

Bill Needelman: ...far as I'm – is this good?

Corina Gribble: Right there. Yes.

BN: Okay.

CG: My name is Corina Gribble and I am with College of the Atlantic. I am here with Kaitlyn Clark, also with College of the Atlantic. We are at the National Working Waterfront Symposium in Grand Rapids, Michigan. Today is May 15th, 2018. It is 5:38 p.m. Would you start us off by saying your name and spelling it?

BN: My name is Bill Needelman. N-E-E-D-E-L-M-A-N.

CG: What is your occupation and where do you live?

BN: I live in the city of Portland, Maine. I work for the city of Portland, Maine as the waterfront coordinator in the Department of Economic Development.

CG: What makes the working waterfront important to you?

BN: Professionally, it is my livelihood. I work on the policy and development side of working waterfront preservation and the industries that depend on the waterfront are my constituents. The property owners are an important component of that as are their tenants and the city itself is a waterfront property owner, including significant port-related properties and the city's fish pier. I also staff the city of Portland Fish Pier Authority Board of Directors. So, I have a direct administrative role in a waterfront property that is tied to the fisheries industry.

CG: What about personally? Do you have any personal ties to the waterfront, working waterfront?

BN: My family has deep roots in the Portland area, including the islands of Casco Bay. My parents have a summer place on Little Diamond Island in Casco Bay. We have cousins on Chebeague Island and so being an islander or someone connected to the island, you can't help but interact with waterfronts. I also conducted a carpentry business that largely concentrated on cottage work on the islands. So, I depended on piers, wharves, ferries and boats for my livelihood as the way to get materials and myself to work every day.

CG: So that is definitely a value of the working waterfront. Are there other values and reasons that you care deeply about it?

BN: Waterfronts are fun. Waterfronts engage our imagination. They allow us to recreate. They allow us to think. They allow us to dream. When you go to a waterfront, you feel differently. I think it is that aspect of being on the land and the water at the same time and that at any moment, on purpose or accidentally, you can bridge that divide. People fall off the waterfront. You can't just fall off any place else in everyday world. You have to be careful. In thinking about where you walk and how you walk and how you interact, you approach the world differently. That

sparks my imagination. I'm in a better mood when I'm on the waterfront. I like the people that I meet there. They don't complain about the weather, but they talk about the weather. It's just a different place.

CG: What brought you to do the work that you do currently?

BN: About the time that I was discovering that I wasn't going to make my living as a carpenter, I started thinking about changes in careers and land-use planning was an area of interest. I was fortunate to get a job with the city of Portland, Planning Department. But having grown up around the waterfront and working on the islands, I knew the geography of the waterfront. On my very first day of work in the Planning Office, a development project – an application for a new building came in on Custom House Wharf in Portland. The planning director looked at the application and said, "Custom House Wharf, which one is that?" It's my first day at work, I said, "That's the wharf with Harbor Fish on it." He handed me the application. He said, "Okay, you know the waterfront?" I said, "I do really know the waterfront," but I knew where Custom House Wharf was. It started me down a road of being the guy who knows a little bit about the waterfront and several years later, I knew a bit more about the waterfront and working on waterfront development from a planning perspective – from the land perspective gave me a unique perspective. The planners and city government looked at me as the guy who knew the water. The marine uses looked at me as the guy who knew the land. They were right. I'm not a marine operator. I've never been a commercial fisherman. I wasn't in the Coast Guard. I haven't been in the Navy. I don't have a commercial license. I know boats, I own a boat. I like to be on the water, but I never – I don't call myself a mariner. But understanding and having a sympathy and an appreciation for what it means to bring a boat alongside, to transfer goods and materials between boat and land, and between dock and truck. As a land use planner, you learn about the turning radiuses of trucks and the pedestrian needs of uses, and the land side transportation network is something you're well familiar with. But land use planners don't understand those same dynamics from the perspective of the water. They don't understand the needs of a vessel and how a vessel interacts with the pier, and then the needs of the pier to serve that vessel. So, I've cobbled together the skill and the knowledge-base that allows me to operate in both worlds. I'm privileged to be able to do that work.

CG: Oftentimes, I feel that the waterfront is talked about in sort of a disconnected way from the land and when the land is used. Could you maybe touch on how they are actually connected and integral to each other?

BN: Waterfront, philosophically, is almost the dimensionless line between water and land. It's not, I think, unexpected that there's a fair amount of confusion or disconnect. The maritime community has little to no sympathy for what happens on the land very often. The land side has little to no knowledge of what goes on the water. There just happens to be a lot more people on the land side than there are on the water side. I get frustrated by the treatment of marine activity from a nostalgic place. We're always talking about working waterfront preservation and it's important. It's laudable. I'm far more comfortable talking about working waterfront promotion. We don't always have to be on defense when it comes to thinking about waterfronts. Waterfronts are vital act of places that generate jobs and economic activity. It's not scenery. But when a person comes to the waterfront without any understanding of the marine activity or the industries

that rely on the water, they don't see the jobs. They don't see the activity. It's almost like looking at a television screen, they're passive participants. It is almost as though they're looking at just something that is there to be observed. Part of my job and part of the job that I've tried very deliberately to get good at, is explaining to people what they are looking at in terms that they will understand that a commercial boat is a business. It's like a floating family farm. You have to find a metaphor or an analogy that brings them into that boat in their own psychology, so that they can then put themselves in the position of being that marine operator. So, the marine operator no longer is just scenery for them to observe. It is somebody to sympathize with and empathize with. It's somebody who is conducting business in a way that's no different than a farmer, that's no different than any other land side industry, they just happen to need a boat in order to conduct their business.

CG: So, we had an interview earlier, someone who came from – essentially you were talking to other examples for Portland, especially about the port storage going in on there and on the port issues were tight in the local residents. So, I was wondering if you would not mind keeping us a synopsis of that story. [inaudible]

BN: So, the western waterfront in Portland is our deep-water industrial port. Freight, ship and boat repair, as well as some other industries that require deep water uses with access to rail and access to highway. The good news is we have access to rail. We have a dredged channel. We have good highway access. It's the perfect place for deep water port activity. We've been very fortunate with the main port authority that they have brought investment into the port and attracted a new shipping company, Eimskip, which is an Icelandic company that has operated in the United States since 1914 and largely serving Northern Europe and the Arctic with containerized shipping services and they now have their North American headquarters in Portland, Maine. It's a great story. Eimskip is a leader in refrigerated logistics. They ship food. Food needs a refrigerator. So, if we're going to continue to build our relationship with Eimskip, which means that we're building trade relationships with Northern Europe, Maine no longer is the end of the line with regards to our agricultural and fisheries products. We are the gateway to the Arctic and we're the gateway to Northern Europe. Three hundred million people live in Northern Europe and we now have the ability to ship our food to them for the same cost as it costs to put that same food in a truck and ship it to Delaware. It's a big deal. But they need a refrigerator. Refrigerators are tall, and the western waterfront sits right below the most expensive real estate in the state of Maine. The West End of Portland has seen a resurgence in property values. Modest working-class neighborhoods have converted into very high-end housing. Above those were the mansions built by the captains of industry 100 years ago and are still occupied by city leaders, business leaders, folks who are civically-minded but have come to appreciate their views. The port of Portland, and on the Portland side was largely fallow for many years, and people became used to the idea that there was empty land by the river so you could see the river. When the city looked to increase building heights through zoning to allow for a cold storage facility, we found ourselves in a fight with our own neighbors around expanding port activity in a way that was visible. For thirty years since the creation of our current waterfront policies, we have waited for the expansion of port activity in the Western Waterfront. Now that it was here, all we needed to do was increase building heights to allow for the development to happen and it took us a year's worth of in-depth discussion as a community to make that decision. The neighbors are not bad people, they're good people. They're not bad

Portlanders. They love their town and they love the livability and the vibrancy and the opportunity that it brings. They just didn't appreciate or value the economic potential of shipping over the value afforded to them by water views. They weren't wrong. They weren't bad. They just had a different perspective. We had to ask our City Council to make a very difficult decision, to weigh the values of neighborhood views against the value of trade relationships with Northern Europe, increased potential for manufacturing statewide and the ability to expand marine enterprise on Portland Harbor. The council ultimately did vote strongly to support expansion of port activities through taller buildings. But it required that we as professionals working for the city, the state Port Authority and the industries that looked to benefit. We needed to demonstrate the need, the reasonableness and the benefit that that new development would create because it was very easy to sympathize with people who said, "I love my view and my view is worth money to me," and that is economic development itself. Airbnb is economic development but the person who rents the short-term rental in an Airbnb has no interest in port activity. But that provides value to the property owner who can rent out that unit. So, it was a question of balancing values and deciding who we are as a community. Are we a poor community or not? Fortunately, I believe that the City Council made the correct decision to decide that not only are we a port community, but we are proud enough of it to look at it and to have it become a signature portion of our waterfront. As people enter the city, they're going to see it and I'm proud of the work that I did to help achieve that.

CG: You mentioned that you do not have personal experience with the commercial fisheries and working waterfront but recreational? Could you maybe touch on the differences of waterfront use between those two as someone coming from a more recreational background?

BN: I own a small boat and it's very important to me that my children have a connection to the water, that they're comfortable in boats, swimming in cold water, crunching up on beaches and understanding what islands are like. That you can drive a car too. So, for me it's about the connection to the place. As a Portlander, if you're not physically connected to the water, you're missing more than half of the city. Much of the city is submerged lands. If you're not on a boat, you don't get to see some of the best parts of the city. So, for me, I'll circle more. I like to be on a boat. Boats are fun and they change your perspective. It's different than when you are making a living. That boat then is a critical piece of equipment that allows you to pay the mortgage, put your kids through college. So, it's very different and I don't pretend that my recreational boat use qualifies me to understand what it means to be a professional mariner tying up a vessel, using marine infrastructure, ramps and docks and boat yards. We share a lot in common but I think – if I retain credibility with marine operators, I can't pretend that my recreational use of the water qualifies me to tell them how they should interact with the water. But that allows me to ask them to let me talk when it's time to think about things like landside access, truck maneuverability, how to design a site and appear in the landside support. Because from the land side perspective, I think I have perspective and skills that I can bring to them. So, we have roles and responsibilities that are different. The recreational part of it is frosting on the cake for me. It's just fun.

CG: To wrap up, how do you feel the National Working Waterfront Network can support you and the organizations you work with and the people you work for with tools or information to help the Working Waterfront challenges?

BN: Back in 2010, the National Working Waterfront Map Park held their second symposium in Portland and I was asked to participate, to provide some walking tours of the waterfront, and to describe our policy process and zoning process at one of the panels. Up until that point, I didn't know I had colleagues. I only worked in Portland. As the planner in Portland that worked on waterfront issues, I was wrestling with concepts that I didn't know that there were models to follow and while Portland has provided a leadership guidance and a role on the national stage in working waterfront preservation and promotion. The National Working Waterfront network brought port participants, fishing participants. Many other industries and policy professionals into one place to share and exchange information. At that point, it was a tremendous relief that I knew that I could call Jack Wiggins in Boston at the Urban Harvard Institute to look for other zoning examples. That Kenneth Walker at NOAA, when he asked me to provide some examples of what Portland was doing with smart growth in the waterfront, I can call him and look for other examples around the country, knowing that there is a network of professionals that care about the same issues, have knowledge on the same issues and help make connections between professionals. That's the value of a network and it's invaluable.

CG: Any questions, Kaitlyn? Is there anything else you want to add or have not had a touch on?

BN: Yes. I haven't heard enough in the symposium this year about youth and making sure that young people have recreational connections to the water professional opportunities to use the water, use waterfronts. I think that that's going to be a real concentration moving forward as the workforce ages and as fisheries transition. So, it's very encouraging to see folks like yourselves participate in this conversation.

CG: Thank you so much for your time and it's really great sitting down and talking with you.

BN: I could talk about waterfronts all day long. [laughter]

BN: I think I have. [laughter]

[end of transcript]