

Ela Keegen: This is Ela Keegan from College of the Atlantic at the National Working Waterfront Symposium in Grand Rapids, Michigan. Today is May 15th, 2018. So, could you please state and spell your name and describe your occupation and town and today's date?

Chris Kellems: Okay. I'm Chris Kellems. C-H-R-I-S, K-E-L-L-E-M-S. I'm from Sturgeon Bay, Wisconsin. I'm retired sustainable building advisor. I have my company, Sustainable Building Concepts and today is May 15th, 2018. Did I get it all?

EK: Yes.

CK: Okay.

EK: So, what makes your working waterfront important in your community?

CK: Okay. Sturgeon Bay is a harbor town with a working waterfront. The working waterfront was historically a shipbuilding and yacht building and agricultural product port. Peterson Builders, Christie Corporation, Sturgeon Bay Shipbuilding, Palmer Johnson shipbuilding, Leathem Smith Shipbuilding. It had agricultural aspects of the waterfront that is granaries and feed mills. One granary, the tools and Brandeis Granary is the last granary standing in Door County on the waterfront. Ship builders and yacht builders have fallen by the wayside until today there is only Fincantieri Bay Shipbuilding left. The Waterfront Redevelopment Authority was started in 1990, and its members were prominent businessmen and property owners and the local banker of the waterfront areas. The WRA was tasked with getting rid of blight and redevelopment on the waterfront. Vanderwall Associates came up with an award-winning plan for the Westside Waterfront in 2011. Today, the waterfront on the Westside is wrapped up in lawsuits pertaining to botch developments due to lack of an ordinary high watermark and violation of the public trust doctrine and lack of the DNR willing to make a determination on the ordinary high watermark. To complicate matters, a special TIF district was put in place approximately 2012 to finance development of this Westside Waterfront District. A hotel developer entered into an agreement to purchase from the city and build a hotel in 2013. Unfortunately, the city had purchased the property on a quitclaim deed and didn't realize the property was on fill. Enter the public trust doctrine. The hotel development stalled when the title company couldn't figure out the actual owner of the land and the hotel was to be built on. Historically, it was the waters of Sturgeon Bay. The city bought the two parcels on the waterfront and dragged their feet with the DNR to get an ordinary high watermark. A new group called the Friends of Sturgeon Bay Waterfront sued the city and the WRA to get an ordinary high watermark determination. The judge ruled in favor for the friends' group. The hotel developer pulled out and sued the city for \$500,000. The DNR has refused to determine the ordinary high watermark on one of the two parcels. They want the city and the WRA, the friends' group, to work out a compromise. Members of the city council were willing to compromise, but the WRA, Waterfront Redevelopment Authority, was not. To complicate matters even more, a new group, the Sturgeon Bay Historical Society was able to get the tools and Brandeis Granary on the Westside Waterfront listed on the National Registry of Historic Buildings. The city fire chief issued a raise order on the granary to get it torn down. The SBHS Historical Society raised almost one and a half million dollars to purchase, move, and restore the granary to the east side waterfront. Needless to say, the city was divided politically by the contention on the waterfront.

Now, enter spring election season. The good old boys on city council were voted out of power. The new city council is trying to be more progressive. The WRA, the Waterfront Redevelopment Authority, is on the verge of dissolution, pending satisfaction of several lawsuits that they are included in. The TIF district on the Westside Waterfront only has one new apartment building to pay the increment. Approximately \$250,000 of infrastructure improvements have been done and 200,000 plus of legal fees have been accrued so far due to the ordinary high watermark determination. The hotel developer still has a development agreement on the two parcels the city owns, and he also has a \$500,000 lawsuit against the city. The city now has to hire a legal beagle to untie this Gordian knot we've gotten into. Everyone in town wants the waterfront to succeed. The tugboats between the downtown bridges and Bay Shipbuilding and the maritime museum with a fireboat tour of Sturgeon Bay are a big tourist draw. We already have two hotels on the waterfronts. The past city council wanted one big hotel development to pay for this TIF district. Obviously, that is not going to work in the near term. Now, the city is working to get a new vision for our downtown waterfront. That's my notes. We have a very complex, obviously mess to deal with. I am here. I have absolutely no authority in the city. I am here as a citizen looking for help, and I task myself and my husband. We're here to gather information. I have the blessing of several new council members to get as much information as I can from this symposium and get help because we're almost in desperate need of help. We've had several plans in the past that have obviously failed, and lawsuits have ensued. So, do you have any questions for me, [laughter]?

EK: Yes. So, how do you think that the NWWN could support you and your working waterfront?

CK: I have brought up to the city development department since 2013 to please contact you folks for possible help that you could give in showing case studies and pointing the right direction to help us get going and with whatever new research that's going on. Because there's been a lot of stuff happening with developments not just on waterfronts, but form-based zoning, things like that that could help with the city redevelop. Our little town or city, it's a class four city. It's just under ten thousand people. It's on the Door County Peninsula of Wisconsin and it needs revitalization. I think every little port city does in harbor town. So, I'm here to gather information and then try to get our community development director to contact National Working Waterfront Network and see what you can help with [laughter]. Anyway, does that answer?

EK: Yes. Do you feel like it is easy to access the type of information you are looking for, or is it a struggle to try and find it?

CK: With the internet, I found amazing case studies. Of course, our little city, they want to deal only with cities that are in Wisconsin. They want very local Joe down the street did this, so we can do that. The biggest problem I'm having is trying to get this small city to look outside of just its area or the state of Wisconsin. So, I pointed over to Leland. I've told him to look at Marquette, look at the nautical mile in Detroit or north of Detroit. Someplace in Delaware. I can't remember where it was, of saying, "Hey, here's working waterfronts where they did this. These are tourist towns, and yet they're working waterfronts." You don't have to put another hotel right on the waterfront. We already have two hotels on the waterfront. We don't have to

put another one. So, this is a lot of my opinion [laughter]. So, yes, that's what I'm looking for is help, okay?

EK: Yes. If you could design the future of the Sturgeon Bay Waterfront, what are your kind of goals and the things that you think are most important for your community going forward?

CK: The [laughter] goals to get this granary restored that we have moved from one side of the bay to the other side of the bay. Literally, it was incredible.

EK: Was it boated across or driven across?

CK: It was driven across. They raised it up, put it on sixty-eight wheels and went across the bridge. It required federal state and local governments to come together because it was – the Coast Guards involved. They have to stop boat traffic [laughter]. This is a highway bridge that the state owns, so they had to stop traffic on that. They had to move all the utilities. There were power lines and light fixtures that had to be moved. We have movies of the Granary going across the bridge to its new location. So, getting the Granary restored, making it sort of a tourist attraction, it's part of the history of the working waterfront. We didn't want to lose that. We have tugboats between the bridges that people come and they just – a lot of Wisconsin folks don't get to see a working waterfront like you'd have in Maine or Portland or somewhere. Here's a working waterfront where you come down the hill into town and you look out across at Bay Shipbuilding with all the lake freighters. In the winter, there's seventeen freighters parked. It is absolutely incredible to see a harbor like this in the middle of a cornfield, basically. So, we've got a unique geographic place on the Great Lakes and the vision I have is to have public access to the waterfront. There is a maritime museum right down on the waterfront next to these tugboats and people come there. What I would really love to see, I call it the Sturgeon Bay Institute for Great Lakes Research. That's what I want to see on the waterfront. I want see an aquarium. This is what I want to see. I want to see educational opportunities for, I guess, kind of like what they have in Muskegon of studying the Great Lakes. Because as climate change happens, it's going to become more and more critical to study the water. That's my goal [laughter]. Okay. Anything else?

EK: Do you think that many other people in the community share your goal [inaudible]?

CK: Oh, yes. Unfortunately, Door County and Sturgeon Bay are aging. The population is aging dramatically. My husband and I, we moved back after 40 years from – we moved from California and came back. Several of the new council members have moved here from somewhere else. So, we have a bigger perspective. What we've run into is a lot of resistance from older established – we call it the good old boys – that they don't want to change. Literally at one of the DNR hearings, I heard our very high-priced lawyer lean against the table and say, "Well, this is how we've always done it here." I wanted to just die. It was like, "We need to look outside. We need to look at the research. We need to look at whether other places are doing, so we need to reach out." The older folks are not willing to reach out because it's kind of isolated. It's a peninsula, they don't have a lot of new ideas, so I seek new ideas. I come from a state in the country, California, Monterey Bay Aquarium that is just I actually met Julie Packard. She was a [laughter] client of my husband's. So, we were surrounded with innovation. Then we

come here and it's kind of, "Stop." [laughter] "We don't want innovation." A lot of the folks don't want to learn something new, so there's a lot of resistance. So, we're hoping to push past that. Anyway, do you have any other questions?

Kaitlyn Clark: I am doing a little bit of mapping out, but I want to get your opinion – have you help me put pins in the right spot.

CK: Okay.

KC: But we can do that after the recording. Yes.

EK: Is there anything else you want to add? Any stories or anything?

CK: Yes. There's so much that we could be doing [laughter]. I keep thinking I'd love to win the lottery [laughter] and just be able to...

EK: Make it all happen.

CK: Make it all happen rapidly, but we're tied up in lawsuits for, I'd say, at least two to five years. [laughter] Okay.

KC: Okay.

EK: Well, thank you so much.

[end of transcript]