

Maine Island Coalition Meeting
Covid19: Hospitality Industry and Municipal Governments
Friday, April 17, 2020
10-11:30

Swan's Island

Donna Wiegler
Sonny Sprague

Cranberry Isles

Ingrid Gaither
Laurie Dobson

Isle au Haut

Kendra Chubbuck
Peggi Stevens

North Haven

Rick Lattimer

Vinalhaven

Kris Davidson
Gabe McPhail
Claire Jackson

Matinicus

Eva Murray

Monhegan

Mott Feibusch
Winnie Murdock
Jessica Stevens
Lisa B.
Michael Brassard
Mia Boynton
Barbara Hitchcock

Chebeague

Donna Damon
Margorie Stratton
David Hill
Nancy Hill
Donna Colbath

Long

Mark Greene
Joe Donovan
Catlin Byers
Matt Byers

Cliff

Roger Berle

St George

Richard Bates

Island Institute

Craig Olson
Andy Theriault
Suzanne MacDonald
Meghan Grabill
Nick Battista
Kate Tagai

Seacoast Mission

Douglas Corman
Sharon Dal

Legislative Representatives

Chris Rector, King's Office
Pam Trinward, Pingree's Office

Guests

Steve Lyons, Maine Office of Tourism

Legislative Updates

Pingree: Testing is still a big issue. Maine received 15 immediate testing machines with 150 kits to do the tests. More kits are coming in from Korea today with some allocated for Maine, which will improve this issue. The IRS website has crashed because so many people are trying to access information on their stimulus checks. It may take a few more days for it to get back up and running. Call Pingree's offices, the staff are working (though from home) and want to help constituents who are having issues or have questions.

King: I would also add that we are hoping there will be additional funds associated with the CARES Act and the Payroll Protection Plan. Hoping that is moved through Congress before too much longer. We are aware of the acute need for small businesses in Maine.

Seacoast Mission

We made 400 phone calls this week to people on the islands and in Washington County from a database of 1400 people. This effort is continuing. There are resources available for food and heating, they were even able to provide a washing machine to a family. If you know of someone who is having financial issues, please have them get in contact with Seacoast Mission. Working with islands on food access, eldercare support, and primary care and mental health care access. For questions and inquiries contact: Douglas Cornman, Outreach Director, Maine Seacoast Mission. Cell phone: 207 479-0707. Email: dcornman@seacoastmission.org.

Island Institute

Stimulus package is changing rapidly because they have run out of money. We are looking for stories of people who have and have not been able to access the funds. What are the gaps? What are the barriers? Building the case for other needs. Also looking to understand what are the critical businesses for supporting the community that can't be allowed to fail and what support we need to advocate for within the government stimulus packages for those businesses.

Lodging Letter Update

Nick Battista has been in contact with the Governor's Office every day this week. The need has been heard and has been forwarded so that islanders have access to mainland-based lodging for issues that include

1. Island transportation, ferry, mailboat, passenger ferry experiences mechanical problems and there's no way to get back to the island
2. Of course, the weather forces the above boats to cancel and you are stuck on the mainland
3. Medical emergencies where a family member accompanies the patient to the mainland and can't get home and probably can't stay at the hospital either
4. Too many vehicles or passengers trying to get on the last boat home. With new restrictions of only 5-10 passengers, that could leave some people stranded
5. Medical appointments that are necessary, but don't end early enough to make the last boat home to the island.

Staff has been working with area chamber of commerce to see what may or may not be open to islanders provided that the clarification be made. The chambers of commerce have all signed on to the letter.

Islanders with prior relationships with lodging have been getting positive response that if they get stuck off for any reason that lodging can be made available. The Maine Office of Tourism has also been distributing waivers for anyone trapped off island for essential service needs.

Mott: For Monhegan with three boats a week, if we need to go in-shore we will be stuck in shore so it is an important part of the mainland infrastructure for us and is important it remains available.

Main Topic: Hospitality and Municipalities

There are many ways to look at the issue from supports available to keep businesses afloat, to safety and sanitation, to messaging and advertising. We want to focus on how hospitality businesses, so critical to Maine's economy, are working with their municipal government to plan and prepare for the summer.

Steve: The office of tourism is part of the office of Economic and Community Development. We have been providing waivers to islanders who can't get back to the mainland for medical appointment and other essential services. They are providing written waivers when it is necessary, but for those who have a relationship with different inns or other establishments, sometimes the official waiver isn't necessary. The Office of Tourism has set up an email address for lodging questions. info@visitmaine.com.

Summer is still a grey area, but the Office of Tourism Staff is trying to answer any questions that come in. There is a large volume of questions that are coming in so the response rate may be slower than usual.

Lodging reservations can be booked starting May 1st with the caveat that they may be canceled if further executive orders are forthcoming, then those reservations may need to be canceled.

Lodging Operators/Situation:

Isle au Haut- Visitors are starting to come who have summer homes and are quarantining themselves. The town is starting to talk about the summer. They are going to try to discourage weekly rentals because the boat company is running three days a week with a limit of 6 reservations. Month long reservations and those with their own houses can quarantine and enjoy a vacation without jeopardizing the general population.

Swan's- The weekly rentals are a concern because the visitors can't quarantine. A lot of folks who have second houses on the island can only afford those houses because they have the weekly rental income. The perception that second homeowners are wealthy or own their houses own free and clear, is inaccurate. They may have a mortgage and a tax bill that the summer rental helps them to cover.

Vinalhaven- The real estate company manages 25 weekly rental properties. Most of the activity happens in late June through September. In March, they started getting calls from the epicenter of New York and other places from people wanting to travel, so in response, even before the Governor made the executive order the real estate company made the decision not to accept rentals before June 1st. They are fielding a lot of calls about policies, especially cancelation policies which have been revised with a Covid clause. The Management Agency pays out of pocket fees including lodging tax, and credit card fees and so the company will lose money on return policies and cancelations. It would be great if there was a policy developed by the town around Air BnB's. The Management Company can create policies for the 25 properties they manage, but not all of them on the island and having a universal message is important.

Monhegan- Created a task force. The Island Inn delayed opening by a month to June 22nd, mainly because of the difficulty of bringing in staff and quarantining them. All the reservations for the first month also had to be canceled. They revised the cancelation and refund policy. They eliminated shared bathrooms and are looking at how to reduce the capacity of the dining room to allow for distancing. This means that they have less capacity for housing guests than they normally would and less revenue in consequence. They would like to hear about the social distancing policies around the ferry service because that is the enabling/limiting factor for island businesses. Monhegan House and the Trailing Yew also delayed opening by a month. The Monhegan House runs the public restrooms and is keeping them closed for now, which will impact the day tripping industry.

Shining Sails: We get our credit card charged when it comes in and goes out, the charge is not enough to cover the cancelation fees. If there are no kitchens with the lodging, the people may not have a place to eat because the stores are closed. The bed and breakfast decided to serve breakfast to people in their rooms to keep the congregating to a minimum.

Bracket Rentals- We are letting people come if they want, but we are not encouraging it. The trails are easy to hike, and the grocery store is doing curbside pick-up. We are encouraging isolation and separation. We changed the cancelation policy to be more lenient. We have long term relationships with renters who come year after year. People are letting us keep the deposits toward next year, which is a stop-gap measure to help get through this year, but means they will be down the money next year. The way their houses work is that the tenants have to clean the house which then has to be checked or hire someone from the island to clean the house. The turnovers are within a couple hours. How do we keep our guests and house cleaners safe, because the houses are so big it is impossible to sanitize the entire space in the turnover time?

Mott: In terms of the hospitality industry working with the town government, we have such open lines of communication because of having a small and tight-knit community- they have built in efficiencies by having the hotels meet themselves and report back to the assessors and task force means that we can consolidate the meetings.

St. George: St. George is very dependent on short term rentals to support the economy. We are dependent on the state and the Governor's orders, so we have to recognize what we can do and enforce and what is out of our jurisdiction. We need a central repository of information, and this is where the state department of tourism can play a role, because it is

very useful to have one place to send people for the latest guidance that avoids mixed messages and confusion.

Chebeague: As an Air Bn'B operator, I don't want anyone on the island who hasn't been here for the long term. I am losing money, but it is so easy to spread covid and so dangerous. Many of the guests we had booked were for weddings which may not be happening, so it may not be an issue. But I have told my guests for June that I will probably have to cancel. I don't think the situation will be safe until at least September.

Donna: We may run into a cash flow issue at the town, if the summer season is closed through to when the first tax payment is due. Same with fundraising season for non-profits and the boat companies, so things may be ok right now, but everyone makes their money in the summer. There aren't any unified policies, we are looking to the boat, looking to the Governor, but we need a unified, coordinated policy.

Long Island: Selectmen continue to send out updates weekly. We don't have a right to tell people they can't come, but we can discourage it. There are 40-50 rentals that are weekly rentals, many of us were able to own a place on the island by renting, it isn't a wealthy community. People have property rights. The idea that this would be coordinated from the state would certainly make it a lot easier to say people can and can't come.

Currently no one has canceled, but the reservations are for the end of June. We are thinking of turning the cottage we were going to rent into a single, long term renter for the summer if that made it easier for the island. We are eyeing June and July- looking at how much has changed in the last 14 days let alone the last 21 days and knowing the pace of change continues, those changes are going to determine what we make decisions on. Holding our bookings for now but waiting to see what the next few weeks bring. The business plan for the store hasn't changed but they are looking for how to serve the community socially as well as a business.

Joe Donovan, Chairman of Select board: there is no central registry of Air Bn'B rentals for the island, so we've had trouble contacting everyone. We haven't gone into the long-term rentals because they are family rentals. What sort of notification is happening to the rental owners? We are using listserv and other community communication channels for communicating the needs of the town. When May comes, are people going to get frustrated with being quarantined and want to come to their island house whether or not the state has been reopened and become a stress on the island resources, and knowing the risk that is coming is a constant conversation.

Chris Rector: There are efforts in the next CARES Act iteration currently being discussed to provide relief, to refunding the PPP. Work is also proceeding, to fund monies to hospitals that are all struggling. Also, in addition to the \$1.25B coming to Maine from the CARES Act, there is a push for funding for relief to STATES that will help to make up for lost revenues. It is unclear whether there is an ability for the state to then share some of that in revenue in a way that assists communities as they suffer from lost revenues.

Sonny: I think we will look very different at the end of this and we will be stronger.

North Haven: We have two sets of lodging: Nebo Lodge and Our Place Inn. They are struggling to figure out if the weddings are going to happen. Nebo was set up with state permission as a place for people to shelter if they get Covid19 but don't need to go to the hospital. The likelihood seems that we will need to do some form of social distancing this summer and so how do we manage that as well as the expectations of the people who come and spend their summer on the island.

Gabe: Do we want to, as a community, come together and make decisions in the best interest of our community balancing the tax issue, balancing the resource issue? Business owners are creative and resilient.

Claire: Maine Tourism Association had a meeting talking about a positive message, working on a project to inspire people to stay positive and hopeful for the summer.

Eva: I am on a lot of calls with Knox County Emergency Management and I'm doing my best to gather supplies and materials so that we are better equipped than what we otherwise would have been. Matinicus is very independent and so everyone is doing their own thing without much coordination, but there aren't any hotels and few rentals.

We talk about tourists coming to the islands as a potentially risky group but does anybody else have a lot of sternmen who come to participate in the fishery from all over and how we can help mitigate the risk they bring?

Jess: I am learning where the community needs the help and where they need to be independent. We do have people with wilderness first aid training, but no licensed EMS. Trying to get medical volunteers more training, finding the time to work out protocol and order supplies has been very difficult because I am tasked with a lot, including running the task force. An island without EMS doesn't have the same resources from the state because they can't tell you to do or not do something.

Steve: I know the Governor is looking into how to take a phased approach in lifting restrictions in the same way that they were eased into, but we don't know what those are because there is no playbook for this. It is unprecedented. I will be taking some of this back to the commissioner of DECD. We paused out of state marketing and have no intention of jumping into tourism promotion in the next several weeks contingent on the situation on the ground. Trying to understand the needs and concerns in the state and the research from elsewhere to develop a contingency plan.