to the neighbors and urged the council not to restrict Flaherty at this point.

"If he has music that's too loud, it's going to force people out and he won't make money," he said. "He's going to be sensitive to his clientele and the people in this room."

Camille Bosworth lived on the side of Corinthian Island that faces Sam's for several years until she and her husband, Design Review Board member Bryan Chong, moved to Tiburon's Belveron neighborhood off Trestle Glen Boulevard. They lease out the Corinthian Island house.

"We think a vibrant Sam's is a wonderful thing," she said.

Council deliberates

During deliberations by the Town Council, member Jon Welner and Vice Mayor Alice Fredericks were on the same page in seeking "hard evidence" to review at the end of the trial periods, specifically data about what decibel levels were being generated by the music.

"I don't think I need to repeat how important Sam's is, but I do need to repeat how important the concerns of neighbors are," Fredericks said.

She said the permit needed a decibel limit and a means of enforcement.

"What I'm hearing is that if we start now and have the Planning Commission review it in three months or six months, what will they have to review?" he asked.

Councilmember Jim Fraser was opposed to seeking such data for now.

"I'm afraid of putting the cart before the horse," he said. "We're making a lot of assumptions that things could be bad."

He called Sam's the "heartbeat" of downtown, noting there is already a lot of noise on the Main Street waterfront, including revving boat engines and metal rigging banging against the masts of sailboats.

"We need to support the direction that Tiburon is going in," Fraser said. He favored denying the appeal outright and upholding the commission's decision without the second permit review.

Mayor David Kulik said the demographic of the town has shifted, so attitudes have to shift, but he said "we have to do it in moderation."

If the town doesn't "make every effort to make sure that (developers) can succeed," it will be hard to find entrepreneurs to invest in the community, he said.

Deirdre McCrohan has reported on Tiburon local government and community issues for more than 30 years. Reach her at 415-944-4634.

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Louis, cioppino, fish-and-chips and fresh-caught fish specials — are still on the daily menu. A separate catering menu is available for larger groups.

"I think it's a new look, but it's a good

look," said Steve Sears, the president of the Tiburon Peninsula Chamber of Commerce and a former 40-year co-owner of Sam's who sold the restaurant to Flaherty and his partners in Tiburon Investment Group early last year. "I think most people are going to like it. The floors are fabulous, the new doors that open to the outside are fabulous — I don't

know why we didn't do that long ago. I think they did a great job."

Sam's also was required to bring both restrooms up to code to comply with the Americans with Disabilities Act.

On April 17, the night before the restaurant reopened, the Tiburon Town Council denied an appeal and allowed Sam's a permit

to have live music seven days a week. The permit will be reviewed every six months for at least the next year.

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