

Town of Winter Harbor

Board of Selectmen – Special Public Meeting

Date: September 18, 2025

Location: Winter Harbor Gym and Zoom

Subject: Community Discussion on Marina Property

Call to Order

The meeting was called to order by the Town Manager. The purpose of the meeting was to engage the public in discussion regarding the future of the Winter Harbor Marina property, which is currently listed for sale.

Presentation and Background

Facilitators and invited guests provided context on the marina property, including its historic use, current condition, and potential value to the community as a working and recreational waterfront. It was emphasized that:

- The property is presently for sale and could be purchased privately at any time.
 - The marina once supported a range of uses, including moorings, boat storage, and repair services, but has not operated at full capacity in recent years.
 - Interest has been expressed in preserving the site for public benefit and community access.
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Public Discussion

Harbor Use and Community Needs:

- The Town Manager reported a current *waiting list for moorings* and frequent calls from visiting boaters seeking safe harbor during storms.
- Residents noted that Winter Harbor is unable to meet current demand for dockage and that this represents a missed opportunity for both commercial and recreational boating.
- Public comments strongly supported preserving the marina as a viable, year-round working waterfront to ensure access for fishermen, visiting boaters, and recreational users.

Economic and Cultural Importance:

- Attendees stressed the economic and cultural value of maintaining a working waterfront.
- Concern was raised that if the property is sold privately, it could be developed in ways that diminish community access and heritage.
- Residents noted that successful redevelopment could support mixed uses, such as seasonal businesses, dining, tours, and public access for kayaks and small boats.

Potential Ownership and Management Models:

- Options discussed included:
 - **Municipal ownership** with professional management.
 - **Public-private-nonprofit partnerships**, combining grants, philanthropy, and business investment.
 - **Nonprofit ownership models**, similar to the *Sea Meadow Foundation in Yarmouth*, which integrates aquaculture, education, and recreation.

- Business support organizations and the Maine Working Waterfront Coalition were identified as resources for exploring mixed-use models.

Funding and Resources:

- Potential funding programs include:
 - *Working Waterfront Resiliency Grants* (storm recovery-related).
 - *Working Waterfront Access Protection Program* (anticipated reopening in 2026).
 - *Land and Water Conservation Fund* (federal).
 - *Federal Transit Administration ferry grants*.
- Additional funding could be sought from philanthropic organizations, private donors, and the Town's congressional delegation and state elected officials.
- Land trusts, including Maine Coast Heritage Trust and Frenchman Bay Conservancy, may be able to assist with technical support, connections, and facilitating grants.

Concerns Raised:

- Some residents noted the historical difficulty of sustaining businesses at the marina location, citing seasonal population challenges and economic limitations.
- Others pointed out that while seasonal demand is high, year-round viability may be difficult without significant outside funding or philanthropy.
- The realtor for the property emphasized that the sellers are motivated and could accept a full-price offer immediately, creating urgency for the Town to act if interested.

Community Engagement:

- Multiple residents urged that local philanthropic individuals be approached by the community to assist in acquisition or preservation.
- Comprehensive Plan priorities were discussed; public access and waterfront preservation ranked as a top priority in recent surveys. Incorporating marina revitalization into the Comprehensive Plan could strengthen grant applications.
- Attendees supported the idea of negotiating a fixed price with the property owners and requesting a defined period of time for the community to raise funds.

Survey and Documentation:

- A public survey has been made available via QR code, the Town's website, and the Town Office.
- All meeting notes, resources, and recordings will be made available on the Town's website for public review.
- Residents were encouraged to complete the survey and continue submitting input to the Town Office.

Next Steps

- The Selectmen emphasized that this meeting represents the *start* of a community conversation regarding the marina property.
- The Town Manager, with Select Board support, may initiate discussions with the property owners regarding possible purchase terms or grace periods.
- Community members with expertise in grant writing, fundraising, or marina management were invited to volunteer to assist.

- Outreach to donors, state and federal partners, and philanthropic organizations will be explored.

Adjournment

The Board thanked all attendees for their participation, noting the strong turnout and engagement.

Appendix A – Action Items

1. Property Owner Discussions

- Town Manager/Select Board to explore whether property owners are open to a fixed price and grace period for fundraising.

2. Community Survey

- Continue promoting public survey via QR code, Town website, and Town Office.
- Encourage residents to complete survey and submit input.

3. Grant & Funding Research

- Identify eligible programs (Working Waterfront Access Protection Program, Working Waterfront Resiliency Grants, Land & Water Conservation Fund, ferry grants).
- Reach out to Maine Working Waterfront Coalition, Maine Coast Heritage Trust, and Frenchman Bay Conservancy for technical assistance.
- Engage state and federal elected officials for possible support.

4. Local Philanthropy & Partnerships

- Approach local philanthropic individuals, businesses, and foundations for potential funding.
- Explore public-private-nonprofit partnership models, including nonprofit ownership examples.

5. Community Engagement

- Invite volunteers with expertise in fundraising, grant writing, or marina management to assist.
- Incorporate marina revitalization goals into the Comprehensive Plan update to strengthen grant eligibility.

6. Documentation & Transparency

- Post meeting notes, resources, and recordings to the Town website for public access.
 - Provide updates at future Selectmen's meetings.
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