

# Maine Island Coalition (MIC) Meeting Notes

## Friday, September 20, 2024

**Location:** Midcoast School of Technology

**Facilitators and Co-Chairs:** Ellen Mahoney (Peaks Island), Kendra C. (Isle au Haut)

**Island Institute MIC Staff Lead:** Alex Zipparo (Island Institute)

**Notetakers:** Bria White, Abby Roche (Island Institute)

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## Welcome and Introductions

- **Member and Alternate Attendees**

- **In-person:** Kendra Chubbuck (Isle au Haut), Ellen Mahoney (Peaks Island), Laurie Farley (Swan's Island), Katie Ford and Tracy Sommers (Great Diamond Island), Janice Avignon (Long Island), Gabe McPhail (Vinalhaven), Majorie Stratton (Vinalhaven)
- **Online:** Rachel Bishop (Frenchboro), Ingrid Gaither (Cranberry Isles), Mark Greene (Long Island), Catherine Haley (Vinalhaven)

- **Guest Attendees**

- **In-person:** Richard Hackel (Chebeague Select Board), Eliza Jane Adams (Chebeague Select Board), Tim Carr (Land Use Planning Commission Senior Planner), Margaret Snell, Laura Graziano and Curtis Brown (Lincoln County Regional Planning Commission planners), Thomas McClellan (Monhegan Island Fellow), Senator Pinny Beebe-Center (Knox Co.), Sarah Lawrence (Congresswoman Chellie Pingree), Representative Valli Geiger, Christina Breen, (Senator Angus King), Allyson Cavaretta (Senator Susan Collins), Zach Schmesser (Congressman Jared Golden), Representative Lydia Crafts, Nick Battista (Island Institute), Kelly Cotiaux (Senator Susan Collins), Claire Oxford (North Haven Island Fellow), Olivia Richards (Island Institute), Max Johnstone (Midcoast Council of Governments planner), Rick Erb (Frenchboro Town Administrator), John Burke (Long Island Select Board), Jessica Stevens (Monhegan School Board and EMA Director))
  - **Online:** Josie Jackson (North Haven Select Board), Susie Arnold (Island Institute), Kate Klibansky (Island Institute), Greg Piduch (Hancock County Planning Commission planner), Mark Gorski (Peaks Island Fellow), Senator Nicole Grohoski (Hancock Co.)
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## Storm Impact and Climate Change

**Overview:** Island communities are addressing critical adaptation projects to combat storm impacts, infrastructure vulnerabilities, and long-term resilience. Projects include repairing storm-damaged waterfronts, installing green infrastructure, and planning protective measures like breakwaters. Challenges include high costs, regulatory delays, insurance liability, and balancing immediate and long-term needs. Strategic support, streamlined processes, better support for businesses, and increased funding are essential.

**Themes:** Infrastructure damage, cost of repairs, access to funding.

### ***Infrastructure Damage and Funding Challenges***

- **Funding Overview (Gabe McPhail):** January storms highlighted vulnerabilities. State funds have been allocated for repairs and upgrades, including new NOAA funding (MIAF) and CRP funds, available for individual and regional projects. Emergency funding from the Governor was delayed, highlighting the need for increased legislative awareness of island communities. Available funding includes:
  - **MIAF:** New NOAA funding available through the state.
  - **CRP:** All islands are eligible for the Community Resilience Partnership (CRP), allowing individual communities to apply for up to \$75k and regional projects (2-5 communities) to apply for up to \$175k. Applications are due December 2024.
  - **Emergency Funding (Valli Geiger):** \$60 million in emergency funding from the Governor post-January storms; however, delays mean funds were only received in August, highlighting a need to educate representatives about the year-round needs of island communities.

### ***Access to Funding and Capacity Challenges***

- **Community Capacity (Gabe McPhail):** There is significant funding available, but communities struggle to access it due to limited capacity and the burdensome nature of reimbursement grants. Simplified reporting, lower-barrier applications, and state-level support for program management are needed. Federal funds should be more accessible through state channels with assistance in reporting and project management.
- **Staffing Support (Greg Piduch, HCPC):** Each regional council will receive staff dedicated to resilience-related projects.

### ***Challenges with Federal and State Processes***

- **FEMA (Janice Avignon, Long Island):** Working with FEMA is time-consuming, and funds have not yet been received. Monhegan's experience highlights that FEMA's "streamlined" processes are still too complex for small communities (Jess Stevens, Monhegan).

- **Permitting and Regulation Delays (Long Island):** Ongoing challenges with lengthy processes involving DOT and FEMA regulations; the urgent need for more efficient governance to expedite critical infrastructure projects.

### ***Short-Term vs. Long-Term Planning Dilemmas***

- **Monhegan (Jess Stevens):** Difficulties balancing immediate repairs and long-term planning, especially for complex projects like breakwaters. The lack of contractor availability adds to the challenge.
- **North Haven (Josie Jackson):** Engaging stakeholders in short- and long-term planning for waterfront resilience, with support from Island Institute Fellow Claire Oxford. Short-term repairs often overshadow long-term resilience planning.
- **Frenchboro (Rachel Bishop):** Personal wharf damage and restrictive funding criteria (e.g., requiring usage by 10 fishermen) limit access to state funds for businesses that make a significant impact on the local economy. Additional barriers include insurance challenges on damaged properties.

### ***Technical Assistance and Program Management Needs***

- **Support Networks:** There's a critical need for technical assistance and program management through regional planning offices, Island Fellows, and organizations like the Island Institute.

### ***Island Adaptation Projects and Updates***

- **Little Diamond Island:** Post-storm infrastructure damage led to community-driven projects combining green and hard infrastructure solutions, serving as a valuable case study.
- **Chebeague (Eliza Jane Adams):** The community is dealing with erosion, waterfront property at risk, and infrastructure vulnerabilities including a submerged town wharf during storms. Expensive and challenging logistics for barging waste off-island after storms shoaled the only barge access point to the island.
- **Long Island (John Burke):** Considering building a breakwater to address increasing weather intensity; acknowledges the psychological toll on the community.
- **Great Diamond (Tracy Sommers.):** Recently shored up a bank, but the infrastructure was severely damaged in the latest storm, illustrating the ongoing struggle with storm resilience. DOT owns the wharf and is addressing structural issues, but the road leading to the wharf and little diamond are in significant danger.

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## **Energy**

***Overview:*** Island communities face outdated energy infrastructure, high costs, and limited capacity for sustainable solutions. Challenges include aging generators, stalled solar projects, the need for funding to replace critical systems like underwater power

*cables, a lack of power company management succession plans, and a major dearth of municipal capacity to manage municipally owned systems. Workforce shortages and housing issues exacerbate energy reliability concerns.*

***Themes:** Aging Infrastructure, Funding Barriers, Sustainability, Municipal Capacity Needs, Workforce Challenges, Political Obstacles.*

### **Overview of Energy Systems and Challenges**

- **Monhegan and Matinicus:** These islands generate their own power but face critical energy needs due to aging infrastructure and a lack of long term management sustainability. At this time, Matinicus Power is being managed by a small group of local volunteers.

### **Solar Projects and Political Barriers**

- **Great Diamond Island:** Completed a solar farm feasibility study indicating potential contributions to the grid. However, the project stalled due to island politics and strained relationships with the city, despite the potential for a grassroots initiative.
- **Isle au Haut:** Relies on an underwater power cable from Stonington, with a backup generator when Stonington's power fails. The island is seeking funds to replace the aging cable. A proposed solar farm was deemed too costly.

### **Critical Energy Needs and Funding Barriers**

- **Matinicus (Gabe):** The island faces a critical energy situation, relying on 1980s diesel generators that are increasingly prone to failure. Despite applying for multiple USDA high energy cost grants, none were awarded. Efforts to secure a power purchase agreement with Revision were found to be cost-prohibitive. Through the Community Resilience Partnership, the island developed a long-term plan involving new generators, solar power, battery storage, and an updated grid, but immediate solutions are needed. Because contractors are unavailable this time of year, due to rough seas, the project will likely be delayed. This is a highly stressful and urgent situation, with only 20 full-time island residents remaining in the deep winter months.

### **Training and Workforce Pressures**

- **Monhegan (Jessica Stevens):** The island has a dedicated plant manager responsible for maintaining the power plant, but he is the only one trained. A lack of housing on the island prevents the growth of the population and training of a successor, forcing them to rely on off-island coverage when the plant manager is unavailable. This creates significant pressure on the island's energy reliability.

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**Break**

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## Transportation

**Overview:** *Island communities are relying on a mix of state-run, nonprofit and privately owned ferry services and one private bush plane service, facing challenges around cost, schedules, seasonal service, EMS transport, and service reliability (due to staffing and the impact of climate change). Transportation issues significantly impact residents, businesses, and access to essential services.*

**Themes:** *Service Disruptions, Economic Impact, Emergency Transport, Crew Shortages, Funding Challenges, Infrastructure Issues*

### ***Service Disruptions and Reliability***

- **Vinalhaven (Marjorie Stratton):** Service disruptions are frequent due to crew shortages. A new contractor, Seaworthy Consulting, is providing additional temp crew, but issues persist. Maintenance problems and administrative changes contribute to frequent cancellations, affecting vital services like trash transport.
- **Monhegan:** Uses Monhegan Boat Line through Port Clyde, with only seasonal service from two other businesses out of Boothbay and Bristol. Cancellations, especially in winter, have severe impacts on limited travel days (only two trips per week in the winter), school operations, and postal services. Challenges from COVID have persisted post-pandemic.
- **Swan's Island:** Cancellations and schedule changes have major impacts, including on school budgets, the lobster industry, and healthcare access. Community efforts to organize health providers have been thwarted by unreliable ferry schedules.
- **Matinicus (Alex):** Matinicus relies on a ferry service that is limited to 36 trips per year, with just one or two per month in winter, which is insufficient for community needs. Dependence on Penobscot Island Air and occasional lobster boats complicates travel, especially under adverse weather conditions.

### ***Economic and Operational Impacts***

- **Vinalhaven:** Ferry disruptions significantly affect the local economy, especially the lobster industry. There is a critical need for decision-makers to recognize the economic role of islands beyond their perception as isolated communities.
- **Chebeague (Eliza Jane Adams):** Served by Casco Bay Lines and Chebeague Transportation, nonprofits, which limits access to federal grants. Transportation challenges include expensive and inconvenient parking and failing piers.

### ***EMS and Emergency Transport Challenges***

- **Monhegan:** EMS services have been reduced due to staffing cuts by the Coast Guard. Emergency response now relies on chartered lobster boats or Marine Patrol, which are

not always available. The community supports ambulance boats but faces distance and capacity challenges.

- **Frenchboro (Rachel Bishop):** Lacks formal EMS services and depends entirely on private boats and vehicles, raising significant liability and safety concerns.
- **Islands-led nonprofit solution for EMS transport (Valli Geiger):** Proposed by a mainland ambulance transport org as a solution for islands without EMS, but existing services are resistant to change and costs are prohibitive.

### ***Differences in Service Models***

- **Great Diamond Island (Tracy Sommers):** Quasi-governmental service (Casco Bay Lines) allows for more adaptability in dealing with boat and crew issues compared to state or private models.
- **Cranberry Isles (Ingrid Gaither):** Relies on a for-profit, family-owned service (Beal and Bunker). Pros include strong community ties, but the operation is vulnerable to personal challenges within the family business.
- **Frenchboro:** Sunday, Wed, and Thurs car ferry (once per day except 1st and 3rd Wed), and two passenger only trips Fridays April-Nov only

### ***Exploring Solutions***

- **Regional Emergency Transport (Margaret Snell, Seacoast Mission):** Exploring ambulance boats and other regional solutions to improve continuity of care and emergency response for island communities.
- **Island Caucus (Valli Geiger):** Formed to advocate for island transportation needs, especially around funding and operational support for proposed solutions like ambulance boats.

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## **Housing**

**Overview:** *Communities identify that they are facing severe housing challenges, including skyrocketing real estate prices, gentrification, and the increasing difficulty of accessing affordable housing. This impacts service providers, community demographics, and the long-term sustainability of island life.*

**Themes:** *Affordability, Access, Cost of Construction, Long Term Management of Properties, Lack of Capacity to Develop Projects*

### ***Rising Costs and Gentrification:***

- Real estate prices have surged, making housing unattainable for tradespeople and service providers essential to the community. This trend accelerates gentrification and displaces year-round residents.

- **Mark Gorski (Island Fellow, Peaks Island):** Raises questions about the timeline for addressing housing challenges—1, 5, or 20 years—and the potential tipping point where the problem becomes too great.

#### ***Community-Specific Challenges:***

- **Long Island (Mark Greene):** School populations are dropping as young families are priced out. Service providers are aging, and costs continue to rise.
- **Great Diamond Island:** Housing challenges are already critical, impacting community sustainability.
- **Chebeague (Eliza Jane Adams):** Proposes modular homes that bypass the need for local building trades. Suggests a municipal transfer tax on property sales to fund community housing on town-owned or private land.
- **Frenchboro:** Lacks available land for housing development, with properties increasingly sold to seasonal owners. Maine Coast Heritage Trust's land restrictions hinder community growth.

#### ***Innovative Solutions and Partnerships:***

- **Modular Homes:** Companies like KBS Builders provide modular options. Peaks Island used Maine Housing Authority funds to build small homes, learning from early challenges.
- **Monhegan:** Aging community infrastructure with no younger generation prepared to take over due to housing issues. Local land trust, Monhegan Associates, contribute positively by paying taxes. Monhegan has a housing nonprofit that develops and manages affordable housing.
- **North Haven (Claire Oxford):** Developing a citizen housing advocacy group and exploring multi-use municipal buildings for housing. Recent successful projects include a tiny house rental initiative and new year-round homes managed by North Haven Sustainable Housing, a nonprofit that develops and manages affordable housing.

#### ***Legislative and Funding Support:***

- **Valli Geiger:** Highlights the passage of LD2003, allowing ADU units and increasing market options for small, modular homes. Notes high initial costs but predicts affordability will improve with demand.
- **Cranberry Island Realty Trust (Alex):** Recently placed two modular homes, but costs remain a significant barrier. Funds from MaineHousing through the Affordable Island Housing Fund has been crucial, but at the cost of \$500,000 per unit, \$650,000 was still needed through private philanthropy to fund the two units.

#### ***Logistical Challenges:***

- **Isle au Haut:** Difficulties in getting contractors contribute to long construction timelines, highlighting the benefits of modular homes. Nonetheless, the island is currently

developing housing through Isle au Haut Development Corporation using MaineHousing funds via the Affordable Island Housing Fund.

- **Peaks Island:** Success in housing initiatives due to partnerships with Island Fellows, Avesta, Genesis, and technical support from housing authorities. The nonprofit Home Start is managing the development of new affordable housing using MaineHousing funds via the Affordable Island Housing Fund.
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## Lunch and Island Updates

- **Chebeague (Eliza Jane Adams and Richard Hackel):**
  - Many projects are underway, thanks to the Island Institute.
  - Childcare spaces are available but depend on support from local businesses to remain operational.
  - The school benefits from teachers commuting from the mainland; however, access to the mainland is difficult.
  - The island is in need of EMT staff; recent training provided by SMCC helped but gaps remain.
  - Pier maintenance is entirely island-funded, posing significant financial challenges.
- **Great Diamond Island (Katie Ford and Tracy Sommers):**
  - Transportation improvements include new ferry passes, making costs more affordable for year-round residents.
  - No affordable housing available; current housing stock is very limited.
  - Land bridge and pier are privately owned and frequently impacted by flooding; costly repairs are needed. Pier is owned by DOT, but useless if the land bridge is in disrepair.
  - Recently installed broadband service.
- **Isle au Haut (Kendra Chubbuck):**
  - School enrollment includes 7 children from Pre-K to 2nd grade.
  - The community celebrates local connections, including the First Selectman's upcoming wedding.
  - A new broadband cable from Stonington to Isle au Haut is expected to be operational by November 8th.
- **Islesboro (No islanders present, Alex Zipparo fills in):**
  - Ferry challenges continue due to construction traffic.
  - New housing projects underway through Islesboro Affordable Properties, with MaineHousing Fund via Maine Affordable Island Housing Fund and Genesis Fund technical assistance.
  - Recent changes in management, including the departure of Rick Rogers and a longtime operations manager coming on to serve as executive director.
  - The community is building a new multi-million dollar health center, supported by congressional funding.
- **Long Island (Janice Avignon):**



- Ongoing challenges with erosion and aging housing stock.
- Active housing committee working to address the needs of an aging population with no available year-round housing.
- School enrollment is down to 8 students, with 2 commuting from off-island.
- Two water studies- One was about the quality of the ocean water around us opening doors for more options such as aquaculture and maybe others. Second is about a study of our drinking water situation.
  - There was a two year grant awarded from the Community Resilience Partnership to complete a water sustainability study focused on collecting and analyzing data from wells, septic, and groundwater to assess the health and vulnerabilities related to our single source aquifer then make recommendations on actions to take to keep our water source safe and resilient. We were able to get an Americorps/GPCOG Resilience Fellow to support this work which has helped enormously with capacity.
  - After several years of testing, the State is opening most of the town's waters as safe for clamming, aquaculture etc. They have been closed for decades due to lack of testing.
- **Matinicus (no islanders available to attend, Alex Zipparo represents):**
  - Eva Murray and Laurie Webber are both at events and were unable to attend.
  - Though there are challenges, there is a lot to celebrate.
  - The island is exploring the purchase of a privately owned airstrip that is critical to the island's sustainability and seeking funding for the project.
  - Penobscot Island Air recently opened a new federally funded hangar, which was dedicated to Kevin Waters, founder of the airline.
  - The new ferry, Charles Norman Shay, is dedicated to a 100-year old member of the Penobscot Nation and D-Day veteran, will enter service next week.
- **Monhegan (Jessica Stevens):**
  - New broadband tower was installed in June, though the school is still working to get connected.
  - School enrollment includes 3 children; the island is welcoming more young families.
  - A new Island Fellow, Thomas, is working on breakwater repairs and storm mitigation planning.
- **Peaks Island (Ellen Mahoney):**
  - Affordable housing projects are underway, with three units expected by spring.
  - New Island Fellow, Mark Gorski, is focusing on Portland's ReCode effort and affordable housing initiatives.
  - Housing demolition is proceeding with a careful, slow disassembly process.
- **Cranberry Isles (Ingrid Gaither):**
  - Long-time postmaster has retired; a new off-island clerk now handles daily postal service, weather permitting.
  - The community faces logistical challenges when weather disrupts postal service.
- **North Haven (Claire Oxford):**

- Currently working on thoroughfare short and long-term resilience planning, focusing on accessibility of data for community use.
  - Progress on the saltwater intrusion study is expected to inform future water management strategies.
  - Facing challenges in distributing water and sewer system costs sustainably.
  - **Vinalhaven (Marjorie Stratton):**
    - Recent paving project underway with hopes that hiring local workers will ease future projects.
    - VH Housing Initiative has purchased a home to be renovated into multi-units and is exploring additional ADU opportunities.
    - Ongoing downtown redevelopment project has been split into smaller phases to attract more bids.
    - Significant challenges with staffing the local ambulance service, leading to concerns about possible closure.
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## 2025 Planning

**January - Augusta Meeting:** Seeking input and engagement from policy allies.

### **Strategic Plan Reminder:**

- **Debrief on 2024:** Focus areas included Storm Impacts, Island Lobster Economy and Community, Municipal Digital Capacity, Climate Change, Energy, Housing, and Transportation.

### **Topics for 2025:**

- **EMS and EMT:** Address the need for on-island EMT training and community involvement.
- **Waste Materials Management:** Focus on sustainable waste and materials management, including storm debris. Consider what materials are brought onto the islands and explore options for leaving organic materials (e.g., composting) on-site.
- **Impact of Short-Term Rentals:** Increased waste management challenges linked to the rise of short-term rentals.
- **Capacity Challenges:** Acknowledge the widespread capacity gaps in municipal government and within communities. Explore resource mobilization and model strategies to enhance productivity.
- **Youth Substance Use:** Youth on Vinalhaven are facing issues with substance use; there is a need for more dialogue and action on this issue. Seacoast Mission offers useful resources for most islands.
- **Psychological Impact:** Recognize the mental and emotional strain of ongoing challenges and the community's response efforts.

- **Strengthen ME Initiative (MaineHealth):** This wellness resource aims to support island communities, particularly those in Casco Bay.

### ***Additional Reminders***

- **Ad Hoc Committees:** Consider forming Ad Hoc committees, as outlined in the strategic plan, to address specific challenges; invite community members to lead.
- **November Election:** State legislative bills will be introduced from late November to mid-December. **This is a crucial time to communicate your needs to representatives.**  
NOW IS THE TIME.

### ***Meeting Schedule for 2025\****

- January (Augusta- all day)- January 7th penciled in (Jan 9th alternate date)
- March (Zoom)- Island EMS/EMT services and transport- March 13th, 5:00pm - 6:30pm
- May (Zoom)- Materials Management, May 15th, 5:00pm - 6:30pm
- September (Rockland)- Friday Sept 19th, in person in Rockland 10:00am - 2:00pm

\*Ad Hoc meetings as needed for emergent and pressing issues

***Dues-*** Kendra will be reaching out to members in January

**2:00 Adjourn**