

Maine Islands Coalition in Augusta

March 29, 2023 10am-2pm

Room 102, Cross Café Conference Room, Burton Cross Office Building

Attendees:

MIC in person: Roger Berle (MIC Co-chair) and Cheryl Crowley (Cliff), Ingrid Gaither (Great Cranberry), Kendra Chubbuck (MIC Co-chair, Isle au Haut), Eva Murray and Laurie Webber (Matinicus), Ellen Mahoney and Anne Coughlin (Peaks), Jennifer Fox (Great Diamond)

MIC online: Phil Crossman (Vinalhaven), Carley Feibusch (Monhegan), Mark Greene (Long Island), Bob Earnest (Chebeague)

Legislators and staff: State Rep. Laurie Osher (Orono; Agriculture, Conservation and Forestry), Rep. Charles Skold (Peaks, Cliff, Great Diamond, Portland; Labor and Housing), Rep. Stanley Paige Zeigler (Islesboro; Chair of Energy, Utilities, and Technology), Rep. Steve Moriarty (Chebeague, Long; Elections, Ethics, Judiciary), Senator Teresa Pierce (Cumberland County including Long and Falmouth), Senator “Pinny” Beebe-Center (Knox County including Matinicus, North Haven, Vinalhaven, and Rockland; Chair Criminal Justice and Public Safety, Marine Resources); Jenna Howard (Chief of Staff, Senate Majority Office); Scott Donahue (Legislative Aide, Senate Majority Office, Senator Grohoski); Alex Kennedy (Legislative Aide, Senate Majority Office, Senators Curry, Reny, and Nangle), Kelly Cotiaux (Sen. Collins), Teague Morris (Sen. King), Zach Schmesser (Rep. Golden)

Partners: Hannah Pingree (GOPIF, North Haven), Douglas Cornman and Simone Babineaux (Maine Seacoast Mission), Peter Huston (GLIA)

Island Institute: Kate Tagai, Brenna Cohen, Alex Zipparo, Stephanie Welch

Catering: A Small Town Bakery, Julie Baker and Sue, from Wayne

Welcome and MIC history: Roger and Kendra

A handful of Maine islanders asked Philip Conkling, Island Institute’s I co-founder, to convene a meeting in Rockland to strategize on how to stop a proposed liquid natural gas terminal in Casco Bay. It’s Nate Michaud formed a regular gathering of islanders from the 15 year-round islands Islands got together with Island Institute. We now meet monthly from September to May and have covered an extensive list of topics from libraries to lobstering. (See **Addendum MIC Topics Addressed**). We’ve supported each other with the arts and schools, such as putting on North Haven’s musical, and addressing problems such as houseboats near the islands. Everyone’s problems are different but the problems are universal. When we focus on islands, we can mythbust...there’s no single perspective of “the islands”.

Island Updates:

Matinicus (Eva): 22 miles off the coast. Transportation is really hard. Farthest island out of east coast in US with year round population. Our lowest population in history this year with only 17 winter residents. Our average population is only 80-90 people year round. Don’t have enough people to do the work on the island. Public works employee died before Thanksgiving- big shoes to fill. Everyone on the island has multiple jobs (11+ part-time jobs). Lobster is the entire economy. Noone works remotely, online jobs are not part of the real economy here. (But we do have a couple of residents who work online). No students

enrolled in our school this year but a few are studying online, cobbling together learning opportunities such as [TLC](#) (Outer Islands Teaching & Learning Collaborative) with Eva and homeschool. The school is not closed and we recently started a library. Recycling program is 20 years old (despite those who said it wouldn't work). Transportation and electric utility are really hard- more than \$1.50/KWH because it runs on diesel. Despite what others say, there's no quick and simple solutions. it's really a complex issue. We're very worried about the lack of people in winter- like the canary in the coalmine of islands. It's not just one problem- it's a wicked problem of complex issues. The fuel tanker pilot is extremely ill. The island air provider is struggling with profitability. Ferry only comes 36 times a year. [Criehaven](#) is a telling example, a domino effect where services end, people leave and more people follow.

Peaks (Ellen): 700 – 1000 residents. Part of Portland. Housing is more and more expensive, desirable communities feel the pressure and it's impossible for people to stay on the island. Ellen is 7th generation Portlander, but this is the first generation where my children can't harness their economic resources to grow in a community that our family's lived in since the 1600's. She was involved in first affordable housing bond. 35 students in school- significant drop over the years from 70 to 50 to now. Peaks was once the affordable place to move but it's no longer as older affluent people are moving there. We're facing sea level rise, roads destroyed and we're overrun by summer visitors. We've created zoning ordinances to regulate boarding. Health Center has closed because it's too expensive to send Maine Health staff out but our medical professionals stepped up to volunteer to run it. 30% of our land is in conservation, which puts pressure on land development. We're training EMTs and firefighters because our current crew are aging. Island Institute has helped with programs such as Fellows and scholarships, but need to ensure year-round sustainability and access to the island especially for young people. Loves II and has worked with us for 25 years, including with ISLES, island leadership cohort. Learns more about her own island by listening to other islands. Not unique problems from the rest of rural maine, but more focused. Ellen remembers years ago when Little Diamond's school had a student that came from Peaks. Now there are no year round residents on Little Diamond. At the turn of the century, Maine had 300 year round islands, now we have 15. Important for islands to work together to focus collective power.

Great Diamond Island (Jennifer Fox): Little over 70 year-round residents. GDI students attend school on Long Island, make up half the school body (6 kids), and take the ferry there. Island is divided into 2 communities: "public" side and "private" side (Diamond Cove). Diamond Cove, developed in 1980, provides its own services through private association. Public side is part of Portland's public services, which included a sea wall and basketball court in the city's capital improvement plan, the first time in memory. While there used to be a balance between year round population on public side and private side, now more live on private side. Investors from outside Maine drive up housing costs, making it impossible for regular people to afford housing. Little Diamond now has two year round residents.

Cliff (Cheryl): 50 year round residents. Really hard to bring young families to island- housing is the problem. Feel very neglected by Portland. People are buying with cash way above value and driving up property values. If regular people and families can't find or afford housing, schools will lose students, employers will lose workers. Year-round communities will not continue.

Cranberry Isles (Ingrid): 60-70 year round residents on each island. Highest in a while. Islesford previously had similar amount, but GC is increasing in population. Both schools are renovated, run year round and rotate on both islands. Sharing the students has improved the relationships between the

islands. If bad weather, the kids stay on their own island, we're the only school with a "wind policy". So far each island has always had a teacher. Great Cranberry's year-round general store, which employs 4-5 people and is a major social hub, was destroyed in a fire this winter. Owner is floating finances and hopes to open by fall. Broadband from USDA grant provides better internet on our island than on the mainland. Great Cranberry added two families during COVID, who work remotely. Kept two homes from turning into summer stock- needed the broadband for work and to afford living there. Thanks to financing from Genesis/Maine Housing affordable housing fund, the [Cranberry Isles Realty Trust](#), is building 2 affordable rentals on Great Cranberry. It's really hard to keep year-round, affordable housing. Land Trust housing does trap people, without growth opportunities. We have down payment but can't find anything. Market forces make it impossible. Was able to come live on the island because of affordable housing, however. On another note, excited about Great Cranberry Futures Group.

Isle au Haut (Kendra): 20 year people live here year round or so. 189 homes on island. 3 students (all girls) K-8. Have a labor shortage- house cleaner (\$45/hr) decided not to clean. No landscaper and mower. Someone donated to the town for new community center with café. This involved drilling \$25k well (family donated). Have a town hall, but this space will provide prepared food. Working on broadband- hope to have Axiom sometime between April and July.

North Haven/GOPIF (Hannah Pingree): North Haven resident and GOPIF Director. 417 yr round residents. 45 students. Store just sold to a couple from Nantucket, very exciting. Town took on visioning for community infrastructure and economic development, including housing, workforce, and climate. Island Fellow worked on this. NH is signing up for Community Resilience Partnership and looking at how to address dying spruce population.

Long Island (Mark): - Remembers beginnings of MIC with historic protest at the Cumberland town council against the LNG terminal. 218 year round population with 102 households, steady but aging. 13 students now, but almost zero kids in pipeline. Long Island civic association received \$10,000 Shore Up grant, thanks to help from Island Fellow. Sea Level Rise poses severe threats. Casco Bay Lines is amazing. Connect Maine grant brought broadband, which helps people stay here longer... but without housing, can't attract young families. We're one of the only islands without long-term year round rentals. We have two lots available and the reality of construction, etc. is overwhelming. We have a proposal for funding for the town admin to add more time to focus on island housing. Thanks to the legislature for island housing funding- but not enough and we need capacity to manage the grant on the ground. This capacity is not possible on islands with small populations, where everyone is spread thin with multiple jobs. Each island is different but major issues are similar.

Monhegan (Carley): 70 year round residents (up a little) have 3 kids in school, one graduating. Lots of projects- broadband tower build, process to transfer water company to town, drill wells, water treatment assessment, wharf resiliency study. Working with Lydia Crafts to pass legislation to support water company upgrades. Housing is a big problem- a couple hopping around from house to house between summer and winter. MISCA has just awarded two lots for housing. Power is run on diesel powered turbines. Have land but not able to develop in way zoned. Wearing too many hats for capacity.

Chebeague (Bob): Population 375 (up 25) 10 students, 11 next year, 3 in pre-k. December 22 storm hit hard, eroded roads including some on private land. Town projects include [Stone Wharf](#) assessment, upgrading public safety infrastructure, and finalizing application to Maine Housing for rental units. Finalizing app to Maine Housing for 4 rental units. Aiming to stem the trend towards seasonal residents

outnumbering year round community with comprehensive plan, zoning ordinance and affordable housing. Climate Action Team has formed. Very concerned about the aquaculture leasing bill (LD 487) and want more local input into leasing decisions to grow aquaculture through smaller family owned businesses rather than corporate structures.

Legislator intros & updates:

Rep. Zeigler: Represents Islesboro, which has same issues as other towns but they're magnified. Students: 86 students: K-5: 22 students, 6-8: 22 students, 9-12: 42 (20 kids come from off island). Island has become more affluent. Contacted DOT to deal with inadequate parking on mainland side of ferry. Broadband has made a huge difference. There's debate on the island over increasing ferry runs. Has ten bills in committee to vote on so needs to leave.

Governor's Office on Policy Innovation & Future – Hannah Pingree: GOPIF director, lives on NH, was II board member and was a legislator for many years. GOPIF works on climate, energy, aging and ending hunger by 2030. Delivery of programs is most important. Our office helps small communities address challenges. Legislature is in the middle of trying to pass baseline budget. While there are a lot of federal funding opportunities, it's hard to apply for federal funding. The Bipartisan Infrastructure Law and other recent federal legislation provide funds to towns but it's overwhelming for towns to manage.

Rep. Skold: Bill in select committee with Maine Housing to create 1-4 new units with rental covenant. Welcomes islanders to testify. (*more info on this*)

U.S. Senator Collins (Kelly): Working hard to support Lobster, with rest of delegation.

- CDS season ([appropriations requests](#)) - think about what you want assistance with.
- Academy Night at Sheraton in Bangor will include the whole congressional delegation. It's a job fair for service academies including Merchant Marines, Maine Maritime, Coast Guard. Students can also learn about how to pay for school and what to study. Encourage educators to attend too.
- Renew passport ASAP. Currently 8-10 weeks wait but 18 weeks in the future. State Dept. received 500,000 apps in Feb because of new online portal. Backlog due to Covid layoffs. When you apply, send it in with tracking number. Start applying 6 months prior to passport expiration.

U.S. Senator King (Teague):

- We're processing 300 CDS requests.
- Sen. King appointed to Veterans Affairs Committee, first Maine Senator in 20+ years. Funding is tied up for Maine Vets Home. He's hearing that oversight of VA is important and supporting transitions. We need to invest as much time and energy to help soldiers return to civilian life, in particular suicide prevention. There is a study looking at correlation between soldier's occupation and suicide. King interviewed 9 vets through Library of Congress program. He's also focusing on aging vets and keeping vets' homes open. While on paper, funding was restored for vets assisted living, he's pushing to implement it
- Teague produces 3 policy updates and circulates newly posted federal grants. Please contact him if you want to receive them. teague_morris@king.senate.gov

U.S. Representative Golden (Zach): IRT and Bipartisan Infrastructure Law have opportunities for funding for technical assistance. Especially with energy infrastructure and climate resilience. Reach out to our offices for help with this. We can also search for grant opportunities for you, even for smaller projects. We want you to be successful.

Senate Majority Office (Scott): Works with Senator Grohoski and Senator Pierce (Chair Joint Select Committee on Housing). Senate bill to provide [housing first](#), wrap around services such as healthcare along with housing to reduce chronic homelessness, could offer a model for island housing needs.

Partner orgs and other updates:

Maine Seacoast Mission (Doug): Purchasing and handing out ipads to help with telehealth, along with cell coverage and IT tech assistance. Healthcare access is shifting. Helps with mental health. Can look at better and expanded use of the boat – don't need to go to islands to connect islanders with telehealth. People aren't getting out as much, post covid... hosting things on islands to foster that. Trying to engage islands so they are involved, rather than just planning events for them. Partnership with MDI biolab to test arsenic in well water and its impact on seniors. Work with all 15 year-round islands but most frequently with Cranberries, Frenchboro, Swan's, Matinicus, Monhegan, Isle au Haut. Potential to bring Sunbeam to Casco Bay. Sunbeam had \$2 million retrofit/repairs. Looking to expand Washington County based volunteer skilled carpenters to islands but challenged by need for accommodations.

Island Institute (Alex): April 28 [Artists and Makers Conference](#) at Hutchinson Center in Belfast.

Other discussion:

- Very concerned about **lobster** industry changes (regulations) - this is our future.
- **Working Waterfronts:** LD 574 would allow land trusts to hold working waterfront covenants. Will go to floor in a week or so and has support of DMR, etc. It will develop a toolkit to support land trusts.
- Cheryl brought Cliff's student art and lobster stories for Rep Skold
- More on **housing**
 - Maine Housing Island Affordable Housing: Cranberry will close in April, North Haven and Islesboro have applied. Chebeague will apply next week. Islesford, Isle au Haut, Peaks, will be applying sometime within the next couple months. Long and Matinicus are talking, but are 50/50 as to whether they can pull something together.
 - LD 2003- requires towns to allow ADUs. Islands that are making progress have an island nonprofit.
 - For Peaks- ADU is fine, but to develop them is still expensive.
 - Tiny homes are fine, but don't meet weatherization and energy requirements of Maine Housing.
 - Peaks had major TA from Genesis. But still so much work. Islands don't have the capacity.
 - Rising housing values linked to increased property taxes?
 - higher sales doesn't mean higher taxes. Property taxes are based on assessed value and [mill rate](#), not on sales price. Sales price may indirectly influence as assessment values can be affected.

- Sending **volunteers** to islands for projects including building housing. Sunbeam could send volunteers (expand their Washington County construction program) but it's hard to house them on islands. Not even enough room for tents. Also unskilled volunteers require too much capacity when islanders are working multiple jobs. Housing, supervision, meaningful projects take more skill.
- **Future meetings:**
 - Monthly meetings prior to COVID and moved to monthly during COVID. Quarterly meetings?
 - We are successful with hybrid. Augusta meetings are everything.
 - Continue to include GLIA, which is based on MIC.
 - Kendra and Brenna's visit to Great Lakes Islands Summit. Multiple states and international border. GLIA attendees asked about Fellows program and Teacher Learning Collaborative.
- **Closing** - Takeaways and appreciations: Maine Seacoast Mission in Casco Bay, feeling energized after this meeting, energy of meeting in person, the caterer from Wayne, hearing about islanders' opportunities and challenges, a wealth of info, resilience of islanders and how you continue to laugh and love where you live, felt legislators' respect and listening, key touchpoints with legislators, most inspiring group of people, our island has much in common with our islands, Covid made some things easier and people off island had to learn to live like we've always lived, we are still here.