Working Waterfront Advisory Council Insurance Working Group
Work Group Meeting #1
***DRAFT* Meeting Summary**
June 16th, 2026 in Augusta and via Zoom

Council members present: Stacey Keefer, Dan Bookham, Casey O'Hara, Chad Strater, Rhiannon Hampson, Sandra Darby (representing Shari Gregory, Bureau of Insurance)

Maine Office of Community Affairs (MOCA) staff present: Harriet Booth

Collaborators and members of the public present: Monique Coombs, Olivia Richards, Natalie Springuel, Noah Oppenheim, Amanda Smith, Merry Chapin, Jeremy Gabrielson, Aurora Burgess, Nikki Yanok, Maya Pelletier, Alex Zipparo, Jessica Joyce, Galsun Akdemir Evrendilek, Nick Branchina, Andrea Devereux, Bhuwan Bhandari, Mal Carey

(Meeting commenced at 1:01pm.)

Welcome & introductions

- Stacey Keefer (Council Chair) welcomed everyone, had Council members introduce themselves, and reviewed the meeting agenda. She welcomed members of the public to submit feedback and/or comments via email after the meeting.

Review of meeting materials

- Stacey and Harriet Booth (Council staff) briefly reviewed the materials that were shared with the workgroup prior to the meeting. These included an insurance memo from GMRI, two background documents on flood insurance in Maine, a short collection of case studies, and a document summarizing the themes (problems and proposed solutions) that came up at the May 5th full Council meeting.

Discussion

- Stacey outlined the goal of the discussion: to identify the specific problems/barriers to focus on and come up with actionable items that this group could explore. An additional goal is to identify what further information or resources is needed to support this work.
- Rhiannon Hampson suggested the group start by digging into the problems and solutions that were identified in the May 5th Council meeting. Initial discussion focused on the barrier of insurance coverage only paying to rebuild properties back to their original state, there being a lack of support for resilience upgrades, and then many instances of coverage getting dropped because rebuilds aren't fortified against future risk.
- Rhiannon requested that Dan provide a brief overview of why insurance is structured that way to help inform this conversation.
    - Dan explained that insurance is structured as indemnification rather than improvement due to moral hazard concerns about fraud, where insurance companies would face higher risk if they paid for enhanced rebuilding. These are not designed for forward-looking restoration and building, partially due to insurance

companies not wanting to incentivize any damage for the purpose of improvement rebuilds. He noted that the January 2024 storms revealed new climate-related hazards, with insurance companies now questioning the odds of similar large-scale damage occurring again before they can recover costs, which is why coverage often gets dropped. Dan identified infrastructure pressure as the primary challenge, citing delays in marine contractor work due to high demand and limited resources, and suggested that state-level initiatives focusing on seeded funds and educational programs could address climate resiliency concerns more effectively than changing insurance laws.

- Chad Strater added that an additional challenge for rebuilding after the storms (for marine contractors) was the difficulty in navigating the permitting requirements through the state and experiencing delays due to staff shortages and backlogs. Stacey commented that the Working Waterfront Coalition has been working with DEP to streamline the permit process and improve management of applications. More information will be coming out in the next couple of months around this and new permitting resources.
- Stacey shifted the discussion back to potential solutions and asked how codes or rebuilding standards in reconstruction could help create solutions. Dan volunteered the term 'voluntary standards' instead and noted that many of these standards exist already through FEMA and are used in the insurance industry. The challenge is figuring out how to make standards specific to Maine and educating people on how to use them. Meeting these standards wouldn't affect the payout of insurance but they would help make properties more insurable and resilient, though he noted challenges in implementing specialized guidelines that vary by location. He noted that working waterfronts in Maine are a fairly specialized part of the industry and more education is needed for insurance carriers and consumers around working waterfront infrastructure/properties/gear.
- The conversation shifted to questions about creating funds to support preventative investments versus reactive ones, with uncertainty about the financial feasibility for many working waterfront businesses. Climate hazards will only increase and programs like the Fortify ME Homes program and others help consumers move this work forward, outside of insurance, to help protect properties and assets. Investment in resilience upgrades would ultimately make insurance much more affordable for these consumers.
- Chad suggested there could be a person or entity that works with property owners on these working waterfront cases specifically to help translate options and guide coverage/policies. Dan noted that working waterfront is very niche and we need more insurance agents and carriers more knowledgeable on this specifically – Maine has some but there are challenges in covering the diversity of insurance needs and providing that specialization. Sandra Darby noted that there is definitely more education needed on the parts of consumers as well as insurance agents on what insurance is most appropriate for working waterfront properties.
- Stacey noted that a potential next step related to a funding program would be researching who was involved and the process behind getting that set up. Sandra offered that the Fortify ME roofing program had standards in place ahead of time, developed by IBHS, and that would likely be necessary for any kind of resilience fund or program using that model. Links on these referenced programs and related ones are listed below:
    - https://www.maine.gov/pfr/insurance/fortify-maine
    - https://ibhs.org/about-ibhs/ibhs-research-center/
    - https://resilientcharity.com/

- Rhiannon emphasized the need for public education and access to that education for consumers in both the public and private working waterfront sectors. Dan agreed that the Bureau of Insurance, the insurance carriers, and consumers would all be essential to engage collaboratively to think through solutions. Chad suggested looking at data around the most common insurance claims that could inform a best practices resource for consumers.
- In summary, the group focused on the topic of 1) voluntary standards and the Fortify Maine homes program as a potential model and 2) the education piece for agencies and consumers. Proposed action items included researching how the Fortified Maine Homes standard was created, identifying who may be an entity to develop/maintain voluntary stands in Maine, investigating existing data on common waterfront insurance claims, and exploring potential partnerships with insurance companies and industry groups around education.

Public Comment

- Jeremy Gabrielson (Maine Coast Heritage Trust) suggested that if there is a need to test new voluntary standards that there could be an opportunity to use public infrastructure with existing public support to test those standards.
- Noah Oppenheim (Homarus Strategies, Fishing Communities Coalition/MCFA) highlighted a memo that was shared with the workgroup that addresses initiatives at the national level related to insurance and disaster funding eligibility. The Maine delegation is a leader on these issues and this could relate to this conversation. The memo talks about how eligibility for disaster funding and grant funding is predicated on insurance coverage but NFIP is generally unavailable for wwf infrastructure (over the water structures) and private coverage is thin. There is potentially a way to unlock this through statute amendment and loan guarantee.

Wrap-up & Next Steps

- Harriet will follow up with a meeting summary and a scheduling poll for the next two work group meetings (likely between mid-July and mid-August).

(Meeting adjourned at 2:00pm.)