

Emergency Ferry Service Task Force
Regular Meeting
Town Office Meeting Room & via Zoom
Wednesday, January 22, 2025 @ 4:30 PM

APPROVED

2/19/25

MINUTES

Members Present:

Chair Gabriel Pendleton, Shey Conover, Fred Porter, Peter Willcox, Earl MacKenzie
(4:33)

Members Present via Zoom:

John King (joined after approval of the minutes)

Others Present:

Town Manager Janet Anderson, Bonnie MacKenzie.

Others Present via Zoom:

Linda Achorn, Murt Durkee, Eileen Boardman, Lauren Bruce, Jennifer West, Doug Welldon, James Weiss, Genevieve McDonald, Terry Sanderson, Peter Drury, Dan Tutor, Peter Rothschild, Sonya, Elizabeth Hayden, Dorea DeCoursy Engstrom, Amy Mulnix, Laura Staines Giardino, Michael Giardino, John King, Linda, Carol Pierson.

Call to Order: Chair G. Pendleton called the meeting to order at 4:30 PM, and a quorum was established.

Minutes of January 8, 2025, Regular Meeting.

John King asked in an email about Earl's comment in the minutes regarding Bruce Van Note and Bill Pulver being "Central Maine engineers," and wondered if "civil engineers" would be better. Earl was not present to comment. Gabe suggested keeping it as written.

MOTION BY G. Pendleton to approve the minutes of January 8, 2025 Regular Meeting, as written. No discussion. Motion passed, 4 yes, 0 no.

ISSUE UPDATES

a. Updates since 1/8/25

- Gabe reported that we've had a lot of feedback, and the Town has received a lot of emails and calls. Folks are very engaged. Our representative Mike Ray has put in a couple of bills with the legislature. We don't have details on those yet, but they most likely don't directly relate to the housing of the boat in Lincolnville as much as other ferry related issues, although there's some interplay between things like staffing, pay, and where the boat is berthed.
- Gabe reread the commissioner's letter. It's clear that we're a couple years away from a decision being finalized regarding where the ferry is berthed, so that gives

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us some time to think about this. It's important to be thoughtful, deliberate, and cooperative with the other islands.

- The Town is in the process of hiring Genevieve McDonald, a former representative and current lobbyist, who is very familiar with the ferry service.
- Peter and Earl have been working on thoughts about the safety of the boat staying in Lincolnville, which will be important in formulating a strategy and argument.
- Earl added that he recently met Bob Kochan, who lives on Islesboro full-time and is a marine forensics engineer. He is experienced with breakwaters, and is willing to work with us in helping to draft our arguments against the ferry being berthed on the mainland. Earl will meet with him within the next two weeks.
- Earl stated that he met with Islesboro Affordable Properties (IAP), and suggested we find a way to entice ferry crew to live here long-term, and should include that in the IAP criteria for selection process.
- Fred stated that we don't know what the bills are yet. He asked if we need a lobbyist at this point, or would it be better to retain a lawyer? He also asked about the new presidential executive order regarding the electrical mandate, and if it affects the hybrid ferry being build since that grant money could go away. This could be part of our argument.
- Gabe clarified that the hybrid electric ferry does not directly relate to the boat staying in Lincolnville. They are happening at the same time, but are separate issues. Gabe added that we don't yet know whether or not the directives from the new administration are going to impact funding for the ferry. It's a bit early to hire an attorney. It seems that as things get closer and a decision is being made that is adverse to our interest and there's a basis for us to fight that in court, we will look at that option.
- Fred stated that he doesn't want to just get the boat retained on Islesboro; he wants to see specific language put back into the tariff that the boat will be available for emergency trips, with the assistance of the USCG triaging the call to make sure it's worth violating the 12-hour rule. We have one shot to salvage our ferry in the service we've always had. We will not overuse the ferry. We've done everything the State has asked of us. We've worked hard to triage our calls and utilize the Quicksilver and private boats when needed.
- Earl stated a lobbyist wouldn't just monitor bills, they will keep our representatives and senators informed of what we need.
- Fred replied that the tariff is not a bill. He will keep petitioning and will appeal to Augusta personally if needed. Fred watches people go down the incline with a patient at times when it shouldn't be done. He is requesting that the committee support that effort and not only do we get to keep the boat, we get it put in the tariff that we're going to be able to use it for emergency reasons.
- Gabe stated that this is a broad conversation. It is beyond just where the boat will stay overnight. Part of other possibilities that have been suggested by the MSFS is a standalone emergency response vessel. There are other parts of this conversation that all fit together.

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- Earl added that he and Peter will be talking about the negatives of a separate emergency response boat, and that the ferry is the best alternative. Fred can help flesh this argument out.
- Peter stated that at this time, the crews are not required to do emergency runs. That needs to be changed. The whole system needs to be formalized, and crew need to be compensated for however it is.
- Amy Mulnix reported that the Up-Island Church held a letter-writing event on Sunday, and about 18 people attended. In listening to the conversation, there's an understanding that this is a complex issue. There was a concern that only 7-10 medical emergencies after hours does not give us a strong argument for this service in terms of numbers. Other items that people talked about were the impact on the school and the ability of the school to attract students, considerations of the grant and whether we are in violation and would need to return money to the government, the impact on our workforce, the economic impact of year-round residents in comparison to the summer residents, and crew considerations. If we're looking at a greater number of storms and sea level rise, is Lincolnville the right place to berth a ferry or should we be looking at another location on the mainland? Grindle Point will be underwater. Is this the right time to be thinking about that? This conversation is much bigger than the engineering considerations of keeping a ferry in Lincolnville, along with the medical services. The concerns of the islanders in that meeting were much larger than the conversation we've been having so far.
- Gabe asked Amy to share those letters with the Town Office so we can keep them in our file.
- Earl stated that the small number of emergency trips is actually a strong argument for keeping the ferry here, because of the 12-hour rule. The captain has the option to bypass that, and the fewer trips they have to make, the easier it is to rationalize that under Coast Guard regulations with no problem. More trips would be a detriment. Having fewer trips is a positive thing.
- Sonya Leach asked about the educational aspect, and if anyone has considered Islesboro students getting to Mid-Coast School of Technology. If they flip the schedule and leave the mainland at 7:30, unless Mid-Coast is willing to change their start times, it would greatly impact our ability to send kids. Gabe replied that Commissioner Van Note has been made aware that the change in schedule would impact folks who are going back and forth every morning. It's important to add this to the list of concerns.
- Doug Welldon stated that the Islesboro Ambulance Association has decided to send a letter to Governor Mills, believing we should work from the top down on this. He checked with a few people in Augusta who know politics. Working with the commissioner is unlikely to get to the key decision maker. She replied that although communication with the governor is important, before we give official sanction on that, we should introduce Genevieve. Bringing her on board is not just for lobbying on a specific bill, but also for supporting broad communication and strategy development on this issue. She can speak to timing, and how we

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develop that package to make sure our communication is as effective as possible. Gabe added that we want to work cooperatively with other islands, and we want to make sure everyone is pulling in the same direction, in a cohesive way.

b. Introduce Genevieve McDonald

- Genevieve is the Senior Policy Advisor at Preti Strategies. She lives in Stonington and served two terms in the Maine legislature, representing North Haven, Vinalhaven, Frenchboro, and Swans Island, which are served by the MSFS, in addition to some other island communities that are not. She has a lot of knowledge about this issue.
- We have a rallying point. Where to berth the ferries is a consistent point among all the unbridged islands. Genevieve has spoken with Representative Mike Ray and Senator Grohoski and got feedback from last week's meeting among coastal legislators. Nick Battista of the Island Institute sent background information of conversations he had with Representative Ray about what the MSFS is proposing. There are 5-6 bills, each sponsored by a different coastal legislator, and they have agreed to cosponsor each other's bills. Not all of the bill language is fully drafted. Some bills are submitted with just a title as a placeholder. These bills still have an opportunity for revision.
- Now that Genevieve has come to this meeting and gained insight into some of our concerns, she will go to Representatives Geiger, Ray, and Eaton, and ask what their language is and what they are proposing. It is her understanding that there is a bill specifically to require that ferries be berthed overnight at the islands.
- There are many directions this could go at this stage. It's very helpful to make sure that every rep that has an unbridged island is supportive of each other's bills.
- Some messaging we need to get out to lawmakers is why someone who is in Farmington or other inland town should care about this issue. We need to identify the influential lawmakers who may not be educated about this issue and will need help understanding why a ferry service to an unbridged island is just as important as a bridge located inland.
- Genevieve's role is strategizing communication, the legislative process, who needs to be touched when and what that messaging needs to be so it's the most effective and so we can get the support we need, because this is a hard issue.
- She asked if there is a deadline that the legislators have to get the bill language finalized so that it can be made public, or can that happen deep into the legislative session. Genevieve answered that there are approximately 3,000 bills. The revisor's office is probably about a month from getting bills that were submitted back to lawmakers to ask if they have any revisions before the bill is released to the public. Also, there are multiple opportunities for amending a bill before it goes to a public hearing. Amendments can be added in the work session or on the floor. There's a lot of opportunity to inject new information or take out information and language. Bill titles haven't been released yet. We are probably a month from these bills becoming public.

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- They asked about the timing in working the legislative process vs. the executive branch. Should those be done concurrently, or should we wait for the legislative process so that we can communicate a cohesive message? Genevieve stated that we do want to have a cohesive message. The governor is most likely aware of this issue. We don't need to hold back from initiating conversations with her. However, we don't have a specific ask or solution to propose to her. There may be certain points that we want to elevate at this point as a light touch. It will be in stages. Genevieve would like to be able to share with the governor specifically which bills are being put in.

STRATEGY DISCUSSION & PUBLIC COMMENTS

- Doug Welldon stated he is concerned about the timeline. He thinks there needs to be a sense of urgency. We need to be working and keeping the momentum going, not waiting. Governor Mills could stop this process in its tracks, by telling Van Note to keep the ferries on the islands.
- Gabe stated that we are going to have a better outcome if we're not shooting from the hip, but being thoughtful about this issue and deliberate about how we move forward. That doesn't mean we're not doing anything. We want to spend time on the front end to make the right ask and to get everything in line to have the best possible outcome. Saying that we have two years is not to say that we are not urgent. As Genevieve noted, we don't have a specific ask to make, as we don't know the bills that are in place. The exact message to the governor is unclear. Having the governor intervene at this point doesn't necessarily get us the emergency response from the ferry service. As Peter noted, there is no obligation on the part of the ferry service to make emergency trips.
- Michael Giardino stated that there are a number of concerns that we would want to be sure are recognized and covered in the various bills. Is there a way for the island communities to put the list of those items in front of the legislators drafting those bills?
- Genevieve stated that we need to find out specifically what the bills say and then circulate that. She will find out tomorrow what has been submitted and then determine if there are additional things that we feel need to be added or ideas we are less interested in pursuing. There is an opportunity to revise.
- Peter Rothschild stated that we need to be cognizant that the residents of Islesboro span a huge spectrum; some are summer residents and some are year-round. It's important that we reach out and extend this discussion to include the greater community. If most people who are not here now understood the impact of this potential change, they might be concerned about their property values, and their ability to continue living here. The economic impact would be staggering.
- Earl stated that in our last meeting, we talked about not just using our year-round population numbers, but using our actual summer numbers, which is huge.

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- They stated that the Maine State Ferry Service Employee Union did a survey of staff and shared the results with us. She would like a copy to circulate, and get it onto the website.
- Lauren Bruce stated that it's important for us to have a clear idea of how we're going to combine all the elements that will need to be included as part of our strategy. Is that part of what Genevieve will be doing? Can we lay out the timing of letter-writing, petitions, etc., to have a strategy for the next four months? There should be some sort of paper document.
- Gabe stated that speaking with one voice with all the other islands combined is going to be a more effective strategy. We're still trying to develop the strategy, both locally as well as in the region for other islands. Gabe added that this group will create a position statement about where we stand and what our goals are.

NEXT MEETING DATE

Strategy Workshop February 5th, 4:30, Regular Meeting February 19th, 4:30.

Motion by E. MacKenzie, seconded by F. Porter, to adjourn meeting at 5:21 PM. No discussion. Roll Call. Motion passed, 6 yes, 0 no. Unanimous.

Respectfully Submitted,



Carrie Reed
Secretary