

York River Study Committee / ORV Subcommittee Meeting
Topic: Working Waterfront, Tidal Water Recreation, and Economic Values
Wednesday April 26, 2017, 10:00 AM – 11:30 AM
York Public Library Community Room

Meeting Notes

Attendees:

York River Study Committee members: Karen Arsenault, Cindy Donnell, Claire Enterline (Maine Coastal Program), Jennifer Hunter, Thom Kearns, Jack Murphy, Chuck Ott, and Judy Spiller

Other attendees: David Chase, Priscilla Cookson, Jeff Donnell, Joey Donnelly, Drew Donovan, Dale Hilbourne, David Hutchinson, David Linney, Deborah McDermott, James Moody, Robert Ober, Bernadine Speers, Jon Speers, Paula Sewall, Michael Sinclair, Jim Smith, David Webber, Jeff White

Meeting goals: The York River Study Committee has organized a series of meetings on specific topics to gather and share information to help characterize watershed resources and develop management plan actions and recommendations. Experts, project managers, and others interested in topics are asked to provide input and share ideas and information in these meetings.

➤ **Presentation on working waterfront – state perspective, Claire Enterline, Maine Coastal Program**

Presentation: <http://www.yorkrivermaine.org/wp-content/uploads/2017/05/York-Working-Waterfronts-MCP-April-26-2017.pdf>

Claire provided information on some of the state programs that support working waterfront in Maine. The state has identified 25 miles of working waterfront in Maine, responsible for about \$3billion in the state's economy. Preserving working waterfront/commercial fishing access is a priority for Maine agencies. The Maine Working Waterfront Coalition provides policy and planning support, and the Working Waterfront Access Protection Program has provided financial support to maintain commercial uses in the past. Maine Coastal Program and Department of Transportation provide grants for shore and harbor planning. The Bureau of Parks and Lands has the Boating Facilities Program that provides grants to improve recreational boating access. And finally the Maine Coastal Program Coastal Communities Program provides grant support for working waterfront and natural resource protection. A current priority involves looking at working waterfront and shoreline resiliency in light of sea level rise, storm surge and increased flood events.

General comments/additional discussion:

- The 2005 Colgan study on working waterfront was noted. It showed that while conversion of waterfront to private, non-commercial uses provides an initial profit, maintaining working waterfront provides a greater longer term economic benefit to a community.
- Question asked on the rapid rise on most recent lobster landings and economic value. The demand from Asian markets is partially behind this increase.
- Some studies have shown a 2 or 3-fold increase to the total economic value for the landings value.

➤ **Town goals and priorities for marine uses, Dylan Smith, Town of York Planning Director**

Dylan was unable to attend the meeting. York River Study coordinator Jennifer Hunter provided attendees a copy town goals related to marine resources industry and access for fishermen and the public. Excerpt from Town of York Comprehensive Plan: <http://www.yorkrivermaine.org/wp-content/uploads/2017/05/York-Comp-Plan-Goals-for-Marine-Uses-and-Public-Access.pdf>

➤ **York Harbor priorities and observations, David Webber, York Harbor Board Chair, and Drew Donovan, Assistant Harbor Master**

David gave a brief overview of the Harbor Board: it meets once a month, has seven members that include commercial and recreational fishermen and power and sailboat interests. Its goals have been to maximize access to the river without degrading the river and its resources, and ensuring that commercial fishing operations remain viable. Two priority issues the board currently is addressing involve paddle craft use and dredging. With increased paddle craft use in recent years there is more pressure on the river and parking. The board intends to have a professional use survey done this summer to provide quantitative data for the board's use. He anticipates some type of regulation might be needed. Regarding dredging, the Harbor is overdue for maintenance dredging but the project has been held up because the federal money hasn't been available.

Drew added his observations regarding paddle craft that where they are launching and stopping are as much of a problem as the number of paddle craft. Many websites and on-line resources list places to launch and stop that are not suitable, such as mud flats. Education is needed to let people know these aren't good sites and there are impacts to natural resources. He also noted that with power and sail boats, the overall number of boats in the river is not increasing but with improved economy in the last several years people are using their boats more often.

General comments/additional discussion:

- Working waterfront / York Harbor is a finite resource. No one knows the breaking point for number of moorings, boats and paddle craft before permanent degradation occurs.
- Question on cost and implementation of the dredge project. Army Corps of Engineers is the lead federal agency. Cost is estimated at \$2.5-3 million. There is close to \$0.5million in the York dredge fund. Dredge spoils are moved to a dump site about 14 miles offshore.
- Sense that the river is being "loved to death" and there is a sense of entitlement by visitors. How do we enforce use restrictions without signage everywhere and without becoming a police state?
 - There is a need for education of boaters on impacts to resources; need to have people available to educate boaters and kayakers
 - Boat sticker program is an opportunity to track usage and provide some basic education upon issuance of sticker
 - York Harbor Board proposal for paddle craft sticker and fee would have instituted that contact with the Harbor Master as an opportunity for outreach and education but was met with opposition
 - Strawberry Island mudflat is disappearing with its overuse by paddle boards and recreational boaters with overuse
 - Need to address use problem before it really is overused. For many people, recreational use is their connection to the river and its resources. You want to foster and encourage use, but wise use.
 - The Maine Island Trail Association uses a sticker program. Stickers are required to land kayaks on the islands and creates the opportunity to explain where you can and can't go and why.
- More and more people are picnicking, swimming, and running dogs at Steedman Woods area. Many websites "invite" people to come to shore there. Wiggly Bridge is the "new" beach, though its use creates erosion problems and pollution problems for shellfish beds largely from dog waste.
 - The Harbor Board does not have jurisdiction over this area.
 - Town needs to post restrictions.
 - Historical Society has closed area for restoration efforts; used signage and blocked off easy access points.

- Recreation department needs to be represented in conversation. Better signage and more bags for dog waste are needed from them.
- Preservation of mudflats, coastal wetlands, and inland tributaries is all important to the health of the river system.

➤ **Data on York Harbor use and economic value, Cindy Donnell, York River Study Committee**

Cindy read through the data that she compiled that demonstrates some of the value and use of the harbor and river. The landings data came from the state. Most of the other data are from the town of York. A summary of the data she compiled was distributed to meeting participants:

<http://www.yorkrivermaine.org/wp-content/uploads/2017/05/Working-Waterfront-Data-Compilation-Summary.pdf>

The Study Committee welcomes input from anyone who is aware of additional data or reports that could be added to the data summary to help characterize use and value.

General comments/additional discussion:

- The number of moorings hasn't changed since 1984. A study of docks and piers was done in 1987. Those numbers haven't changed either; docks have only been replaced over time, not added.
- Someone noted that currently there are no kayak summer camps being planned through Parks and Rec.
- When do we recommend closing an area for restoration? People don't read signage. We need better enforcement of closures or areas with access limits.
- Wiggly Bridge area signage brings more attention to the area and more use as a result.
- What does Wild and Scenic designation do for us that we can't do ourselves?
 - Study Committee Chair Chuck Ott indicated that with the designation there would be federal funding available for projects, much like the existing studies underway. The federal government is prohibited from buying or managing land with Partnership Wild and Scenic River designation, which is what is under consideration. The designation has potential to highlight the history and culture of the region and brings with it a level of status and recognition of the river's resources.
 - A concern was expressed that promotion could encourage greater use of the river.
- The list of data does not include out of area groups that use the river; sometimes very large groups.
- Would designation bring additional regulation?
 - Chuck Ott indicated the partnership designation status would not bring additional regulation; existing local and state regulations remain in effect.
- Concern was expressed that river designation could affect dredging project.
 - Chuck indicated that the Study Committee, a group of volunteers interested in protecting the river resources, does not intend to move forward with any action that would jeopardize dredging. The Study Committee acknowledges the importance of the working waterfront as a valuable community resource. Chuck mentioned the Committee's policy statement on dredging that was handed out to meeting participants: <http://www.yorkrivermaine.org/wp-content/uploads/2017/03/York-River-WS-Study-and-York-Harbor-Dredging.pdf>. The Study Committee will make any accommodations necessary in its approach to designation to make certain that dredging is not impacted. A possible solution could be to exclude the Harbor area from designation.
- Clarification was sought for how the National Park Service will review the dredging plan. How will it affect the timeline, expense and overall approval process? Nothing can interfere with the dredging timing.
 - Chuck reiterated that the Committee will seek specific information to address those questions to everyone's satisfaction.
- In terms of additional data that is of interest, that Harbor Board would like to know the overall impacts of docks on the river and how many additional docks could be added to the river system.