

**Maine Islands Coalition
November 14, 2019
Broadband**

MIC Members

Donna Wiegler, Co-Chair, Swan's Island
Roger Berle, Co-Chair, Cliff Island
Andy Dorr (Online), Vinalhaven
Ingrid Gaither, Cranberry Isles
Donna Damon, Chebeague
Cheryl Crowley, Cliff Island
Mark Greene, Long Island
Tara Hire (Online), Monhegan
Kendra Chubbuck, Isle au Haut
Shey Conover, Islesboro
Eva Murray, Matinicus

Island Institute Staff

Kate Tagai
Suzanne MacDonald
Andy Theriault
Hannah Barrows
Tom Groening
Nick Battista

Special Guests and Legislative Representatives

Pinny Beebe-Center, Representative
Jill Lewis, Swan's Island
Vicki Doudera, Representative
Marion Choffe, Monhegan
Kelly Cotiaux, Office of Susan Collins
Donna Hopkins, Isle au Haut
Stew Foelix, Isle au Haut
Sue Foelix, Isle au Haut
Rebekah Paredes, New Hope for Women
Roger Heinen, (Online), Islesboro
Rhiannon Hampson, (Online), Office of Chellie Pingree

MIC Business

Better turnout than previous meetings. Hope to continue strong turnout from island guests and MIC representatives. If representative can't make it to the meeting, please invite and encourage other islanders to attend.

Maine Islands Coalition Mission

To provide a consistent, if not always unified, voice for islands in Augusta, to the press, and to outside groups.

Minutes from September 12th approved.

Finance Report

All invoices for 2019 have been paid. New invoices will be sent out in January 2020. Assessment is likely to remain the same.

Certificate of Recognition for Volunteer Service

Mark Greene was recognized for extensive commitment to the Town of Long Island. He was nominated for recognition by Brian Dudley who wrote,

“Mark Greene represents the heart and soul of the Town of Long Island. He was a leader in our session from the City of Portland and the subsequent creation of our Town 26 years ago. Mark continues to serve the Town in a variety of ways such as the MIC representative, heading our Broadband Exploratory Committee, advocacy for affordable housing, coordinator of our property tax maps and assessing, moderator of town meeting and so much more. Mark serves Long Island diligently and with great pride.”

Virtual Island Summit

Island Institute is working to build networks to support community development. The MIC is a great example of the power of a coalition that we have shared already in Scotland, the Great Lakes region, and other places. We developed a panel for the Virtual Island Summit held October 6th-11th. The summit was entirely free and designed to connect global islands to share common experiences, good practices and solutions. Roger Berle participated as one of 5 panelists on a session called “Island Networks for Resiliency” about the strength of collaborative networks. Roger shared the story of MIC and Michael Childers and Matt Preisser shared the story of the Great Lakes Islands Alliance (Modeled after MIC). Stephanie Nowers talked about the Islanded Grid Resource Center, Mark Glick represented the Hawaii Natural Energy Institute, and Alexis Chatzimpiros talked about the work of the Samsø Energy Tentou Project. The entire summit from panelists to participants was held virtually to create a zero-carbon footprint and had global participation.

Great Lakes Islands Summit

Roger traveled to the Great Lakes Island Alliance (GLIA) Summit meeting October 23-25th in Mackinac, Michigan along with Tom Groening and Kate Tagai.

GLIA as a network is a bit different than MIC simply because of the geography that it covers: 14 year-round island communities with more than 20,000 people spread across 8 states and 2 countries and 120 tribes across the geography.

At the summit they repeated the breakout sessions, so Roger had a chance to sit in on multiple sessions, it was nicely designed so that you didn't have to miss any information.

“I was out there to learn from them, but they are interested in learning about how we do it in Maine. One of the pieces that I talked about was that the Islands Coalition is really carrying out the original mission of the Island Institute from the early

1980's. It was back then that Eldon Meyer from Chebeague and I got together when the LNG crisis was going on in Casco Bay, that we needed to get together in some fashion and that was the genesis of the coalition. The thing that we talked about a lot is that we want to keep MIC doing what it does and not get caught up in some of the other wonderful things that the Island Institute does. So, we are trying to reinforce what we do, our process and our goals. I had conversation with Kendra, Eva and Andy. The concern we have is how do we make it more relevant, easier to get to, to make sure that we are meaningful to our own purposes as the coalition itself."

In the last 17 years the MIC has covered more than 30 topics in discussion, some more than once.

There has been a lot of interest in ferry rates and structures from Great Lake Islanders looking to Maine for ideas and solutions.

Strengthening the MIC

Kendra:

Interesting to bring in some partners of the Island Institute CEI; Seacoast Mission; Maine Share; to hear their goals for working with the island communities and to hear about who they work with and what they do to expand our own networking. A lot of these nonprofits work with the islands and it is important to understand what they do for us that we may not know about. It's an opportunity.

Roger:

We are looking for other ideas to help MIC move forward as a coalition

Kendra:

I would love to have some trainings on how to work with select board on economic development, and how to have the difficult conversations we are going to need to adapt to in the future to be sustainable. We need to be able to bring young people to our communities, we need schools and broadband to be able to do it, and we need the older generations to think about these changing needs now.

Mark:

There is no simple answer to the many challenges. It is hard to think about future sustainability when you are facing the budget committee and realities of passing the budget this year without increasing taxes beyond an affordable level. We need continuous education of the need for changing and adaptation.

Roger:

Please continue to think about creative ideas that we can use within the Maine Islands Coalition and send your ideas to me.

Teal On Wheels

Donna just completed a cross-country motorcycle ride to raise awareness of ovarian cancer that she called, "Teal on Wheels". Teal is the representative color of ovarian cancer, like pink is for breast cancer. She raised \$56,000 that went to the Beth C. Wright Cancer Resource Center in Ellsworth, Maine.

Donna rode over 6,000 miles across 19 states in 40 days and handed out 700 ovarian cancer symptom cards. She met a lot of great people all across the country and hopefully made a

difference in women's lives. After she was home she got a message from a woman in Downeast Maine. Her husband had picked up one of Donna's cards and given it to her. Because of that knowledge, she was able to push at her doctors and advocate for an ultrasound that discovered a cancerous mass. She credits Donna with the earlier detection of her cancer.

Island Institute Update

Community Profiles – being created as a tool for communities to communicate key data points quickly to a wide variety of audiences, they are looking for MIC members to help with the development for their communities. Thus far they have Cliff and Vinalhaven completed. The new Waypoints publication called Waypoints Connect will be printed in January and is focuses on infrastructure. The Waypoints Forum will be held in Portland on February 7th.

Legislative Update

Pinny Beebe-Center, Representative

The legislature is currently not in session, so they are working slowly and intentionally to craft bills to put forward in the first session that would meet the needs of the people in Maine. There are 2700 bills put in for the first session, lots of duplicates. Lots of bills have been held over with lots of task forces established to look at programs and funding to accurately understand what needs to happen.

Vicki Doudera, Representative

She works on energy committee and was disappointed that the broadband bond did not pass. There are many representatives still committed to bringing broadband to rural area. Keeping the ferry affordable and efficient is another issue she is following closely because Islesboro is within her district.

Donna:

"I know that you and that worked really hard to lower the ferry rates for Islesboro and kudos to you and the whole community for getting their rates lowered, but the only way they could get the rates lowered was for the rest of us to have our rates raised, and so it has left some hard feelings amongst the different islands, I'm afraid. We need legislators to work for all the islands to get their rates lowered." For someone to be driven to a doctor's appointment from the island round trip is about \$80 and it is crippling.

Vicki: The ferries are for everyone. There are conversations happening across the Casco Bay lines as well about affordability and accessibility, for tourism, trades, and residents alike, so I recognize that it is a broad issue that impacts everyone.

Rhiannon Hampson, (Online), Office of Chellie Pingree

Our congressional representatives recognize broadband as key to economic development, healthcare, and education. It isn't the lack of providers that is a problem, it is the challenge of even getting to them which makes broadband so important.

Kelly Cotiaux, Office of Susan Collins

The 2020 funding bill allocates \$73.33 Billion, a \$9 Billion increase, which includes National Sea Grant Program, \$2 Million supporting Lobster research; \$10 Million for right whale research; directs NOAA to work with Canadian counterparts. There is also money for electronic monitoring and reporting of the herring quota and it directs NOAA to complete the assessment. There is \$76.5 Million for Coastal Zone Management Grants and \$38.5M for integrated ocean monitoring systems

Featured Topic: Broadband

Nick Battista

1. Island Institute Policy
2. Advisory Committee for the Maine Broad Band Coalition

Conversation at the State level is at a point where everyone recognizes that broadband is critical to economic development. There is also a growing realization that the economics of building broadband in rural areas to not work if we are waiting for private industry to step up and improve infrastructure. There are not enough residences per mile to justify the capital investment for a company and see any return.

If there is a longer time horizon or there isn't the need to see return on investment or if we can lower the cost of the capital investment, than broadband is easy to build, especially because there is a significant revenue stream that comes along with it.

It would cost \$1.6B cost to build dark fiber statewide. The state doesn't have that much money to build out broadband and so it becomes reliant on the service providers.

- \$600M to extend existing networks
 - Capital from public private partnerships needed to make this happen
 - If communities invest in infrastructure, they can work with providers to cover the costs of service.
 - Comes down to deferring capital cost and increasing take rates
 - The state economic development plan has broadband as the top issue
 - Recognizes the need for state investment in the infrastructure
 - A lot of the work in helping to share the story of how to bring this to communities comes from the communities in this room.
- Recently worked with AARP – 75%-80% of Mainers support the building out of broad band

Island Communities are providing incredible leadership in this work statewide

- The stories of why it matters for community sustainability are key
- Communities working through the difficult issues associated with buildouts and finding creative solutions around barriers are all helping to inform the state level discussions.
- ConnectME is getting new board members
- Hoping for \$15M in the Governor's supplemental budget request as a direct appropriation.

- Expectation is that the broadband bond will come up again in the next legislative session and will be voted on again.

Cliff Island:

Cheryl Crowley

Cliff Island is part of the City of Portland and was up against many challenges

- Went to the city to ask what they are doing to increase broadband access but there was not much municipal interest from the city, they had ideas but no formal timeline.
- Underserved. Maine State Library does not provide the level of service given in most other schools and libraries.
- Serviced by undersea cable w/out fiber. We realized we had to create our own infrastructure

They don't have access to rural grants as a part of the City of Portland

Networking and conferences finally led us to putting out a request for proposal.

- Working with Axiom
- Community member is also building out in Lime, NH and helping to inform the process. Adopted his model for private investment funding.
 - This is an investment in the year-round community not a return on the investment of the money.
 - The model is an LLC – investors have asset
- Axiom's initial quote was \$500K whittled down to \$350K
 - Did not put fiber on poles – laid it on the ground right down the middle of the island.
 - Laid fiber down the middle of their long, skinny island with hubs out from the main line.
- Able to get guarantee of subscribers- needed 65 minimum but got 80
- Speed is now "wicked good"
- People that come to the island in shoulder seasons to do business – now they don't need to go to the city to get online.
- Connected with microwave tower

Islesboro:

Roger Heinen

Islesboro municipal broadband is a public-private partnership that delivers 1 gigabit fiber optic broadband internet to every home and business.

- Subscribers who opt in pay \$360/year
- GWI contracts to run the network
- Town owns and maintains the infrastructure

The community was on their own – had to be a local solution to a local problem, which was a very important selling point.

- Started with a letter to the select board in 2014 from a couple who said they were leaving because couldn't get internet

- Conducted a census to discover the state of internet service across the island. They found places where people couldn't get any service; when they could it didn't meet FCC compliant speeds.
- Embarked on building their own system
 - Some donation, small town match
 - 2 town meetings
 - Put out to bid
 - \$3.5M contract
- The argument: this was a survival issue.
 - We convinced people that it was just a good deal for them.
 - At the time it was \$85/month for DSL
 - 83% of subscribers would pay less than \$85/month
 - This is survivability – and it will save people money

The project has been running for almost 2 years and has 625 subscribers. The operating costs have turned out to be less than projected.

- GWI bill is covered by subscriber fees.
- Taxpayers take up the bill for maintenance and the insurance of the system

The challenge now is to get people beyond the basics to take advantage of what the high-speed internet can offer such as telehealth and online education opportunities.

There are lots of ways to get broadband:

- Find the way that works best for your community
- Take a leadership position
- Find out what you have already- data makes crafting compelling arguments easier.
- Hold incumbents to the fire and get answers
- Tax Burden:
 - Increased \$1M total.

Cranberries:

Ingrid Gaither

The broadband project for the Cranberry Isles (5 islands with 2 year-round communities) took two years of hard conversations to even create a broadband committee. It is a testament to one or two people really making a difference and that patience is key.

- Goals was 2 year-round and 1 summer islands
- Lots of discussion – Town meeting that turned into 2 Saturdays
- Voted to spend \$1.2M
- Partnered with Axiom for the service.
- Now have underground fiber from mainland to Great Cranberry and microwave links to Little Cranberry and Sutton. On island it is fiber to the home.
- There are 150 homes connected (almost 100% of year-round homes)
- Just completed one full year of having broadband implemented– people talking about how happy they are with the speeds.

- Same rate for all – year round/summer
- Made the news because they applied for a large USDA grant. At first they didn't get the grant, but people knew they would still be responsible for the \$1.2M and agreed to go ahead with the project. In the second round, more money was allocated to USDA and the Cranberries were awarded their grant.
- Fiber on the ground vs on the poles: on the ground doesn't seem to pose problems, but the Cranberries opted to put up their own poles after realizing that it would be too costly to work with Emera and rent their existing poles.

Long Island:

Mark Greene

Long Island is underserved – many people have 25/2 speeds from consolidated. Many people don't even have access to that internet. But we are working against the mindset that what they have now is ok, which is holding back the any bonds that we would need. Cumberland County has just put out a 100-page playbook with a proposal to fiber to the home the entire county, community by community. The Long Island estimate was within \$10K of what the County estimated it would cost to build fiber on Long Island.

- Risks: Technical obsolescence (5G; Cell phones)
- Chebeague Story – competition to municipal owned model after the build when FairPoint came in and provided competition.
- Long spent 3 years on broadband research but with low community response there was no impetus to move onto the next step, but there is an increasing awareness for the benefits as more communities implement projects.
- Meeting with Selectmen in the future to review Cumberland County playbook.
- Could they protect municipalities from competition if they wanted to set up their own system, unless they wanted the competition. It may encourage more municipalities to take the risk. Following a Casco Bay Lines model.

Chebeague:

Donna Damon

Chebeague was one of the first places to take on broadband because of Beverly Johnson and David Hill. They set up Chebeague.net 15 years ago. They used a model where investors got free internet. Then FairPoint got a \$1M grant to provide fiber cable to the library and the school. They didn't provide service to the public and they didn't want to do business with Chebeague.net, but eventually the proof of concept was solid enough that they began undercutting the price that Chebeague.net was able to provide for service. Chebeague.net was sold to Axiom and is still available as a service.

- Got a planning grant. Axiom was the only one who bid on the request for proposals.
- Town of Chebeague created a broadband committee but ran into local resistance about the cost of the project.
- Coming up against the “good enough” argument

- Had the biggest town meeting since they became a town – over 126 voters as well as non-voting taxpayers who were allowed to speak. A little over 30 people voted for broadband. It was disheartening for the committee who had put in so much planning work.
- Building community infrastructure comes with a tax cost, but how do you balance that with being able to provide services and upgrade infrastructure.

Monhegan:

Tara Hire

- We are waiting for USDA funds from the application submitted in May.
- In general, we have support of the community that they need better internet but they want grants or matching funds to help pay for it.
- We were able to raise \$250K at town meeting towards a total cost of \$900K for fiber to home and microwave to the island.
 - We are planning fiber on the ground; no poles
 - We will need a new tower for the infrastructure
- Currently RedZone and CCI provide service on island – but neither company was willing to take on the broadband project because of the cost to upgrade infrastructure.
- Plantation is currently working on franchise agreement
- They are planning for a municipally owned system with Axiom as the internet service provider.
- Community discussions listed broadband as a clear priority for the community

Isle au Haut

Sue Foelix

Isle au Haut is working with TDS on improvements to the underserved east side of the island

- There were upgrades to the infrastructure needed with new remote terminals.
- Isle au Haut is looking to build its own system but is also linked to Swan's via a microwave transmission.
- Broadband committee is still active, though quiet because of the focus on the solar project taking up so much of the town's time. They are conducting an assessment of speeds and needs. Dealing with Maslow's Hierarchy of Utilities
- At this year's town meeting the broadband committee asked to set some money aside for when they do want to undertake a project they will have some money already put aside. The committee asked for \$20K, the town approved \$10K to be put aside which is a tiny marker of interest in the project.
 - Working with TDS as they already have infrastructure which could reduce the overall cost of the project.

Swan's Island

Jill Lewis

The Swan's Island broadband committee was not able to get a warrant on the town meeting agenda to discuss broadband, but they have a planning grant from the

Island Institute and \$13K in donations to start assessments. There have been a lot of recent outages.

- Hired Brian from Casco Bay Advisors
- Getting report and specific numbers needed to help people share the story, what it will really cost. People need concrete data in order to start talking about the issue.
- Getting bids with both TDS and without TDS

Vinahaven
Andy Dorr

- Just put out a request for proposals for a feasibility study to understand the costs associated with a fiber to the home broadband project.
- Have done a survey to map current speeds
- The mainland power cable also has a fiber cable
- FairPoint and Spectrum currently offer services on the island.

Matinicus:
Eva Murray

- Issues may not match other islands
- Telephone switch is on Swan's island

Island Updates:

Ferry Advisory Meeting update:

- Very civilized
- Still working led by IB – to work with DOT to keep costs down

Matinicus:

No kids in school this year, 3rd time this has happened. We are having to remind people that the school is open, there just aren't any students this year. There are preschoolers on island. Some wonder why the school wouldn't just close, but it is important in keeping the plantation status as well as the ability to attract families with kids, so as long as the plantation has the money to pay the teacher and keep up the building it will stay open.

Chebeague:

There is some concern about the amount of aquaculture happening around the island. A new lease has been submitted for area in front of the last remaining deep-water property (Sunset) that the town purchased in case they ever wanted to move the location of the municipal wharf. They are currently in the process of making a decision about building a new ferry wharf or fixing the current wharf.

Someone is applying to have a marijuana dispensary

The Historical Society is doing new exhibit called, "Growing up on Chebeague"

There is a challenge for many organizations because of the lack of volunteers – The “women power” is aging out.

Chebeague Island Ferry has a new boat – launched in June – and they are waiting for it to arrive

The Church is going through discernment process.

They would like another Island Fellow, but housing is the challenge.

Could we bring in granting organizations to the MIC meetings to talk about available funding and opportunities?

Cranberries

The Cranberries is serviced by a private ferry that currently costs \$18 round-trip. The barge is \$275 one way.

There is a new schoolteacher this year, Ms. Jan, who previously worked on Frenchboro. There are 9 students but just a few years ago there were 18. It is the second year on Islesford, so next year the school will be moving back to Great Cranberry per the town’s agreement.

The affordable houses are full and with families – all are happy and plan to stay – so there is currently nothing affordable on the market to buy.

Population down a bit this year. Islesford has between 60- and 70-year-round residents. Great Cranberry probably lost 15 in the past 2-3 winters.

There is a position open for a public safety coordinator – the woman who held the role is leaving the position but staying in the town.

They are still waiting for reimbursement from USDA for their broadband buildout.

Islesboro

There is a special town meeting to vote to put another solar project at the transfer station. The energy committee wants to get 100% of the town’s municipal energy needs from solar or other renewable sources. They will be voting to see about starting a quasi-municipal economic development corporation that could facilitate private \$ to be given out as loans and grants to support the island. Downeast Energy, one of two energy providers, was purchased by Vinalhaven Energy and there is concern that prices for propane/fuel may increase.

Swan’s

Hopkins Freight has been serving the island for decades – TIMS owner has bought the freight service keeping the same name and employee.

Emera Maine has been great at keeping service reliable and restoring it quickly with the latest storms. The Historical Society bought a building for \$1. There is lots of real estate moving on the island. There is a new camping moratorium on the island that is in response to a proposal for the first glamping operation in Maine. Glamping- glamour camping- is very popular in other regions and Donna experienced it when she was traveling on her motorcycle trip, but the Selectmen had concerns if it was the right enterprise for Swan’s, so the entrepreneurs are looking for an alternative site on or near MDI instead.

Isle au Haut

There was a special town meeting last week where they voted to change the school board to four members. They are also seeking approval for the deer population management plan. The Island Fellow is working on medical facilities survey to understand the needs of the community. There is a new teacher on the island and six students. Her husband works for the power company. Long time Islander Bob Gerber is leaving. He did a lot of mapping (911, Flood) for the town, but he is selling his house to ICDC for an affordable house.

Cliff

The broadband project is going well, they've been able to deal with any first-year issues that have popped up. The addition on the community center that houses the broadband equipment also includes space for an informal health center. They have monthly soup luncheons (and idea they borrowed from Long Island) with occasional presentations. The most recent visit was from a VNA nurse to talk about advanced directives. There were 15 people who stayed to listen and take the paperwork home, which was good. There are five students in the school with Jenny, who is in her second-year teaching for Cliff. Cheryl and Roger invited the Superintendent, Assistant Superintendent, and new School Board Representative from the Portland school district to visit this fall. The visit went very well and did a lot to bridge the disconnect between the Portland Public School and Cliff school. The Sustainable Cliff Island Group has recently bought a house which they are turning into a duplex. Each apartment will have two bedrooms. The project is going to involve a lot of renovation. They are hoping to develop dedicated teacher housing, because the teacher has to move around seasonally.

Long

The school had a Veteran's day assembly which was well attended. There are 10 students from Long Island, plus students that come over daily from Great Diamond island. Mark has done is annual informal census and noted that of that out of the 350 or so houses on the island that 50 homes have changed from year-round housing to seasonal. We have been working with the planning board to allow cluster zoning to help create more year-round housing, so we'll see how that works at the next town meeting. On Casco Bay Lines a round trip ticket in the summer is \$11, seniors get 50% discount, and in the winter the price drops even more. Other islands on the line have different ticket prices. The board of directors of the Casco Bay Lines voted 9-2 to proceed with the revised schedule starting in January. It was a year long process and the Bay Lines have respected the input that the communities have given. They are getting more boats and the ticket prices aren't going up. The major worry is the interconnectedness of people living on one island and working on another where schedule changing can disrupt that. We are hoping they will be flexible to deal with any glitches that arise as the new schedule rolls out. The October storms tested the infrastructure. The substations are powered by generators that last a few hours and then the folks from Consolidated couldn't get out, so the internet was down for a time.