

Natalie Springuel: My name is Natalie Springuel. I am from Maine Sea Grant. This is Ela Keegan from College of the Atlantic and we are at the National Working Waterfronts and Waterways Symposium 2018 in Grand Rapids, Michigan. Today is May 15th, 2018. So, why do we not start by having you state your name and then if you do not mind spelling it, that would be great too.

Andrew Dorr: Great. Andrew Door, A-N-D-R-E-W, D-O-R-R.

NS: Great. Thank you. So, tell us where you are from and what do you do for a living?

AD: Sure. So, I'm from Vinalhaven, Maine, Coastal Town along in the mid coast region of Maine and Penobscot Bay. It's a year-round island community, unbridged. There's about twelve to thirteen hundred people that live there year-round and I serve as their town manager.

NS: Great. So, what does a town manager do?

AD: [laughter] So, it really varies depending on town to town. Generally, I mean they serve as the CFO of the community, but the responsibilities will vary from town to town based on the resources they have – the staffing resources they have. So, for me I serve as their treasurer, as their tax collector, in part as a road commissioner to some degree, a planner, a financial manager. It really covers a lot of different grounds.

NS: Could you characterize Vinalhaven for us?

AD: Sure. So, it's a – again, a vibrant year-round community. It has a very nice strong downtown Main Street area. Its main economy is lobstering. We seed anywhere from ten to twelve or eight to £12 million a year. Of the last few years, we come in from the waters there. So, it's a big, big part of our economy. Seasonal tourism is definitely another big piece of it. Second homeowners, as well as the weekend warriors or the day trippers, coming on the state ferry boats is another big, I guess, second industry for us.

NS: What is your waterfront like? What is your working waterfront like?

AD: So, our working waterfront, it's really in Carvers Harbor, to the southern end of the island. When the ferry boat comes in, you're at the western end of the harbor and as you walk east through towards Main Street, it's a lot of commercial buying stations that support the fishing lobster industry. There's public wharf parking dog tie up, hoists people to bring the traps are off the boats. There's a boat yard, the only boat yard on the island. Then as you get past that area, kind of classify that as our more commercial working waterfront area. Then as you get past that, you get to traditional Main Street. It's got over thirty businesses, mixed-use apartments above some of the buildings. There's also another public parking lot with dock tie up for fishing boats or for any boat really – the punts. Then as you move through that area, you get up again onto a high point where you have a church, a library, more residential areas to the east Main Street.

NS: For people who live year-round in Vinalhaven, what would you say that they really value about living there?

AD: So, probably said too often, but there's just this sense of community that exists. The support that exists for families regardless of the situation they're in or really who they know. The communities really come together and support people in a lot of different ways and that I haven't seen when you're in some of the bigger cities or towns. So, that's definitely one of the first things that comes to mind. Otherwise, it's just the traditional, original, authentic, working waterfront community that still exists in our harbor. If it had two hundred boats in it, there's probably ten that aren't working boats. So, it's still a predominantly, very visibly working waterfront.

NS: Yes. It seems like from what you are describing, it maintained its sort of status as a working waterfront, maybe in ways that other communities are doing but have not been able to quite as effectively.

AD: Yes. So, there's a section of the harbor, kind of the western side of Carvers Harbor as it goes through the Main Street area that was a CFMA zone was created. So, the commercial fisheries marine activity zone, with a few exceptions of buildings that were built before that was created. It's that commercial waterfront access and support services. Because I didn't finish – as you go along the eastern side of the harbor as it curves away from Main Street, it's all privately owned and very much mixed-use. But there's a lot of fish houses through there. Very few just residential lots. So, it's neat to see the fish houses along the water and then quite a few seasonal homes actually behind those. But seeing the fishermen in the foreground is something that certainly yields a lot of photos from folks.

NS: I bet, yes. What you are describing sounds like what people often describe about how Maine used to be.

AD: Yes. I think a lot of folks still are holding on to that and haven't quite yet asked the questions about what comes next or how do they get used. Should they not be owned by the fishermen anymore, whether it's because of taxes or no one to hand the fishing business off to or for whatever reason. They haven't heard much conversation about that. But I imagine based on other conversations from this conference, that we'll probably be talking about in the next twenty years.

NS: We have heard a lot of folks already in these interviews talking about gentrification of the waterfront. Is that changing at this point on Vinalhaven?

AD: I think in the harbor where we see the most activity, I don't think it is. Again, a good portion of it is already in that CFMA-protected zone. It's already built out. I don't think there's any lots for sale. I think every once in a while, when the house lot does come up in town, you'll hear folks rumble. People that are looking at buying, "Well, I would have bought it, but it's just too loud. They start the boats too early in the morning." So, I think that because it's still such a strong working waterfront community that it wins that over. So, we haven't seen it in that part of town. There are certainly other areas on the island that have less pressure from the working community and it builds what they built outside of towns. So...

NS: So, it sounds like from a working waterfront protection perspective, passing the marine zoning that you referred to as the CF –

AD: CFMA.

NS: – that has been a success?

AD: I think so. Yes. Yes, I think a lot of it was put in place out of fear of what could happen. Without it, so if the lot were to sell, they're saying not that use – if it's not going to be for commercial fisheries, or marine activity, that you couldn't tear down and build anything you wanted. So, I have to support that industry.

NS: What do you see as some challenges coming down the pipe?

AD: Certainly, the big one, because we are so reliant on one species, the lobster, any decrease in landings or value certainly puts people on edge and becomes very scary for us as a community to think about what happened, what is next. Many talked about it is that we kind of peaked I think in 2012 with lobster yields in the state, we did as well. Until every year since then, it's kind of gone down just a little bit each year and the price accordingly. So, it's definitely something that people talk about. There are no answers for what does come next? The assumption is that it's tourism, there hasn't been anything to try and hasn't been enough effort to talk about diversifying and finding new fisheries or new species to harvest.

NS: Yes. If the lobster industry declined significantly, that would be pretty dramatic. Vinalhaven is one of the state's top.

AD: Yes. The last few years Vinalhaven has been number two in landings by value in the state, second to Stonington.

NS: Okay. What percentage do you think of the population sort of relies on lobstering to if you would make for a living?

AD: Yes. In 2002, there was an effort to update the comprehensive plan out there. Someone actually – as part of the process – went out and drove around the island and looked at every single home. They could name who lived in every home and invest and tried to write on paper what those people did for work. Through that, of course, over fifteen years ago, so a lot may have changed, but at that time, it was fifty percent of the population was directly or indirectly employed by lobster industry.

NS: Wow.

AD: I don't know what it is today. We haven't done that same survey but wouldn't venture that is too far off.

NS: That's huge, fifty percent. Yes. We were talking a little bit earlier with – I think it was (Matthew Pricer?) from Michigan and he was talking about the island communities. He made a

comment that I wanted to hear your thoughts on. He said that oftentimes island communities have more in common with other island communities and other part of the country that they might with the mainland right next to them.

AD: [laughter]

NS: What does that make you think?

AD: Yes, I'd say absolutely. You know, we've heard from folks this week from Smith Island in the Chesapeake from our friends in Beaver Island and others. I knew the folks that are here from Long Island, but yes, we will often when we get together and you hear the story about the strong independence of the people there. The support, as I mentioned earlier, that they provide each other, the challenges we have with the seasonal influx of people. Happy to have them, ready to give to them as soon as they've come. So, it's, yes, very much the same as I look to our poor on the mainland in Rockland – definitely different. There's definitely little to no collaboration. They're trying to attract people into their community. One of the same points might say, "Hey, take a boat ride to Vinalhaven or North Haven," as the boats leaves are both islands right there. But there's no coordination that say, "Hey they're coming here. We're promoting it. Are you ready for it?" The challenges, they are certainly much different than ours.

NS: Interesting. What do you think is the value of coming to an event like this or being connected to something like the National Working Waterfront Network?

AD: Well, when I go to almost any conference, it's usually the best value is found in the connections you make while you're there and the examples that can be brought back. Trying to tell the story that we aren't the only ones dealing with this. Because folks are so independent, you want to go alone. You want to be proud in saying that you've found the answer or created the answer. But there's no point recreating the wheel and to learn how one or a dozen communities fixed or address the problem, the same problem you might have. Maybe there's a way to mold together all twelve of those solutions to find the one that works for you. It's not to say you have to copy any one of them, but you can get light years ahead just by looking at what others have done.

NS: Is there anything we have not talked about that you would like to say or cover? The message about the island or working waterfronts in general?

AD: I guess one of the reasons I'm down here is to talk somewhat about our planning efforts around preserving our Maine Street area, with the inevitability of sea level rise and increased potential for increased storm events. So, this past winter, lot of folks in the Gulf of Maine, including us saw storm levels that we haven't seen since the [19]70s. Maybe again, I think there was one storm again in the 90s. We saw almost an equal level again the following month. So, back-to-back months, we had storms that we're pretty close to that 1978 storm event. So, that was pretty significant when we're talking about looking up the vulnerability and having a vulnerability assessment done through an engineering firm we are working with. It was just timely and unfortunate but was a timely event as we're talking about it. So, that's something that's definitely in the forefront of our selectman. I'm trying to understand where we are at risk,

what are we going to do, when it comes time to replace infrastructure and you look at the life cycle of some of those pieces. Do we have information now that can inform us as to do we build the same, do we raise them? Do we get them out of the low-lying water areas that we know exist today, assuming that it's going to get worse? So, we're trying to understand better what our risk is for our Main Street. No one is ready to say that we need to abandon or relocate but, of course, that is certainly one of the options. If you can adapt or mitigate, is there a place you can relocate? So, those are the three options we have in a harbor surrounded by water.

NS: Do you have models that you can look at or is it such a new issue for everyone that islands and coastal communities are all sort of grappling with?

AD: Yes. I think that all just a little bit different. Most of the island folks that are here this week talk about the erosion that's happening along their shoreline. We don't have sandy shorelines, so we're not losing our land. We're just being inundated with water. Our main street is man-made and so water is coming up through the ground into the basements. Water that travels under Main Street into the tidal pond now threatens the buildings from both sides. So, that's significant. Some of the building owners kind of question at what water levels does the building then just raise off the pillars under the columns that they're sitting on. So, these are things that I don't think we're certainly not alone in. But the challenges I've heard this week are a little bit different depending on your geography and what you're sitting on. So, for us it's inundation. At what water levels can we tolerate the nuisance, or does it become devastating?

NS: Anything you wanted to ask?

Ela Keegan: No. I think that is it.

NS: Great. Good. Thank you, Andy.

AD: Sure. Thank you.

NS: That was great. Super interesting.

AD: Thank you.

NS: Yes.

[end of transcript]