

Maine Islands Coalition Meeting
February 18, 2022
Island Stores

MIC Members

Roger Berle, Cliff Island, Co-Chair
Donna Wiegler, Swan's Island, Co-Chair Departing
Kendra Chubbuck, Isle au Haut. Co-Chair
Peggi Stevens, Isle au Haut
Mark Greene, Long Island
Rachel Bishop, Frenchboro
Lauren Jennings, Frenchboro
Cheryl Crowley, Cliff Island
Donna Damon, Chebeague
Ellen Mahoney, Peaks Island
Carley Feibusch, Monhegan
Jim Buccheri, Monhegan
Jennifer Fox, Great Diamond
Gabe McPhail, Vinalhaven
Andy Dorr, Vinalhaven
Eva Murray, Matinicus
Kat Alexander, North Haven
Donna Colbeth
Ingrid Gaither, Cranberry Islands

Great Lakes Islands Alliance

Matt Preisser, Support Staff
Peter Huston, Support Staff
Mike Gora, Steering Committee Chair

MIC Guests

Mike, Isle au Haut Coop
Barbara Ternes, Isle au Haut Store Board
Mary Anne Mitchell, Peaks Island
Amy, Islesford Coop store
Maura, Monhegan Store
Laurie Wood, Boat House Beverage and Variety
Janice Avignon, Long Island
Heather Durdil, Erie Islands Petro
Leib Lurie, Pelee Island Coop
Sarah Lawrence, District Representative,
Congresswoman Chellie Pingree
Kelly Cotiaux, Staff, Senator Susan Collins

Partner Organizations

Island Institute

Brenna Cohen, CDO
Kate Tagai, SCDO
Jeff Frank, SCDO
Lisa Millette, CDO
Alex Zipparo, CDO
Abby Roche, CDO
Melanie Nash, Fellow
Mia Colloredo-Mansfeld, Fellow

Next Meeting: April 22- Electrification of our Coast (Ferries and boats specifically)

Welcome

MIC Co-Chairs Roger and Donna

Introduction of New Co-Chair- Kendra Chubbuck

Good wishes and warm thanks to Donna Wiegler who is stepping down as co-chair but will remain as an MIC representative.

Organization Updates

Island Institute: Applications for Fellows and host sites are open. Host Site applications are due March 4th.

GLIA – Appreciate inclusion in your meetings, stores are very pertinent to us, Kate Tagai is leading a webinar on leadership next week, April webinar on birding

Backyard Bird Count this weekend - birdcount.org

Legislative Updates

Federal: Kelly (Collins) kelly_cotiaux@collins.senate.gov 207.945.0417 -

- Bipartisan push to fight right whales take reduction plan – NOAA's data show that no right whale deaths are linked to Maine fishermen, new equipment rule goes into effect May 1, gear conversion \$45 mil, Sen. Coll secured \$10mil for this, sent letter to Appropriations Committee to close \$35 million gap
- 32,000 H2 Visas for foreign seasonal workers, if you need help or want to talk about it contact Kelly.

Sarah Lawrence (Pingree) sarah.lawrence@mail.house.gov; 207-774-5019

- recent action to shorten waiting period for asylum seekers to start work, address work shortage,
- Casco Bay Ferry Line awarded money from FTA to replace aging vessel with hybrid vessel

Donna Damon: Thanks to Rep. Pingree's Office for all of the help to get Chebeague's channel dredged. The Army Corps has hired a contractor, and they are starting ASAP. Help from Chellie's Waterville office was essential, and we made that contact through MIC!

Feature Topic: Island Stores

Watch the video here: <https://youtu.be/1Fdp-Y-04Wk>

Leib Lurie: Pelee Island Co-op, 200 winter pop/2000 summer pop; open since 1912

Challenges: insurance and coverage are very expensive due to aging gas tanks, annual revenue \$700K, spend 10% on insurance; delivering items – plane is costly, low volumes difficult to get wholesale pricing, 25% increase in sales because people are staying on the island during pandemic; staffing – labor pool is dried up puddle; marginal markup to cover costs ends up passing costs to islanders

Laurie Wood: Long Island, Boat House Beverage; year round, 20 years in business; insurance is one of biggest expenses; Covid – adapt in many different ways – employees, customers, shopping for products,

delivery, everyone supported us 100% on our precautions; keeping store open in winter is challenging because of economics – they limit hours in order to remain open year round;

Question: How does having another summertime store affect you? The more businesses on island, the better for everyone, other store is innovative with bakery and meals, restaurant brings people to island who patronize my store, love to see more stores because they feed off of each other/learn from each other.

Do others have fees for co-op members?

Leib: We are looking at ways to encourage residents to join coop (\$25.00/year) and what benefits we might offer. One thought is \$1.00 per transaction for 'delivery fee', waived for 'members'...

Mike IAH: charged 20% fee (discount?) for year rounders coming in to the store; co-op, kerosene delivery kept store afloat in the winter but that's in limbo with power company, solar farm or replacing cable, encouraging heat pumps as primary source of heat, giant loss of income for us, best for island but we'll need to replace that revenue, cut staffing to stay afloat, sell gas/kerosene, small amount of groceries – 1 of each type of item, try to meet islanders' wants – produce and meat are difficult to store in the winter, hard to find distributors to bring stuff to the dock, partner with grocery store on Deer Isle but they're in financial trouble and uncertain about future; ~50 people in winter

Leib: we tripled inventory in the past two years, sales rose, sometimes it takes money to make money

Heather: Put-in-Bay Erie Islands Petro – manage gas station – grocery store closed in Nov., we pivoted to reopen on Dec. 24th with mini grocery store, we and hardware store picked up the grocery business, people want to support island businesses because they realized the hardship of grocery store closing, we use GFS for produce, we tell our summer vendors that we'll find new ones during the winter if they can't accommodate minimums; ~300 people on island in winter, influx of ice fishermen

Alex: Islands join with mainland business for economies of sale; Have any islands tried partnering with Blue Hill Co-op for product procurement? As in cooperating around accessing good distributors and benefiting from economies of scale/order minimums?

Mike: hard to partner with Blue Hill Co-op because it is hard to get it to the boat

Maura: Monhegan store. Took over store in 2020, MISCA owns building, biggest problem is housing, we're a family and we move around season to season, 80 winter pop

Eva: bakery on Matinicus – I can use goods and store them for months, but impossible to get fresh goods here regularly, air service costs rose astronomically, can't get more ferries to get more trucks because of state legislature hold up, a lobster boat subsidized by lobster business to deliver goods would be good solution; people want a coffee shop/place to hangout, easy for someone looking from outside to wonder why you can't meet customers' needs; I can't get homeowners insurance because I have propane tanks by the house; who's aging out or wants to shrink their business or take a day off? – more than what one person can do but not enough to support two staff; young people who have time and interest to get involved

Donna W.: Bryan and Kathy has contract on the island for boat who does propane, mail, groceries; purchased second boat; he's mailman for Frenchboro, one person who's keeping all this going – everything would collapse if he gets sick; he should get Citizen of the Year award from the State; cost of boat fuel, etc.; it's a labor of love and he loves being on the water

Rachel B.: We depend on him for all freight and packages, he never lets us down, he insists on running to Frenchboro on Christmas Day

Donna D.: =Ask your legislator to create legislative sentiment – one rep from each community to ask for this – *It can help with this*; any community can do this; same family has run our store since 1961, because of pandemic youngest member of family graduated from college and stayed to work there; curbside to protect family, islanders depended on the store and they flourished; gift shop at museum started online store – labor intensive, connecting people to sense of place

Eva: Public recognition is great but paying your bills is what keeps a store owner going.

Donna W: I work off of credit to help store owner out ahead of time.

Heather: In house accounts, pre-sell gas accounts, we have 2.5 staff (me, owner's son, and owner), grocery store has boosted numbers

Phone: We do that as well, time consuming for cashiers in summertime, over 22 years we've been able to run our store with 2 staff and reduce hours in winter, as owner I work in summer 24/7 for six months, for those who just started hang in there, money is always a challenge, you're buying yourself a job

Eva: Matinicus – general store lasted for years, attempts to fill that gap failed, first one sold alcohol, cigarettes and candy – dealt with thieves and problems, 2nd owner tried organic meats and produce and it failed; 2 different sets of clientele in summer – fishermen and visitors

Mike: We sell cigarettes behind the counter and beer; have to keep an eye on them, beer makes a decent profit, considered liquor but residents had strong feelings for and against so didn't do it

Heather: We cater to locals – what they want for beer and cigs, carry a small selection of it because bev center on island, keep crowd inside store small

Laurie: beer/wine/cigarettes big part of our business, lock it up, no problems, we carry staples that our islanders need, keep it affordable. In the summer we buy what we can knowing that we'll sell it, personal shop in town for people, we do a lot of physical work ourselves; how do people expect more geographically distant islands to provide for them, pick it up before you arrive, we're fortunate because we're close to Portland and have good ferry service.

Peter: Put-in-Bay, everything comes by plane

Donna: Swans Island is dry, overwhelmingly no to alcohol sales, makes it harder to run profitable store

Maura: Our #1 seller is water, heavy and big gallons; anyone do preordering well?

Mike: Set up preorder on Posim (POS); form on our website for people to scan or download, could be more streamlined, if they knew what we had instead of asking for specialty

Heather: Pepsi vendor sells Aquafina 1L bottles, gallons are too large to store in their space

Roger: what do they do with the plastic?

Laurie and Mike: get our water from beer distributor, boxes are hard to break down, so many boxes. Repack groceries into them to reuse, but they are a pain.

Lisa M: II has business resilience grants open (through end of today) and the preordering capability would be a great thing to apply for. <https://www.islandinstitute.org/priorities/resilient-economies/business-resilience/>

Stretch Break

Island Updates

Cranberries: Winterizing the store, opened year round in 2020, ferry schedule is working well – running on Double B and commuter ferry, lost Ashley Bryan, housing – new family with students, 10 in school, 6 kids go off to high schools, barge just back in the water – low on fuel, town office is working on budget, town meeting is Mar. 12, coffee hour at the library (masked), church gathering, audiologist visit soon

Frenchboro: Doubled school population – 4 full time, 1 preK; electric bill increases – \$4.83/day last yr --> \$6.80/day this yr

Swan's: \$173K award towards broadband – federal money, postpone town meeting to Apr. 23, large Covid outbreak, socializing is needed, lowest school pop ever – 24 kids, 10 little ones in pipeline; ferry service – Maine State Ferry Service – 3 weeks with ramp broken, no official word from them, 5 round trips/day down to 2, high school kids are late for school, fuel trucks and workers won't come out, doctors are cancelling, Donna and NP enrolled in EMT course – need younger people to step up; purchased \$400 in gift cards to distribute to 60+ aged through elder care non-profit to celebrate birthdays.

Isle au Haut: Thanks to Mike for his reports, quiet, Peggi's working on annual report, regular ocean and pond plunges, 2 births in the next 2 days

North Haven: Two structure fires in last 3 months, conversations about trainings and enhancing those services; town Meeting and budgeting prep, community vision for long term planning, housing – workforce, year round, rentals; store has been for sale for 5 years

Vinalhaven: Covid outbreak starting in Dec., deep into hiring staff for town, lots of capital projects coming up – transfer station redo, downtown infrastructure project (\$6mil)

Matinicus: Phone company is working on upgrades; 4 kids in school – 35 people out here with 12 that come and go; handful of little kids with parents who have homes on mainland; slammed with a lot more tourism – don't have facilities, no one out here makes their living on tourism and there isn't the infrastructure, overloaded; no emergency covid cases.

Monhegan: Winter months with cold and less light have been hard; issue with ferry service – renegotiated postal contract to drop down to 2 and then went back to 3 – help from II and Pingree's office, looking at alternatives – only transportation, medical emergencies, fuel, etc.; 3 kids in the school, 3-4 in the pipeline, but if we don't figure out housing, they may leave, 50-60 residents this winter; suicide end of Dec., counselors from Sweetzer Center and Douglas from Seacoast came out; \ working with MISCA to increase housing availability. Need year round housing. MISCA was gifted 2 lots 20 years ago and they were recently given to 2 applicants to build on – more that we need to do to attract younger people housing. Broadband committee delayed – build new tower, challenges with Consolidated on phone service; wind project off of south side of island – we're in non-island fishermen's crosshairs, project is now moving through state regulatory process.

Chebeague: Lowest school numbers ever with 11, kids in pipeline, 35 a few years ago, II's facilitated housing series – groups collaborating, town partnering; we've been talking about housing for 15+ years, PT on island is incredible – has clients from 7am-5:30pm, house visits and rec center, Slow Bell open for takeout and dine-in; spike in Covid and 1 resident was on ventilator but home now; thanked II/MIC/Pingree's office for dredging channel, storm has jeopardized access road to Little Chebeague – designated Coastal Barrier Zone so might prevent aid from state to fix road, only access would be by boat – message me for ideas; EMS shortage but 8 people in class; polar bear swim is back – free chili/chowder/soup; monthly zoom historical society lecture – check website; brand new slow plow and truck; contract for broadband – voted to move forward with it;

Long: Store owners and employees keep the store flowing, it's tiny but they keep it well stocked, we don't hold the coffee hour right now, other store owners opened up restaurant/store - pizza, taps, bakery items, broadband is done and it's here, seasonal residents will get hooked up in spring, haven't hear one complaint, happy with Consolidate, place hasn't slowed down, damage to float system (rescue boat) from NW winds exposure, zero kids in pipeline for school, 7 kids in school currently, 7 come from GD, housing, Janice and Melanie (II Fellow) overseeing comp plan – housing is front and center, ground water committee has energy, Covid has swept through but slowing now, Feb pop. 219 – several seniors moved up, down from last year.; wellness luncheons on hold but gave out Valentine's bags, physical therapy may start soon

Cliff: Feels like spring, working at school temporarily while they post for Ed Tec. position, wellness center slows down in winter, hoping to start up soup luncheons, working on 2nd sustainable cliff island house, summer store is great but owners just opened a restaurant in Portland, need off season meeting place, ferry service is steady, when we had 5 stores with 150 residents – people used up credit at one store and moved onto another, we may resurrect SCI owned store to complement summer store

Great Diamond: Diamond Cove is under new Management, it's been a reasonably smooth winter.

Peaks: Peaks Island Council appointment. CDIA association grants and Portland allocation. Community collaborative - attempt to have a hub center for all island non-profits.