Meeting Notes

Date: September 16, 2025

Subject: Wharf Resilience Public Engagement Meeting

Attendees: Approximately 20 members of the Blue Hill community, including ~8 commercial fishermen

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1 Presentation

After a brief introduction by Select Board member Scott Miller, GEI [waterfront engineer] Dan Bannon reviewed a PowerPoint presentation outlining existing conditions at the town's two wharves, GEI's work to date, conceptual designs for protecting the wharves against conditions expected in the next 75 years, and "order of magnitude" costs associated with these alternatives.

2 Discussion/Comments

2.1 Sea Level Rise / Storm Intensity Risk

There was very little discussion/questioning of GEI's summary of its work to assess likely future conditions (sea level rise, storm intensity, wave and storm surge risks). Those present seemed to accept the analysis (with everyone seeming to recognize that there is substantial uncertainty about the specific extent of these risks and likely timing).

2.2 Current Conditions

- GEI advised that both wharves appear to be robustly constructed and should be able to withstand periodic flooding without undue damage.
    - Some concern was expressed by GEI about the wharves' ability to withstand more intense wave action over the years.
        - In response to an audience question about whether the greater exposed surface of the wharf sides might not incur greater force from wave action than the current, lower decks, GEI indicated that their recommended designs for raising the wharf decks would also likely require rip-rap or other wave force attenuation measures.
- GEI was much more focused on the "usability" of the wharves as they become more frequently flooded (or overtopped by waves), making them unavailable to users during periods of those conditions.

Takeaway: The wharves appear able to withstand periodic (maybe regular) flooding—despite damage risks—and the principal SLR/SI concern is associated with the amount of time they will not be available to users due to flooding/overtopping.

2.3 Usability

There was discussion and comment about "usability" of the facilities—especially the South Blue Hill wharf, which is by far the most actively used.

2.3.1 Relative Deck Height

- One person noted that, when the South Blue Hill wharf had been constructed ~20-25 years ago, it had originally been built with a deck 4' higher than present and that, due to feedback from commercial fishermen, the deck height was reduced by 4'.
- Several fishermen seemed to agree that elevating the deck by 4.5', as recommended, would very likely make the wharf very difficult to use…given the height from a typical lobster boat's deck to the wharf deck.
- Adding a crane would alleviate (somewhat) the issue, but there was remaining concern about the difference in deck heights.
- There was discussion about reducing the amount the deck is raised to something like 2'. GEI advised against this, noting that if the town is going to undertake a substantial investment in the wharves, it should plan to do so with a plan that will address SLR conditions over the next 50-75 years.
    - In response to an audience question, GEI indicated that concrete wharf improvements are typically expected to last for __ years; wooden improvements for __ years.
    - Another member of the audience observed that grants may be more readily available for resilience "solutions" that address expected SLR risks over the life of the facility (such as for 75 years to 2100).

2.3.2 Periodic Flooding/Overtopping

- While GEI identified the periods of time the wharves would be unavailable due to flooding/overtopping, the users did not appear to have significant concerns about this eventuality. This lack of concern appears to be driven by:
    - The likelihood that flooding would only occur around high tides, which are predictable and relatively short periods of time, and
    - The worst overtopping/wave action conditions will likely occur during times that the fishing fleet is not likely to be out on the water.

Takeaway: Higher deck level is a significant point of resistance with users; they would prefer to keep the height as it is at the cost of losing use of the wharf during extremely high tides and storms. It seems that this view is likely to prevail until the loss of use is occurring "too frequently" (whatever that will mean)—which could be several decades from now.

2.4 Conceptual Designs

2.4.1 South Blue Hill Wharf

There was relatively little feedback on the specific designs presented, other than the comments about usability noted above. One additional observation was that, since one of the principal

issues in South Blue Hill is parking, wharf designs meant to make the wharf attractive for a significantly greater number of users would only worsen this problem. (The town has explored alternatives for increasing parking space, but has not identified any actionable ideas.

2.4.2 Village Wharf

The Village wharf design was straightforward and also received relatively little comment. One member of the public asked about what the engineers envisioned for the surface where the small building now stands—hoping it is not simply asphalt but would, instead, be a softer, permeable surface. GEI indicated that they had assumed it would be asphalt (for additional parking), but noted that this would be a design detail to be addressed at a later stage.