

## Maine Island Coalition Notes

1/24/24

4<sup>th</sup> floor, Cross Building, Augusta

Catered by A Small Town Bakery, Wayne General, Julie Baker

### Meeting Participants

1. Olivia Jolley, Swan's Island
2. Laurie Webber, Matinicus
3. Eva Murray, Matinicus
4. Ingrid Gaither, Cranberry Isles
5. Fred Somers, Peaks Island
6. Tracy Sommers, Great Diamond Island
7. Bob Olney, Isle au Haut
8. Peggi Stevens, Isle au Haut
9. Kendra Chubbuk, Isle au Haut
10. Fanny Allen, Isle au Haut
11. Ellie Kastanapolous, Isle au Haut
12. Nancy Alexander, Islesboro
13. Ben Mackey, Great Diamond Island
14. Cheryl Crowley, Cliff
15. Rachel Bishop, Frenchboro
16. Jan Keiper, Frenchboro
17. Bob Earnest, Chebeague
18. Janice Avignon, Long Island
19. Beth Marchak, Long Island
20. Marjorie Stratton, Vinalhaven

### Island Institute Staff

1. Alex Zipparo, Island Institute
2. Nick Battista, Island Institute
3. Kate Tagai, Island Institute

### Congressional Delegation Staff

1. Kelly Cotiaux, District Rep, Collins
2. Zach Schmesser, District Rep, Golden
3. Christina Breen, District Rep, King

### Maine Legislators

1. Rep Valli Geiger – District 93
2. Rep Steve Moriarty-District 110

3. Rep Holly Eaton- District 15
4. Rep Charles Skold- District 119
5. Rep Lydia Crafts- District 90
6. Senator Teresa Pierce- District 25
7. Senator Jill Duson- District 27
8. Senator Nicole Grohoski- District 7
9. Senator Cameron Reny- District 13
10. Senator Pinny Beebe-Center- District 12

### Legislative Staff

1. Alex Kennedy, Senate Majority Office
2. William Ranko,
3. David DiMinno, Senate Majority Office
4. Bilal Hussein, Aide for Sen. Duson and Ingwersen
5. Scott Donahue, Senate Majority Office

### Executive Branch and Partners

1. Judy East- Co-Chair of Climate Community Resilience Working Group of Maine Climate Council
2. Stacie Beyer- Land Use Planning Commission- Serve 308 Islands and the unorganized territories
3. Hannah Pingree- Governor's Office of Policy, Innovation, and the Future
4. Molly Siegel- Governor's Office of Policy, Innovation, and the Future
5. Mark Primeau- Genesis Fund

11:00

#### Storm Impact

Chebeague- Stone Pier was damaged on the surface and they are studying what damage may have happened below the surface. Two roads are severely damaged but usable. However, they will need to be rebuilt. Barge access is limited, and diesel can't be delivered. Aquaculture and lobstering operations took a hit with gear in the water. One summer cottage is not repairable, but most houses escaped without damage. Lots of erosion on beaches and bluffs and that will cascade to impact homes in the next storm or two which is causing increased interest in building sea walls.

Frenchboro- Island access points survived well, though some private docks were damaged.

Swan's Island- Carrying Place was inundated. Everyone was hit but the community showed up to help sort out whose wharf ended up on whose property.

Matinicus- One home is uninhabitable, lots of wear and tear, but not as bad as a lot of places along the coast.

Isle au Haut- The town didn't get as much damage as it could have- gravel and causeways went back to the ocean, lots of private property was flooded, but the town avoided a lot of serious damage. The boat company in Stonington got hit hard when the wharf floated up and that is a lifeline to the island. The wharf is also an important source of revenue to the boat company because people pay to park on it, but with the storm damage that isn't possible. Lots of personal wharves floated off their supports and will need to be replaced. Need planning. A representative from Collin's office has been out to inspect the damage. Island Advantage newspaper has a lot of photos of the storm damage. The flooding in Head Harbor came to within two inches of several houses, so it is only a matter of time before they are flooded because of rising sea levels.

Peaks- Eastern side of the island, Seashore Ave, was devastated by flooding. It will take a lot of work to restore. The road over time will not be sustainable as it is, so will need planning to figure out what's next for that piece of infrastructure. Northeast homes were inundated. Damage is still being catalogued. None of the critical infrastructure was adversely impacted. Wastewater treatment and three pumping stations held up fine during the storm. Planning is needed more quickly than people anticipated.

Islesboro- The narrows got washed away and is now only 20 feet across. The road was down to one lane and lost the asphalt. In 36 hours, the road crew had the road up and running again and it wasn't further damaged by the second storm. The town and Sea Level Rise Committee is well into the planning stages working with a company that will have a proposal for review soon. The force of the storm was impressive. There was a dock with steel supports driven into bedrock where the steel was twisted out of the rock. Private docks were damaged.

Great Diamond Island- Marina and dock at Diamond Cove was flooded. This means the dock is no longer safe for vehicles to drive down it which impacts emergency services using the dock to transfer patients to the ferry. The causeway on the other side has been damaged. The 13'+ storm tide has eroded access. There was already planned and budgeted repairs and upgrades to the causeway, but the work had not yet started and now because of storm damage the repairs will be bigger. They need to build back better, but they aren't a high priority because so many of the residents are seasonal.

Cliff- Both storms did progressively more damage with the loss of wharves, sheds, boat houses, and one of the working docks for a lobsterman. The main dock that the ferry service uses was damaged and the underpinning structure needs to be repaired. The state took over ownership of the dock last year and they have been out to look at it. The barge ramp was totally wiped out. The road crew shed was washed away including all the stored winter road sand. Road Crew worker lives out in damaged area and was able to build back enough of a road to allow limited access.

Judy East- The Climate Council is holding extra meetings today, 1/23/24, to hear about the damage and create recommendations for resilience and measures. Maine Community Resilience Workbook is an important resource for communities to use. Printed in 2023, they are looking for resources to keep it up to date.

<https://extension.umaine.edu/climatesolutions/maine-community-resilience-workbook/>

#### Resource Links for Storm Response

There is a need to quantify what it looks like on the ground, even if there is reticence because it is private property or people don't think it will help. Encourage people to report.

Reporting Link: <https://content.govdelivery.com/accounts/MEDMR/bulletins/3866060>

MEMA County Local Agency Link: <https://www.maine.gov/mema/ema-community/county-local/county-emergency-management-agencies>

#### 1:00 Business Meeting

##### Topics:

Housing, energy, transportation, solid waste, shoreline resilience, working waterfront, land use planning, drinking water

#### **Affordable Housing**

Ellie: The infrastructure that sustains the community is propped up and the best solution is to create more affordable housing so that these critical organizations have the capacity they need. If not, we will be asking, 'how long can we sustain?'

Ellen: The housing conversation has grown more difficult as costs have increased, of materials, labor, and real estate, and islands have aged. There are 15 year-round islands off the coast and that is the reality that we face.

Tracy: The population is becoming more seasonal on some of the islands. Homes are turning into seasonal second homes when they go on the market.

Olivia: Swan's has started a conversation about Airbnb regulations and looking for input on how it has worked on other islands. There has always been a large seasonal community and visitors coming to the island for shorter stays, but it is becoming a bigger issue as short term rental properties grow in popularity. There are fewer houses available for sternmen and people working on the islands.

Ellie: Maine State Housing Authority put money into the Island Housing Fund in 2022 and they are already talking about taking it away and rolling it into a larger program. This program was catered towards islands and the different challenges of islands. It won't work for us to have to compete with mainland housing organizations. We are fighting to leave the money there in the fund because not every island has had a chance to apply. February 15<sup>th</sup> is the deadline for submitting an application for the funds.

Peggi: The paperwork for the original grant application is so much. Changing the requirements is hard. Paperwork for small islands is a burden. It takes time and capacity that isn't available.

Kelly: It is a big problem for any rural community with any sort of grant and services like the ambulance that needs documentation and reporting is a huge burden.

Fannie: It takes longer for islands to apply and navigate the paperwork, so we need a longer time horizon.

Peggi: It is hard to get contractors, who are scheduling out for years, if they come at all.

Ellie: Is it important enough to the State of Maine to have island communities?

Ellen: There is an opportunity to bring together a coalition of like-minded communities so that we aren't the stand alone islands, we can build relationships with other small, rural places that are also struggling in the same way islands are struggling with this critical issue. The things that impact the state of Maine are most obvious on islands.

Christine: Do you know if this was a state decision?

Ellie: Maine Housing emailed applicants that their applications had to be complete by Feb 15<sup>th</sup>- news came mid-December.

Bob: Please note that Maine Housing provides funding to Genesis to help islands and that has been a huge benefit.

Maine Housing is a quasi-governmental agency. The director is appointed by the Governor and their funding comes from the general fund of the legislature. Special projects are written in statute.

One strategy is to let state legislators know how this impacts you.

Kelly: Email is powerful because you can let them know exactly how you feel, and they can reference that in a way that is harder with a phone call. Email first, follow up with a phone call.

Peggi: Can someone from Island Institute email the department and grant and info to MIC so people can follow up?

Alex: We can provide the contact information, yes.

### **Solid Waste**

Peggi: Solid waste on an island is a difficult challenge. How do you deal with it on your island?

Eva: Matinicus started 20 years ago, but what Matinicus does may not work with other islands. Maine Resource Recovery Association (<https://mrra.net/>) runs a training for people that Eva attended and that helped Matinicus get their start. You can network with solid waste people and get connected with grants and funding options. You can start a recycling system even if you can't start a transfer station (which needs an impervious surface to operate). Matinicus signed an agreement for recycling with the city of Rockland. Eva got a Uhaul and took a load of recycling over on the ferry. They started building a relationship with the City of Rockland, so they can get answers to their questions and help when they have single, big items to recycle like a load of pot warp. They pay the fees that Rockland requires. Their biggest problem is convincing people not to bring their stinky trash to the staging area because they have nowhere to store it, it attracts rodents and pests and they can only go once a month in the winter. They will take separate trips to take things other than standard recycling like pot warp to Rockland. The Matinicus recycling effort relies entirely on volunteer labor. The cost of the program is the cost of transportation, Uhaul rental, and dump fees. They started small and built a system one step at a time into the system they have now.

Peggi: Our trash could go to Blue Hill or other regional towns. Peggi wanted to get a compactor which required heavy equipment, which they have. But she was thinking that the islands are close together that if they rented a barge together they could create a system together. All the residents abide by the rules of the waste disposal system, and they figure out what they can afford. The system works well the three busy months of the summer but doesn't work in the winter. Cars are the other big problem. They aren't being towed off as frequently because they can't be moved by backhoe anymore. But every island has junk cars, electronic waste, can they get together to create some efficiency for disposal?

Eva: Matinicus had a junk car issue. Around 2000 taxpayers hired Prock Marine and they spent a day collecting all the cars and shipping them off. The next town meeting they decided they needed a system to prevent the pile up of cars, so they worked through the legislature to enact the single ordinance they have on the books which is that there is a fee for bringing out a car. The fee gets put into an account held by the Assessors so that if the car is left on the island, the island has the wrecker fee to get it off again and if the owner brings the car off, they get their fee back. The reason it worked is because there was a volunteer who met every car getting off every single ferry to check the paperwork. The ferry service weren't going to be the ones to track and enforce this, so it had to be someone from the community. You have to have someone to enforce it.

Peggi: Maybe we can see what the other islands are doing. Isle au Haut has talked about instituting a fee for cars, but we haven't implemented it. There is power in the collective and to know what others are doing. How can we team up together?

### **Water Quality**

Janice: The issue that got people excited about getting rid of the junk cars on Long Island was the possible impacts to the water supply. Are other islands worried about the supply, contamination, and capacity of their water? Just got a grant through CRP to do a water study to see where we are vulnerable.

Tracy: There was a study in 1986 done for all the city islands of Portland. It is out of date, but still a resource.

Janice: We'd like to know about point source pollution, runoff, etc. We'd like to take a regional approach so we can coordinate with neighboring islands.

If we have a regional dataset, the state is more likely to take a comprehensive look.

Alex: North Haven has had issues with blue-green algae and they are also using CRP funding to do a study of water quality. Jane Disney and MDI Labs have a water quality study going on where they will help you test your water. <https://mdibl.org/funding-helps-expand-arsenic-awareness-program/> She came to MIC last spring to present on her research and project.

Nancy: We have little zoning and a single aquafer. So, when there was a development proposed with 10 swimming pools, it raised concerns. In the last few years there has been enough water so we aren't worried about the aquafer, but there will be years again where the water will be a concern. The septic field will be underwater from rising ocean levels and that is a greater concern.

Beth: As part of the comprehensive plan they worked with GPCOG to do a survey where they could see the responses and written comments to get a sense of how concerned people were over water quality. There are a lot of things people are afraid to say publicly, so giving them an anonymous way to talk to the committee was very valuable. The work continues to reinforce

what they say in the survey. A survey where people can honestly tell you what they are worried about can be invaluable in work planning.

Janice: One of the hardest things for us is getting people to agree on an issue. But the survey and focus groups gave them a quantitative and qualitative data set to point to show community consensus. They now have a resilience fellow through GPCOG to help complete the work.

Tracy: There is a group who put together a living shoreline workshop in the fall that brought in experts who dealt with restoration of bluffs with state organizations. They are doing a symposium this summer to follow up dealing with the private property level dealing with bluff erosion. Because of property values, people are reluctant to talk about it. They perceive that talking about the issues will devalue their property.

Janice: The same thing with wells and septic, people don't want to share the info, but the state has a way to collect the data to share the macro data set back with the town.

### **Storm Damage**

Ben: There are going to be a few seasonal people who will be shocked when they come back and see how much of their property is gone.

Peggi: The plastic that siphoned out of the system and ended up on the shoreline because it is lighter is unbelievable.

Cheryl: I've been walking around with garbage bags picking up the plastic because it feels like a tangible step in the face of so much work.

Rachel: Frenchboro is worried about surviving. Making sure the lobster regulation issue and the whales with NOAA and the windfarm and the monitoring stay at the forefront of the legislature's mind. Aside from the physical damage of the storms, we need help.

Ellen: Are there fishermen up and down the coast who lost gear? Is this event a way to bring fishing to the forefront?

Rachel: Because it is the offseason, their gear were being stored on the wharves, so if the wharf was lost, so was the gear.

Olivia: Swan's got flooded up to where the cars get gas, so all the fishing infrastructure supporting the commercial lobstering was damaged. It isn't affecting them right now, but it will in the next couple months when they are trying to get back out onto the water.

Tracy: The state talked about resilience. Do you build back as is, or do you build back better and how do you fund the gap?

Olivia: The fishermen just invested in a new storage solution, but it still got flooded. With a new building, we don't know if it had been insured yet?

Cheryl: Insurance on islands is an important topic and one where people, if they can get insurance, are hesitant to use it because the rates will become unaffordable.

Nancy: Divers can collect some of the traps that were washed from wharves, but most of them are lost. There is an oyster farm and a mussel farm in that area of our island, too. There were also three state floats that were destroyed. Without those floats the islands in the Islesboro archipelago won't be able to access the ferry.

Ellen: I'm reminded of the interconnectedness of these issues and will encourage sending succinct emails to your legislators reiterating these issues.

Nancy: She counted 50 workmen getting off the ferry that morning, there is so much construction going on. It has taken 1.5 years to get an electrician to her house. There is an entrepreneur who has bought a truck, loading equipment and dumpsters and he is running dumpsters on and off for waste disposal. It is already starting to pay off and helping the transfer station which would occasionally close because they were full.

Janice: Mariners Wharf has sustained damage over the years, so the last storm didn't hit it any harder, but they are in the process of trying to upgrade it. Our primary wharf is partly owned by the state and partly owned by the town so aligning the funding efforts are challenging. Casco Bay Lines runs the ferry, so each island is different in terms of the ferry support infrastructure. There is a lot of money that has been fundraised and can't move forward without the state doing some of its pieces. I'm trying to find a way to get the state to move on their portion so we can move forward on the planned repairs and upgrades.

## **MIC Business**

### Annual Report and Dues

Dues are \$200 annually from each town. Anticipate the invoices for 2024 will be coming.

Annual Report was sent via email. Will be sent again with the invoice.

Kendra presents a warrant in her town meeting about MIC dues. "To see what sum of money the town will appropriate for the MIC" writes in the renewal dues and she adds in the cost of attending meetings (approx. \$300) so every year they ask the town for \$500 to cover both the dues and travel expenses of the MIC member. Kendra takes the annual report and puts it into the town report for transparency with the town. Kendra is asked at town meeting to stand up and talk about MIC. She also submits receipts to the town with her expenses so they can be tracked.

### Strategic Plan Updates

Kendra, Ellen, Alex solicited input into the plan updates and created action items as a blueprint for ongoing work and keeps the coalition moving forward and how best to use our combined voice.



Janice: Sustaining doesn't jump out of the mission and priorities. Do we want to strengthen the language?

Eva: One of the reasons it was changed was because of the relationship with the Island Institute and their tagline "sustaining Maine Islands" and how it implied dependency.

Ellen: We can take time and look at the document through the lens of strengthening language.

Rachel: Encourage, support, and advocate is the language that is in here over and over again and that's where MIC needs to be.

Ben: Not just within the island but having the federal delegation here is important. To raising awareness to the members in D.C., too.

Eva: It is the intangible benefit to know we aren't alone in the struggle- whatever it is.

Ellen: Do people feel they can move forward on this document as presented?

Cheryl: I like how it has been updated from the original.

Alex: It is a guiding document, we aren't a formal non-profit so it isn't set in stone and it is a living document that can be changed and amended.

Meeting Schedule for 2024

Early March on zoom after fisherman's forum- topic: Working Waterfronts