

Hattie Train: This is Hattie Train. I am with Kaitlin Clark, who is from College of the Atlantic, to conduct interviews at National Working Waterfront and Waterways Symposium in Grand Rapids, Michigan. Today is May 15th, 2018. Can I please ask you to state and spell your name and occupation and where you are from?

Kathy Evans: Kathy Evans. I am the environmental program manager for the West Michigan Shoreline Regional Development Commission located in Muskegon, Michigan, on the shoreline of Lake Michigan.

HT: Do you have that over there? Do you need me to find out?

Kaitlyn Clark: I am good.

HT: Okay, cool. What makes your working waterfront important in your community?

KE: In West Michigan, we have several working waterfronts. Muskegon Lake has a port. There's a port in Ludington, Grand Haven, and other smaller harbors and recreational ports as well. The Muskegon Lake Port historically began as a lumbering community back in the 1800s and was heavily industrialized following that era with foundries and other water-dependent uses of the time, but not using sustainable practices when it comes to water usage or waste disposal. Muskegon has gone through a huge transformation of cleanup. It is one of the Great Lakes areas of concern. So, special cleanups have been completed there. We've cleaned up contaminated sediments. We've restored fish and wildlife habitat along the shoreline, yet we still maintain commercial port uses. We have research agencies and universities, commercial fishing offshore from Muskegon and Grand Haven and Lake Michigan, commercial port terminals, the Lake Express car ferry that travels from Milwaukee to Muskegon. We have tugboats repair, tourism, sport fishing, all of these different uses that are still part of that waterfront of Muskegon Lake, which is about a 5-mile-long stretch. So, because of that history along the Muskegon Lake shoreline and knowing what a sustainable future can bring for us, we want to make sure that the working waterfront is maintained as part of that mixed use, smart growth waterfront that we want into the future. So, while we had good jobs in the past from the historical industries, we know that with proper development and care of the shoreline and the water, that we can have very good jobs again in the future as we continue to expand the water-dependent businesses that we strive for now on Muskegon Lake, and into the future.

HT: Thank you. What about the area that you are in is specifically unique, the place that you are at?

KE: As a part of this conference, I'm finding out that, yes, we are somewhat unique in Muskegon from a geographic standpoint within the Great Lakes. But I'm also finding out that many of the different ports and harbors are experiencing the same issues as we try to maintain that water-dependent economy and the jobs, as we see our land transition from heavier industrial uses to recreational uses, as we struggle to have views and open spaces while maintaining good jobs. This is what this conference is so important for, is to learn, peer-to-peer, from different communities throughout the nation, the best practices that we can put into place to ensure that we are able to preserve what we value and expand on those businesses that we want to further

develop.

HT: So, one thing that was said in the opening earlier today was, what is your story? It was opened with that is what the speaker story was. Everyone that is here has been tied to working waterfronts in one way or another. What is your story that got you involved in this in the first place?

KE: For me personally and because of the regional planning agency where I work, I have been very involved in the cleanup and restoration of the Port of Muskegon., the natural resources that were damaged from the historical, less sustainable industries of the past. So, now we have a beautiful shoreline that can accommodate new, more sustainable water-dependent uses. So, I'm very interested going forward now that we've done so much of the cleanup and restoration, to make sure that we integrate these uses properly. So, we do preserve the natural resources that we all value for tourism and for quality of life. That's why I'm really interested in learning more about how to work with multiple stakeholders to achieve these goals.

KC: What does that cleanup process look like? How do the different organizations you work with get that done?

KE: So, the cleanup of Muskegon Lake and to get it removed from that list of Great Lakes Areas of Concern is a program that we work very closely with many partners. The U.S. Environmental Protection Agency, Great Lakes National Program Office is a key player. They are the lead federal agency for the Great Lakes Restoration Initiative, which has been paramount in cleaning up Great Lakes areas of concern everywhere. We work with other agencies in addition to the U.S. Environmental Protection agencies, such as NOAA, National Oceanic Atmospheric Administration. We work often with Sea Grant to perform some of the outreach that is needed for some of these very large-scale cleanups. We work with many, many other agencies, Fish and Wildlife Service, U.S. Army Corps of Engineers, and in the State of Michigan, we work with the Department of Environmental Quality and the Department of Natural Resources as well.

HT: You said that you have done the cleanup and that you want to be able to keep it going and keep this momentum running with what you want to do. What are the challenges directly that you have been facing with that?

KE: I think the challenges to maintaining the restored shoreline of Muskegon Lake are going to have to do with the new wave of development that is coming through, and the need for land and for space. We have quite a lot of available space from some of the brownfields that are on our shoreline. We have a former paper mill property, as well as a former coal power generation facility that just closed not even two years ago. So, there's significant open space, brownfield space to use for redevelopment of working waterfront activities as well as tourist-related activities. There's a push for more residential along the shoreline. So, there's a lot of space available. We tended to work in between some of those parcels that we knew were coming up ready for redevelopment when we did the restoration. We made sure that we worked with landowners who were willing to either put a permanent conservation easement on that shoreline that was restored or some other form of protection if it was a public landowner.

HT: How can National Working Waterfront Network support you going forward?

KE: The network can support communities like Muskegon by continuing to host symposiums such as this where we can take advantage of peer-to-peer learning with other communities, with agencies who have different programs that can help support resiliency planning. Just getting together and learning from one another is a huge benefit.

KC: What do you see, if you were suddenly the head of planning for all of the development, what would be your kind of ideal future for the waterfronts of the lake?

KE: I think the ideal future for Muskegon Lake is based in the Muskegon Lake Vision 2020 plan that was just produced two years ago. That is really a mixed-use waterfront with amenities for recreation, for retail, commercial, port activities, and the habitat and water quality that we strive to have, having connected residential neighborhoods and downtown areas to the waterfront. So, it's really just a mixed-use kind of waterfront. I think Muskegon has a history of being able to do that because we have the ability to locate different types of uses adjacent to one another in a way that tends to blend and be palatable to the neighbors in the area.

KC: That plan that you talked about, that is already written up. So, it sounds like there is good momentum towards that mixed.

KE: Yes, I think the Muskie Lake Vision 2020 provided a good platform for us a couple of years ago, brought the community together with many different types of stakeholders. We found out that we really kind of want a little bit of everything and that we're willing to work together to achieve it. Since that time, the city of Muskegon has developed a new plan called Imagine Muskegon Lake, that visualizes more of what we talked about in Vision 2020 and puts it in more graphic form. So, I think we're getting there. But we could really continue to identify areas that are vulnerable in the face of climate change. We need to really continue to do our resiliency planning and take those kinds of plans to the next level.

KC: It sounds like the local communities have been super involved in this process. Are you finding community members generally are in support and are excited about the changes that are happening?

KE: Everyone is very excited about the changes that are happening in Muskegon right now, really throughout the whole county. We have other water bodies and similar mixed-use growth potential on White Lake, Mona Lake. But Muskegon Lake is kind of in the heart of the Muskegon County, kind of the county seat downtown, more of the urban area. There are many partners from the Chamber of Commerce to the Convention of Visitors Bureau to the West Michigan Port Operators Association, the Muskegon Lake Watershed Partnership, all of the state and federal agencies who have helped us so much to restore the lake, like the U.S. EPA and NOAA and the DEQ and the DNR here in Michigan. So, we're going to continue to partner as we go beyond delisting Muskegon Lake as an area of concern and ensure a vibrant future and a resilient one.

HT: Is there anything else you want to add?

KC: That is perfect. Thank you so much. This was amazing.

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