

Center for Whole Communities



Case Study – Conservation of a Working Waterfront in York, Maine

Instructions

- Task 1: After you have had a chance to scan *Measures of Health*, please read the attached case study on the conservation of a working waterfront in York, ME.
- Task 2: Based upon the case study description, for the two sets of practices assigned to your group (or, that you have chosen for yourselves), select which column seems to best describe the working waterfront project's impacts or performance.
- Task 3: Highlight or mark the one statement in that column that most reflects your thinking, feeling and observations of the case study. Also mark any other statement that seems pertinent. Give yourself about 5-8 minutes for this step.
- Task 4: Once everyone at your table has finished Tasks 2 and 3, take about 20 minutes as a group to
 - a. Share with each other which descriptors and/or "scores" individuals you gave for each table.
 - b. For your two rubrics:
 - Identify where you may have differences of opinion and discuss why.
 - If possible, agree upon a final score for each table/rubric.
 - c. If time allows, consider whether there are there any impacts – positive or negative – from the working waterfront case study that are not reflected or described adequately by the rubrics.
- Task 5: Which, if any, of the "Value-Based Practices" and associated assessment rubrics do not seem applicable or relevant to the case study? Why? Can you see any value and/or potential learning from including them in the assessment of the project?
- Reconvene as a full group for reflection and discussion
 - ☞ What (if anything) was satisfying or beneficial about the process we just went through (both the individual assessment and the group discussion)?
 - ☞ What was challenging about the process and/or tool? What (if anything) seemed less useful or relevant?
 - ☞ In what ways did this feel or seem different from using "indicators"? What seemed similar?
 - ☞ What do you think are the strengths of *Measures of Health*? It's limitations?
 - ☞ Where/How/By whom might *Measures of Health* be used most effectively?

Thanks, and happy trails!

Case Study: Conservation of a Working Waterfront in York, Maine¹

At one time, York Harbor was dotted with half a dozen commercial fishing docks. The lifeblood of the fishing industry, they provided a place for lobstermen and fishermen to load traps and bait and unload catch. Today, Dan Donnell and his daughter Mary Coit operate the only commercial docks in the harbor, and theirs are not available during the summer months when recreational vessels tie up. The rest of the docks are gone - one as a private yacht club, another converted to a private home. "So many of them are gone now, and once they're gone, you can't get them back," said Donnell, whose family has been fishing the harbor since the 1600s. "And it's not just here. You see it up and down the coast."

"They really are at risk of conversion," said Patrice McCarron, executive director of the Maine Lobstermen's Association in Kennebunk. "The pressure is greater in southern Maine. Development comes from out-of-state people who tend to have more money. But as properties in southern and mid-coast areas are bought up, the pressure will move north." According to a study conducted by Coastal Enterprises Inc. (CEI) in 2002 for the Maine State Planning Office, 25 miles of the 7,000 miles of tidal coastline between Kittery and Eastport remain in use as working waterfront and control of 75 percent of the remaining working waterfront rests in private hands, making it vulnerable to conversion to other use. "You have to consider the contribution a working waterfront makes," she said. "What would happen to the economic well-being of a community if everything was converted into homes?"

Thanks to the efforts of local residents, conservation groups, creative financing and the York Land Trust, one coastal community will forever have at least one working commercial fishing pier. The York Land Trust teamed up with two local lobstermen to preserve a small section of York's last remaining working waterfront property from development. On Monday, Dec. 1, 2003 York lobstermen Jeff Donnell and Mark Sewall signed papers to purchase a recently renovated 2,290-square foot dock adjacent to Sewall's Bridge on the south side of the York River, along with 0.15 acres of abutting land. The property purchase price was \$710,000.

Donnell and Sewall will continue to run their respective lobstering operations from that spot. At the same time, the York Land Trust purchased a conservation easement on the property, assuring that it will remain forever committed to commercial fishermen's use, that a portion of it will be committed to public access to the river, and that the current view there will remain unspoiled. Had the Sewall's Bridge dock property not been purchased under these terms, it would have been sold as a house lot; plans had already been drawn up for the house to be built there.

According to all involved in the transaction, the partnership represents a novel move with potentially far-reaching ramifications for the preservation of working waterfront elsewhere in coastal Maine. "This is an unprecedented agreement," said Doreen MacGillis, executive director of the York Land Trust. "It marks the first time a land trust in Maine is playing a role in protecting our working waterfront. We hope that the pattern exemplified here will serve as a model for others up and down the Maine coast, encouraging them to consider partnerships with the fishing community to preserve waterfront access on behalf of the interests of all," she added.

"At first we had to sort of scratch our heads," MacGillis said. "We hadn't done anything like this before. The land trust, of course, has been involved with landowners in preserving working forests and working farms, but working waterfront was truly new to us." According to MacGillis, the trust's easement purchase matched both the trust's and the lobstermen's needs: It made the property affordable for the lobstermen while preserving its value - commercially, historically, and aesthetically - to the town.

In commenting on the Sewall's Bridge dock purchase, Elizabeth Sheehan, project director of fisheries for CEI and co-author of the CEI study, told the trust, "Of the 25 miles of working waterfront left, just one mile generates 1,160 jobs and \$33 million in income. These simply cannot move inland when the price of land goes up ... I applaud the broad-minded approach that the York Land Trust has taken, and the tremendous community effort involved." Sheehan also said that she regarded the innovative land-trust/lobstermen partnership as "a whole new tool," and said she was quite optimistic about it being a model for application in other Maine coastal communities. Patten White, a York lobsterman who has long been active in the Maine Lobsterman's Association and is now its CEO, termed the Sewall's dock purchase "a shining example of what needs to be done along the whole coast of Maine."

For lobstermen Donnell and Sewall, the rewards are multiple and varied. Both bear names that go far back in York's heritage, and both have long experience at lobstering. As part of that experience, both have also witnessed the steady disappearance during the past 20 years of York waterfront available to York fishermen, most notably in the loss of three docks in York Harbor in the region of Varrel and Barrell lanes, where not long ago one commercial pier heavily used by local fishermen was lost when it was sold for more than \$1 million and subsequently converted to a home, which was then sold for \$2.3 million.

Calling it also one of the nicest spots in the area, Donnelly praised the site's deep-water access and the fact that it is truck-accessible. Its purchase, he said, "won't be a money-maker" but will pay for itself in convenience. He also said that he and Sewall will be letting other fishermen use the dock, and "the more guys, the better." York has 30-plus lobstermen and three trawlers that can benefit from the new dock.

Sewall called the agreement a crossroads in the work of preserving working waterfronts. "It's only one-sixth of an acre, but really, it's huge," he said. Sewall lobsters from another rented dock just downriver from the Sewall's Bridge dock, and he said the acquisition of the dock has a particular meaning for him for a number of reasons. Not only is he, "tickled to death to be able to stay there," but centuries of Sewall family residence in that region and of family connections to the river mean that "to get a piece back like that is really special to me."

Sewall praised the "generosity and energy that went into seeing to it that the property remained a working waterfront." He added, "I just can't say enough about Joey (Donnelly) and all those wonderful folks. They have been so generous. And the York Land Trust has the town's best interest in mind. We're really fortunate to have that group."

"Every time we lose a commercial fishing dock, we lose a part of the heritage of Maine," Donnelly said. Scott Stevens, executive director of the Old York Historical Society, said records indicate the dock was the site of an early ferry landing. It was designed by Samuel Sewall, a craftsman and engineer in the 18th century. Later it became the location of a coffin maker, a business Stevens said existed until very recently.

¹ - Sources: "Waterfront property saved." *The York Weekly* (December 3, 2003). By Virginia L. Woodwell [accessed at <http://www.seacoastonline.com/2003news/yorkweekly/12032003/news/63727.htm>]; "Going against the tide." *Portland Press Herald* (December 4, 2003). By Meredith Goad [accessed at http://www.yorkrivers.org/news_2003.12.04_pph.html]; "Joint effort saves pier from development." *Portsmouth Herald* (December 5, 2003). By Karen Dandurant [accessed at <http://www.yorkcountycoaststar.com/2003news/12052003/maine/64003.htm>]; "Commercial fishing docks now assessed as waterfront land." *Portsmouth Herald* (October 2, 2005). By Deborah McDermott [accessed at <http://www.seacoastonline.com/news/10022005/maine/65910.htm>].