Emergency Ferry Service Task Force
Regular Meeting
Town Office Meeting Room & via Zoom
Thursday, April 3, 2025 @ 4:30 PM

☑ APPROVED
4/17/25

**MINUTES**

**Members Present:**

Chair Gabriel Pendleton, Shey Conover, Peter Willcox, Earl MacKenzie

**Members Present via Zoom:**

John King, Fred Porter (4:50)

**Others Present:**

Murt Durkee

**Others Present via Zoom:**

Genevieve McDonald

Call to Order: Chair G. Pendleton called the meeting to order at 4:31 PM, and a quorum was established.

**Minutes of March 20, 2025, Regular Meeting.**

**MOTION BY P. Willcox, seconded by S. Conover, to approve the minutes of March 20, 2025 Regular Meeting, as written. No discussion. Roll Call. Motion passed, 5 yes, 0 no.**

**LEGISLATION UPDATE**

- Genevieve McDonald reported that the LD 841 hearing went well. There was a good turnout. She was pleasantly surprised to see the Senate President Mattie Daughtry there to weigh in. She represents Chebeague Island, so was there to represent their interests. She has also taken an interest in coastal and island communities and their needs.
- The DOT testified neither for nor against. Their position is that this legislation is unnecessary, as this was driven by where the ferries berth overnight. This is true to a degree, if that issue is resolved. However, it is Genevieve's understanding that the delivery of emergency services in transportation is an issue that existed before this conversation. She's aware of the efforts of the Island Institute and others, and conversations that have been ongoing for many years about who responds (ferry, LifeFlight, etc.). Genevieve's impression is that there's still a need for this working group, and there is still value in having this resolve move forward, even if the current issue of where the ferries are berthed is resolved. Genevieve would like to confirm that this is the pursuit that we would like to take. She also needs information about the existing process for determining who responds, and what those agreements look like.
- The Bangor Daily News mistakenly reported that the hearing didn't happen and that the bill was carried over. Genevieve sent a correction to them last night, so now that is

updated. All of the active pieces of legislation say carried over, but that is because the legislature is in special session. There was a hearing. No one testified in opposition. The only neither for nor against was the DOT, and they were fairly balanced. She has a copy of their testimony.

- We are still waiting on those two regulatory oversight bills to be printed. The first draft hasn't come back from the revisor's office to the sponsors. When those bills are printed, there will be a "Ferry Day" in the Transportation Committee.
- Genevieve spoke with Representative Matlack about her bill, and she was open to amendments, if we had any suggestions for language.
- We're still playing a waiting game for when the public hearings for the rest of the bills will be scheduled.
- There is quite a bit of attention. WABI was there and the Bangor Daily News reported it. It was good to see that media attention; it puts some pressure on lawmakers to not only act on this issue, but also to just have it on their radar that this is important and it's something people are paying attention to.
- Gabe agreed that the issue with emergency response existed before the discussion about where to berth the ferries. During his time on the Ferry Service Advisory Board, there was a change in emergency response after hours and whether or not the captains were required to call and get permission from the Coast Guard. Fred would be the best person to answer how they handle response for emergencies. There have been conversations here about maintaining a high-speed emergency response boat, before this issue.
- Gabe stated that it's his understanding that Fred would like more of a guarantee for emergency response with language in the Tariff. The current system of calling has worked out, but it's not the ideal. This issue could continue to exist whether or not the ferries are berthed on the islands.
- Earl added that the ferry with the ambulance is pretty much always the best choice.
- Genevieve thanked the committee for confirming that. She stated she will draft something and email documents to the committee. It's a nuanced, niche issue, and rather than talking at people, she wants to put together something written that she can send to lawmakers for their consideration.
- Shey asked about a decision tree that Fred uses when determining who to call. This could be useful.

**STRATEGY DISCUSSION**

- Gabe stated that in one week there's a public hearing with DOT regarding the Tariff increase, which is roughly 15%. Gabe has personally emailed his thoughts about the Unfunded Pension Liability and repairs and how they ought to be categorized. The points he will be making at the meeting will be about proper accounting of expenses, as well as pushing to have resident ticket rates for people who live here year-round. The Town and other islands have offered to facilitate some sort of process to identify people who would be entitled to that, so it would not as heavy a lift for the DOT.
- John stated that the 15% increase is a huge issue. We're getting double barreled here, which makes things rather difficult. A family of four with two kids will have to pay

$83.50 for a roundtrip in peak season. John wrote a letter last time the Tariff was increased and included an informal survey of other ferry systems around the country. At the time, he was advocating for a resident tariff, a senior citizen tariff, and a commuter tariff that was user friendly. The only thing we got out of that was a commuter ticket that is now valid for 14 days as opposed to seven. He can send his letter again. The MCS is still out of the water for repairs—wait until we get the bill for that. We'll probably get another tariff increase in the next 12 to 18 months.

- Gabe stated that we need to be part of the process. Offering testimony will be good.
- The new boat is off the table, and they are doing some major repairs to the MCS. It is due to come back mid-April. We need to keep the boat running because the new build is not happening.
- Gabe added that he followed up with Janet about hiring a forensic accountant to assist with pushing for the Unfunded Pension Liability and major repairs to be considered part of capital expenditures vs. operating expenses. The Town doesn't have funding available to pay anyone at this point. In order to move forward we'll have to fundraise. We can at least push the repair issue, as that seems more straightforward.
- Earl asked for clarification. Is the berthing of the ferries on the mainland a dead issue?
- Gabe replied that it is a dead issue in that they're not planning on berthing ferries off island at this point, and it sounds like they're not going to push back against legislation that requires the boats to be berthed on the islands. There was a bill that was introduced that would have pushed this down the road, saying they can't do this for the next ten years. The thought is, if the DOT and MSFS say they're not going to do it and they're agreeable, let's not kick the can down the road, let's have the agreement right now, or let's have the full conversation now and change legislation. Let's have it in writing.
- Shey clarified that she thinks they haven't necessarily in public meetings said they're reversing their position on it. They've just indicated that they are less likely to be opposed to legislation that requires it. Legislation is still important.
- Peter reported he made a call to the Coast Guard. He hasn't received word on the overtime situation for the crews (12-hour rule). He's waiting to hear back.
- Peter stated he is going to the Lincolnville Select Board meeting on April 14th to propose letting us install a wave buoy, which is being lent to us by UMaine. He's not expecting any pushback. It sounds like everyone wants to go along with it.
- Earl asked about the 12-hour rule. Peter replied that the crew on Islesboro only works seven hours now. At the moment Fred calls the Coast Guard in Portland to get their permission every time he wants to use the ferry.
- Gabe stated that this was a broad discussion at Ferry Service Advisory Board meetings, about making that a requirement to call and get Coast Guard permission. At the time, there were concerns about the sharing of medical information, and about the ability of Coast Guard personnel to assess the risks of an emergent medical situation.
- Fred stated he has a different perspective. He feels it's the captains who should contact the Coast Guard. It isn't the responsibility of the ambulance crew, technically, to call Coast Guard for the ferry. The ferry boat should be contacting to see if they can exceed the 12-hour rule. The reason we have never argued against that is because we will never

know if they had called the Coast Guard or not, or whether they flat-out refuse us because they don't want to run. It was easier for us to eliminate that problem with our ambulance drivers. All we have to do is call the captain back and say the Coast Guard gave us permission. It takes away the ability for them to say no. He hasn't wanted to upset the apple cart. He thinks this should be left alone. The Coast Guard is supposed to be medical triage. The ferry crew is not medically trained, and they questioned whether our trips were legit. This has gone on for years. The Coast Guard has never turned us down. They trust us.

- Fred can send the decision process tree/algorithm to the group.
- Peter proposed that all this needs to be formalized, along with the crew pay, the crew alcohol use, etc. Right now, the crew can say, no, I don't feel like it. We can't live that way. That's the gray area we operate under. The process needs to be formalized.
- Fred agreed with Peter. For a long time, they could just do this at will. When they put the process in place with us calling the Coast Guard and giving them the medical information, then it goes back onto the ferry crew because we report to them the name of the commander or the petty officer we spoke with, they trusted us with that call. But this could go backwards. We've got to have a good process in place.

**PUBLIC COMMENTS**

- None.

**NEXT MEETING DATE**

Thursday, April 17th, 4:30.

**Motion by P. Willcox, seconded by E. MacKenzie, to adjourn meeting at 5:00 PM. No discussion. Roll Call. Motion passed, 6 yes, 0 no. Unanimous.**

Respectfully Submitted,

Carrie Reed

Carrie Reed
Secretary