

## **Working Waterfront Advisory Council - Meeting Summary**

February 24<sup>th</sup>, 2026 in Augusta and via Zoom

(Meeting Summary approved 5/5/2026)

**Council members present:** Rachel Bizarro, Shey Conover, Bob Wood, Tora Johnson, Bob Carey, Heather Moretti, Stacey Keefer, Mitch Lench, Chad Strater, Linda Nelson, Dan Bookham, Casey O'Hara, Rhiannon Hampson, Hugh Cowperthwaite, Boe Marsh

**Maine Office of Community Affairs (MOCA) staff present:** Jocelyn Runnebaum, Erin Campbell, Harriet Booth (Council staff)

**Department of Marine Resources (DMR) staff present:** Deirdre Gilbert

**Collaborators and members of the public:** Nick Battista, Olivia Richards, Paul Plummer, Tom Duffus, Natalie Springuel, Chris Payne, Michael Moser, Sarah Demers, Emily Farr, Monique Coombs, Emerson Goodrich, Jonathan Labaree, Laura Pinover, Emmett Gartner

(Meeting commenced at 1:05pm.)

### **Welcome and Orientation to the Council**

- Samantha Horn – Director of the Maine Office of Community Affairs welcomed everyone and thanked Council members for serving.
- Harriet Booth (Council staff) outlined the purpose of the Council and provided an overview of the agenda.

### **Introductions of Council members**

- Stacy Keefer – Director of Maine Marine Trades Association; Working Waterfront Coalition member and Co-Chair of their Policy Task Force
- Bob Carey – Superintendent of the Maine Bureau of Insurance; also served on the Infrastructure Resilience and Rebuilding Commission and helped organize funding for LD 1
- Chad Strater – Sea Meadow Foundation - a non-profit that helps preserve working waterfronts
- Linda Nelson – Economic and Community Development Director of the Town of Stonington; also served as Co-Chair of the Governor's Infrastructure Resilience and Rebuilding Commission
- Mitch Lench – CEO of Ocean's Balance - a seaweed company based out of Biddeford
- Dan Bookham – Senior Vice President of Commercial Insurance at Allen Insurance and Financial
- Casey O'Hara – Executive Vice President of O'Hara Corporation and Journey's End Marina
- Heather Moretti – Waterfront Coordinator for the city of Portland
- Rhiannon Hampson – Vice President for Economic Development at the Gulf of Maine Research Institute
- Hugh Cowperthwaite – Coastal Enterprises (CEI) - a community development financial institution that supports many waterfront businesses; also involved with the Working

Waterfront Coalition and worked with DMR on the Working Waterfront Access Protection Program

- John (Boe) Marsh – Owner and Operator of Community Shellfish in Bremen; also serves on the DMR Advisory Council and the Bremen selectboard
- Tora Johnson – Co-Director of the Sustainable Prosperity Initiative at Sunrise County Economic Council
- Rachel Bizarro – Town Administrator for Bristol; also a member of the Shellfish Committee, Harbor Committee, and Alewife committee
- Shey Conover - Owner at Islesboro Marine Enterprises; also serves on the selectboard and Sea Level Rise Committee
- Bob Wood – Director for Planning and Resiliency for the Passamaquoddy Tribal Government at Sipayik

### **Review and discussion of draft Terms of Reference**

- Harriet introduced this as a draft guidance document for the Council, which lays out the statute requirements as well as general structure, processes, and expectations.
  - This is a time for Council members to provide feedback on this draft document.
- Harriet walked through the document sections
  - Council role and Council meetings – quarterly, hybrid meetings with any additional meeting being remote. Proposed forum of 75% of members (11 of 15)
  - Annual Work Plan – draft to be discussed and revised with the group
  - Council Reports – annual Council reports to the Legislature as well as an annual report from the Director of MOCA
  - Council Members – terms are 3 years in length and staggered. This first membership includes 1-year, 2-year, and 3-year terms.
  - Elected Officers – a Chair and Vice-Chair will be elected each year, one-year terms.
  - Expectations of Council Members & Officers
  - Collaborators – describes the many agencies, organizations, and individuals tackling working waterfront in the state and that the hope is to have broad engagement and collaboration with the Council.
  - Communication – outlines the distribution of meeting information and materials
  - Public Meeting Policy – defines meeting formats and outlines participation
    - Council webpage: [Working Waterfront Advisory Council webpage](#)
  - Council Policies – includes Maine’s Freedom of Access Act and training requirements for Council members

### **Discussion**

- Stacy Keefer asked if there will be committees or sub-working groups as part of this Council. Harriet Booth responded that this is an option and something the Council can decide on as part of their workplan.

### **Election of Council Chair and Vice-Chair (decision)**

- These are one-year terms and will be elected at the first Council meeting of each year.
- Two nominations were put forth and were willing to serve:
  - Chair: Stacy Keefer
  - Vice-Chair: Dan Bookham

#### Discussion

- Tora Johnson asked if these nominees were willing to serve in this capacity. Stacey confirmed she is and disclosed that she also serves as the Co-Chair on the Working Waterfront Coalition Policy Task Force, used to work at Journeys End Marina, and has a family member who works at Allen Insurance and Financials. Dan confirmed that he is also willing to serve.

#### Voting (majority vote of members present)

- Chair – Stacey Keefer
  - Show of hands - unanimous vote
- Vice-Chair – Dan Bookham
  - Show of hands - unanimous vote

#### Discussion

- Stacy asked if she should run the meeting if Harriet will continue. Harriet offered to continue running this first meeting. Boe Marsh asked about the voting process and if there is there a motion and a second (Roberts Rules). Stacey responded that she would suggest the Council follow Roberts Rules going forward. Harriet will add Roberts Rule procedures into the Council's Terms of Reference.
- Bob Carey asked if there is a quorum for decision-making. Harriet responded that there is no set quorum in statute. Boe suggested that the Council asks what the DMR Advisory Council uses for their process of decision-making. Deirdre Gilbert (DMR) responded that they use a simple majority for quorum and a majority of those present to pass a vote. She named that at times even getting a majority can be challenging.

Motion (Boe Marsh and Bob Carey) – To use the same DMR Advisory Council process for decision-making: a simple majority for quorum (8 members) and a majority of the majority for decision-making (5 members).

Motion passed.

#### Further discussion

- Chad Strater asked who will be responsible for drafting the annual Council report. Harriet responded that as staff she is willing to support in any way that the Council would like. Rhiannon Hampson responded that it works well to have professional staff create the draft report and have the Council respond to that. Linda Nelson agreed and encouraged the use of well-structured working groups to make specific recommendations for the staff to easily follow in drafting those reports and accurately replicating the will of the group.
- Linda asked about the decision-making policy and whether a simple majority is appropriate for making policy recommendations to the legislature. Deirdre clarified that the DMR Advisory Council is not making policy recommendations and that a consensus vote may be more appropriate here. Linda recommended that the Council consider a different model of decision-making (consensus) instead of only 5 members needed to pass a vote.
  - Stacey suggested different decision-making policies: 1) for larger decisions when there's policy on the table and 2) for smaller decisions when one is approving a motion or approving meeting minutes, etc.
  - Linda talked about how successful the IRRC was in having consensus and bringing everyone along in the decision-making process and final reports.

- Boe asked for clarity around wording these different policies. Tora responded that it is common for councils to have different decision-making processes for different levels of decisions. The aim is a negotiated consensus and more depth than a simple majority vote. Jocelyn Runnebaum (MOCA/MCP) added that having consensus recommendations from this Council would be helpful for MCP and MOCA to bring recommendations to the legislature. Bob Carey agreed: To operate a meeting, at least 8 people there (simple majority) and for larger decisions and the issuing of a report he wouldn't want only 5 people to make a decision. Instead, it works well to hear everyone out and sought consensus.
  - Harriet will draft language for the two different decision-making policies.
- Boe asked what the number would be for those larger decisions. Linda clarified that the group would be seeking consensus to move something forward, not a simple majority. Voting in this context is about gauging consensus. If you have several people who do not agree, that means you do not have consensus and there may need to be several rounds of voting on big decisions. Stacey added that there would likely be work ahead of meetings to gather feedback around decisions. Mitch Lench asked if content may get watered down if we need to get everyone to consent. Stacey responded that a simple majority is fine for approving meeting minutes but a group consensus is needed for policy recommendations.
- Tora made the point that often proposals are made that are a good fit for the urban parts of the state and less ideal for rural parts of the state, so we need to be cognizant and clear about where and how policy is applied and its consequences. We should strive to be fully aware of all the variables and seeking consensus is a good way to make policy recommendations. Linda agreed that there won't be one size fits all and there will be competing interests surrounding working waterfronts. Everyone needs to understand the ramifications of all the parties at the table. We shouldn't be able to push something through with a majority because it wouldn't give MOCA the confidence that they need to push policy through. Stacy suggests getting language recommendations from Harriet and the Council can react to and provide feedback and the Council will adopt it at the next meeting.

### **Review and discussion of the draft Annual Workplan and Council topics**

- Harriet introduced Nick Battista – Chief Policy and External Affairs Officer for the Island Institute and Chair of Maine's Working Waterfront Coalition, a statewide non-partisan and non-profit collaboration working to support working waterfronts.
- Nick introduced some of the Coalition's work around helping to advise on the recommendations from the Infrastructure Resilience and Rebuilding Commission, helping to advise the Maine Climate Council recommendations, and helping advise the Resilient Maine grant in areas related to working waterfronts. The Coalition is also working with state agencies (MOCA, DMR, DOT, others) on various working waterfront issues and have helped envision where this Council could be most helpful.
- Recommendations from the Coalition include addressing issues outlined in these existing reports as a great starting point for the Council's work. Additionally, they recommend three topic areas (outlined below) that the Council could explore:
  1. The intersection of flood insurance and financing and what that means for working waterfronts, particularly privately-owned properties. Their ability to get financing is affected by their ability to get flood insurance. Part of the challenge is that this intersection is not well understood.

2. Local land use planning and municipal support – there's a need to think through how to support MOCA in supporting communities in incorporating working waterfronts into their planning.
  3. The regulatory environment and what that means for building projects in the working waterfront. The Coalition, DEP, MOCA, GOPIF, and other state agencies held a meeting in fall 2025 to help inform where DEP could improve guidance to help working waterfront permitting projects and where they could make statutory changes. Continuing that conversation among the Council could be fruitful. Additional opportunities may exist around the Army Corp and permitting windows.
- Additional information: The Coalition has a session at the upcoming Maine Fishermen's Forum and will also be starting a listserv. The invite will be sent to everyone and will be a platform to share working waterfront topics and resources. Also encouraged Council members to join the Coalition if not members already.
  - Harriet recapped the three topics and some potential areas to engage in ongoing work. She stated the goal for this conversation is to try to figure out what may make sense to work on and how to accomplish that work.

#### Discussion

- Bob Wood stated that all these topics sound important but would like more context around them. He suggested first articulating a vision that leads to a strategy that those tasks are directed to accomplish so people could have a clear view of where we are headed and why as a Council. Chad asked if the Council is tackling everything on this list or just picking a few items. Harriet responded that these topics are just starting points and could be tackled on different timelines or in topical subgroups.
- Discussion around insurance ensued. Boe asked if we are talking about private or public working waterfront. For private properties, we need to think about all the factors like insurance, financing, and opportunities for continued support for protected properties (mentioned that the Working Waterfront Access Protection Program provides one-time funding but nothing over the long term for maintenance). Rhiannan offered a third category: privately owned publicly utilized properties that have more of a shared use role. Boe agreed that most privately-owned properties have some shared use. Rhiannon spoke to the issue of the tragedy of the commons now with increased storm pressure and the tension around who is responsible for funding the rebuild of these shared use properties. There is no support available for privately-owned properties despite these huge storms and widespread damage. Dan added that it also depends on the size of the communities and that many public waterfront is very privately-focused and has a heavy commercial usage. Bob C. asked what problem are we trying to solve and can we solve it with insurance or should we be looking at other mechanisms? Insurance should be a last resort and it would be better to understand what other factors are at play here.
- Bob W. brought the group back to the question of a vision. We need to articulate what we want and what we need and how to protect Maine's working waterfronts, including factors like climate change. A strong interest in adapting and focusing more on aquaculture as a way to adapt to changes in the fisheries and the economy. In general though, we need a vision first. Linda suggested that staff summarize the existing efforts and recommendations so that we don't duplicate existing work. We need to know where we intersect with existing efforts and recommendations. We should pull from the recommendations from the IRRC

report, Maine Climate Commission, and regulatory progress that DEP is making. We need to start from the base of what already exists. Harriet agreed to work on this.

- Heather Moretti added that the focus should be on how we make our working waterfronts more resilient to climate change and sea level rise. If we can maintain and protect the infrastructure element that will help bring more folks into the industry and ensure a thriving working waterfront into the future.
- Stacey summarized that part of the vision should be that we want to make our working waterfront adaptable and resilient and help them thrive. We need to articulate what we want to achieve to make that happen. Stacey brought the conversation back to the three topics and how to decide what to pursue. Harriet responded that it sounds like more context and information about existing efforts may be needed before diving into topics.
- Mitch brought up the question of what the bigger challenges are for insurance and insurance. Are there new models/structures that we may need to explore? Rhiannon responded that she never sees federal or traditional lending dollars go into a project without some sort of de-risking mechanism, often insurance. Federal government can sometimes step in with loan guarantees but there has to be an insurance component. Hugh Cowperthwaite suggested bringing a loan officer to the group could be helpful. The risks and businesses are different for every property and when someone is forced to get insurance and it won't cover their expenses it's a broken system. Dan added the difference between flood insurance and property insurance. Casey added their business had pier/wharf insurance but did not have flood insurance for the Jan 2024 storms. They weren't covered by any flood damage but were covered for the buildings, but they have to pay out of pocket for any resilience upgrades. It is also about the awareness of what coverage you need. Are there federal branches of the government that could look into this and help out with coastal-based businesses. Dan added that insurance brings you back to where you were but doesn't cover any of the rebuilds needed to improve resilience. What can the state do to support this gap? Boe added that we need more education around how to protect from these impacts, especially for smaller businesses. Rhiannon added that having some sort of an insurance navigator program would be critical. Linda added that culturally Maine has low participation in the National Flood Insurance Program and we need more incentives and education around that. Right now it's a negative cycle where in order to become resilient you need to get the grant but in order to get the grant you need the insurance. People don't want to buy any more insurance and think it's a scam because no one has connected the dots for them. Heather emphasized the need for some sort of resources for insurance navigation and help private business owners find the right thing.
- Bob and Stacey – let's look at what others have already done and learn more about specific issues around insurance and financing, potentially some case studies and information from the communities to help the Council decide if there are places we can recommend policy.
- Linda suggested adding another topic into consideration: working waterfront business development. We need more of an ongoing economic development policy to support these ongoing businesses.

#### **Public Comment Period**

- Nick Battista offered that the WW Coalition would be happy to provide additional background context on existing efforts and recommendations, as well as the concrete topics, ahead of the next Council meeting.

**Wrap-up & Next Steps/Upcoming Opportunities**

- Harriet will send out a scheduling poll for the next meeting, draft meeting minutes and updated Terms of Reference. She will coordinate with Nick Battista on additional context to provide to the Council.
- Other announcements:
  - Tora Johnson announced that the Trust Feasibility Study is running a stakeholder survey and encouraged participation.

(Meeting adjourned at 3:00pm.)