

Kenneth Walker: Okay.

Corina Gribble: So, my name is Corina Gribble. I am from College of the Atlantic. I am here with Kaitlyn Clark, also from College of the Atlantic. In honor of the Fifth National Working Waterfronts and Waterways Symposium, and to celebrate more than a decade of convening, it is time to collect the National Working Waterfront Network's stories and take stock of our successes in protecting the nation's working waterfronts and waterways. You have important stories to tell. We plan to capture them and share them with the network. This interview will focus on two themes. We will spend most of the time hearing the story of your working waterfront, and save a few minutes at the end for how the National Working Waterfront Network could support you in the future. So, if you could go ahead and state your name and spell it, please, for a sonic ID.

KW: Okay. I am Kenneth Walker. It's K-E-N-N-E-T-H, W-A-L-K-E-R. I'm with NOAA's Office for Coastal Management in Silver Spring, Maryland.

CG: What kind of working waterfront community are you most engaged with?

KW: So, because I work at the national level, I have the national landscape overview. So, really, more than working with one specific coastal community, I have a little bit of a bird's eye view, just trying to keep a pulse on what's going on nationally. I think NOAA is very interested in potentially making connections to the blue economy. We know that's going to be important for this administration. So, the blue economy includes the marine transportation system and aquaculture and other important elements. To some degree, working waterfronts are at a nexus or a connection point for those important economic activities. So, that's something that, at NOAA, at the national level, we are interested in trying to articulate why working waterfronts are an important piece of the blue economy.

CG: Do you see at a national level a shift in the working waterfront? You discussed aquaculture is starting to come into play in areas it was not before.

KW: Well, I think in general, we're seeing the continued increase of competing uses, whether it's other industrial uses and new uses like aquaculture or a competition between maybe gentrifying neighborhoods that are close to existing port facilities. Those new residents may not appreciate the working waterfront and the boat noises at 6:00 a.m. and the sights and the smells that go along with the real working port. I think the other issue that I wanted to mention that is very important for NOAA is resilience. So, we're interested in working with coastal communities and working waterfront communities to be more resilient to storms and flooding and economic issues. So, economic resilience is a component as well. So, we produce a lot of tools for local decision-makers, like the Lake Level Viewer and our Coastal Flood Exposure Mapper, Sea Level Rise Viewer. So, we hope that working waterfront decision-makers are using those tools to make better decisions in terms of their long-term resilience. Because obviously, we are seeing changes in nuisance flooding and the severity of coastal storms.

CG: What is your experience working between the two sides of the working waterfront right now, with the people that have been working on the water for generations and maybe some of the

new higher income area, people coming into these communities and buying property and just having to navigate the trickiness between making it a cohesive community?

KW: Yes. So, there was just a really interesting presentation this morning. Bill Needelman who is a waterfront planner for Portland, Maine, they have been dealing with, the port is expanding at the same time as these historic neighborhoods downtown are gentrifying. I referred to an example before, and that was Portland. So, really, the port needed to expand. They were looking at a cold storage facility. That made a lot of sense in terms of the products that they need to move out of the port. But the local residents came out opposed to that plan because of the height of the facility on the waterfront. So, really, the city did a lot of work with the port and those community groups to try to find solutions that were amenable to everyone. But the height restriction became a real polarizing issue in the community. Portland has tried to address that by having a really open public process that has engaged the city and the port and residents.

CG: We are talking about Portland, Maine?

KW: Yes, Portland, Maine.

CG: You mentioned NOAA has a lot of resources available. You hope, as an organization, that policymakers and even the local communities will utilize that. Do you feel that information is easily accessible to everyone, and that people know about it?

KW: So, I think the choir knows about it. So, NOAA has a web platform called Digital Coast. That's where we have most of our data, tools, and training. If anything, the biggest problem with it now is there are too many resources there. But we do have Topics pages. So, if a community or a local waterfront decision-makers are interested in just adaptation planning or just risk communication for outreach and communication with residents, we have basic training and resources that help with that. So, do all communities know about our tools? No. But we try to work with partners like the American Planning Association and Association of State Floodplain Managers. So, they represent lots of folks who work at the community level. We try to make sure that those folks are aware of our tools. I have a panel tomorrow here at this conference, on tools for working waterfront resilience. So, we're going to be talking about some of the NOAA tools and some others that partners have developed.

CG: You said you worked at more of a national level. Are you seeing commonalities between the different working waterfronts that encapsulate the United States, even if they are on different coasts? Are similar things happening and similar things going forward?

KW: Certainly, some of the trends are very similar all around the country. The port expansion, at the same time that the community is gentrifying, and the conflicts between the residents and the pro-economic development interest; I mean, that's not limited to Portland. That's playing out, to some degree, in communities across the country. I think resilience planning and really integrating that into the port and city planning is happening more aggressively in some parts of the country. I mean, Norfolk, Virginia, is a hotspot for sea-level rise. It's also a very important U.S. Navy port. So, the Navy and the City of Norfolk and the port are being very proactive in trying to address some of their flooding issues. So, the degree to which the community has

already seen those impacts vary.

CG: It seems like local communities and local governments are working more effectively together. Do you see that translating to a more national scale? Because here, with the Mapping Ocean's Stories project, we are trying to make more information about small communities accessible, and telling their stories to the people who might not think about them because they are on this tiny island in the middle of nowhere. So, taking that to a more federal kind of level, are you seeing that happen? Or how could that maybe be better managed?

KW: Peer-to-peer learning is very valuable. We regularly hear from communities that they want to hear from a colleague appear from another community, usually in the same region or maybe in the same state. I mean, Portland, Maine doesn't really want to see an example from Seattle, Washington because they just feel like that it doesn't represent their region. So, we hear regularly that folks want to hear it from other community members who are doing innovative things. I think what I was describing in Portland, we are seeing in some communities. That's kind of a partnership between the city and the port, or the economic development interest and the public. I mean, the homeowners and the same groups who might come out and be very vocal once the proposal's on the table, we try to get those groups together early in the process so that issues are identified early on, like the height restriction issues in Portland. If they had tackled that issue and brought that out into the light early on, been able to have a full discussion with the community on ways to address their concerns, it could have not been as polarizing an issue as it was for the community. When the port came out and said, "Oh, this is our plan. It's going to create lots of new jobs," I think the community felt a little flat-footed. They weren't prepared. They didn't like the proposal. So, I think that nugget of trying to align the local vision and engaging the city, the economic development folks, and the residents, to try to get everybody on the same page early on is something that has certainly worked in some communities and certainly, probably, would help when issues get polarizing like they were in Portland.

CG: You mentioned Portland, Maine quite a few [laughter] times. So, I was just wondering, what has been, that you have seen from where you are, the biggest challenge currently in Portland within the last year, couple of years? Something that has been a big issue [inaudible].

KW: Well, I think that as I was describing the port expansion that they were trying to complete at the same time, in close proximity to the neighborhood that were formerly workforce housing, those have all gentrified. Property prices have gone up tenfold, from a multifamily unit being \$30,000 to \$300,000. So, there are different expectations when people are paying that kind of money. The new residents coming in, they may have an idea of – property prices may be part of their motivation for buying in that area. But then they're looking for the kind of amenities that support that kind of price point. They don't want their views blocked. They don't necessarily want trucks rumbling through the neighborhood and the smells of the working waterfront.

CG: Portland, Maine is one of Maine's biggest cities. Things are probably happening there a little faster than they are everywhere else just in terms of development-wise. Have you seen a success story that has taken place there that could maybe be mimicked or used in other situations that might be coming up on that same issue?

KW: Yes. I think the upfront coordination, the coordination that they tried to establish after things got so polarizing. As I said, if they had implemented that approach earlier on, I think they could have probably addressed some of the residents' concerns. The project might have gone forward. So, I think that early coordination is really key. Making sure residents understand that their voices are important and that they're heard.

CG: Do you have any personal ties to the working waterfront or the waterfront in general?

KW: No. I grew up in North Carolina, going to the coast and the beach. They certainly had working waterfront communities that were part of my childhood experience. So, I think that to some degree that's informed my work and career decisions.

CG: So, with the National Working Waterfront Network, what kind of work have you been doing with them? Has that been effective and working well? Are there changes that could be made to help the organization better help the communities at all levels?

KW: So, I've been involved with the Outreach & Education Committee. So, we really developed the case studies that are on the Sustainable Working Waterfronts Toolkit. I think there are about twenty-five case studies. Those were all written as peer-to-peer interviews. We wanted to glean out those lessons learned, and maybe this is what I'd do differently. Then we got a NOAA grant. We developed ten oral histories to supplement that collection. So, that's been my main contribution. We've really found a lot of value in both of those. One of our oral histories is on Sarah Garcia, who is a waterfront planner in Gloucester, Massachusetts. NOAA helped her with some economic information that helped them make the case that their working waterfront was not dead, that it was very much alive and viable. Hearing her describe that in her own words is very compelling. We're actually now using that. We have developed a NOAA training that is on identifying your working waterfront economy. We used that oral history from Sarah Garcia in the training because it's so compelling to hear from her about how valuable it was to have the economic information and how that really changed the conversation about the long-term viability of the working waterfront. So, I think that those case studies and oral histories have always been an important part of the work that we wanted to promote. I still think that's one of the most important ones. We continue to hear from communities that, yes, they want examples from their neck of the woods, from their region, from a similar-sized community, similar capacity, of how they addressed a similar issue. The Port of New York is not relevant because they're a huge player with a lot of capacity.

CG: Is there anything you wanted to add that we might not have touched on?

KW: I don't think so. We talked about the blue economy and resilience. I think that's the lens that we're looking at this issue at the national level now, because the blue economy is going to be important. Resilience has become increasingly important over the last decade. Increasingly, local planning processes may integrate some type of resilience or hazard-mitigation planning. So, to the degree that we can help communities integrate that to their comprehensive planning process, with their economic development or infrastructure process so that all those local processes aren't disjointed, that's a worthy goal.

Kaitlyn Clark: How have you found including that resilience piece with this current administration? Have you still been able to go forward with that planning?

KW: Yes. So, coastal resilience is still a priority for NOAA. I think that some of our tools are directly applicable for communities that are planning for adaptation to climate change. But they're also applicable for just hazard-resilience planning. So, we're really taking a cue from communities. Some communities can call it hazard planning. Other communities can say, "We're beginning to adapt to climate change." The strategies that they're implementing locally may be the same, although those goals are very different. So, if we're working with the community, providing direct assistance, we really take a cue from them. If they are comfortable with their constituents talking about adaptation and taking it a little further, that's fine. But politically, if they can only talk about hazard-mitigation, that's fine as well. In a lot of ways, the end results and the strategies are the same.

CG: To wrap up, could you give your definition or NOAA's definition of resilience? It is a word that is being used a lot. I think it may have different meanings to different people in different communities. So, I am just curious what the definition you come from that.

KW: Yes. So, there is a formal definition that NOAA has adopted. That was debated and wordsmith. I don't have that in front of me. People usually talk about being able to bounce back from some type of an event. It doesn't have to be a natural disaster. It could be the paper plant closing in Alpena and 300 people being laid off. So, it usually has to do with bouncing back from some kind of an event and then being stronger moving forward. It can include community resilience, economic resilience, natural resource resilience, or wetland's resilience to – so, if you would like the formal definition, I'd be happy to follow up and get that to you. Okay?

CG: I think I am okay. Thank you so much for your time.

KC: Thank you so much.

KW: Okay. Well, to the Portland issue, I just came from a presentation on Portland this morning. I find it very interesting. I think that's why that was at the front of my brain. But I will tell Bill Needelman, who's a waterfront planner for Portland, that if he hasn't signed up, he should.

KC: Yes. We want to hear lots of different stories from lots of different people at all levels of the chain.

KW: Okay. Good. Yes. I did talk to Natalie. I'm trying to talk to some NOAA colleagues. People at NOAA tend to think, "Well, I'm not working." I don't live in a working waterfront community myself, although a lot of my colleagues in Charleston do. But I just had lunch with them. I said, "You know, you need to sign up for an interview." They were reluctant. But I'll try again.

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