



sophia scott <sophiaquilliam@gmail.com>

7/25/24 S Bristol Board of Selectmen Meeting - Re: houseboat

sophia scott <sophiaquilliam@gmail.com>
To: townoffice@sbristolme.gov
Bcc: Erik Scott <martineden.es@gmail.com>

Thu, Jul 25, 2024 at 10:48 AM

To the South Bristol Board of Selectmen:

I'm writing this on behalf of my father, Erik Scott, who is unable to attend tonight's meeting. I would be in attendance, however, I am currently 40 weeks pregnant.

A neighbor informed my father on Tuesday that his houseboat, currently moored off his property on Poseidon Lane, would be a topic of discussion at tonight's meeting. As neither of us are able to attend, I'd like to submit this letter to provide some context and a response to the complaints received by the Town.

The houseboat in question was built by my cousin's grandfather, Willis Rossiter, in 1929. It was used as the primary residence and wood shop for Rossiter and his family in Camden. About ten years ago, my dad began to restore the houseboat, keeping to its original design. When it was launched, Donny Rossiter, Willis' son who grew up on the houseboat, came to see it off. He said to me, nodding to my son who was just shy of one at the time, "I was on this boat the day I came home from the hospital!" Not only is the houseboat a resurrected piece of family history, it is representative of the history of coastal Maine's culture and lifestyle.

It is our understanding that the majority of the complaints and concerns about the houseboat are coming from non-Maine residents who spend only a fraction of their time in my home state. This is just one of many examples of how coastal gentrification is threatening the way of life for Mainers. My father grew up in Lincolnville and raised his family in Searsmont and I'm raising my son (and his soon to be sibling) in my home state. We're Mainers and it's disheartening to see out-of-state NIMBY-ism changing the culture and landscape of our state.

Purchasing the property in South Bristol was a once-in-a-lifetime opportunity for our family to have a tiny sliver of Maine's beautiful coastline. My father purchased the property for his family - his kids, grandkids, and generations to come. My son, who is four, asks me weekly if we can go to South Bristol and is beyond excited to spend weekends on the houseboat.

When I spoke with Margy this morning, she told me that some of the concerns coming from neighbors were pollution and that it is an eyesore.

First to address the pollution concerns. My dad has been a commercial fisherman for the past 35 years - he knows first hand the importance of keeping our natural resources healthy, because his livelihood depends directly on an ecologically resilient Gulf of Maine. The houseboat is arguably more environmentally friendly than many other boats and watercraft that have heads that empty directly into the water. The houseboat has a composting toilet and any graywater discharge comes from a sink using potable water. We're an environmentally conscious family. I've spent my career in the environmental sciences - working on an oyster farm in the Damariscotta River, interning at the Darling Center, serving as the State CDC Drinking Water Program's source water protection coordinator, and now as a Sustainable Seafood Program Manager at the Gulf of Maine Research Institute. The houseboat is no more of a source of pollution than other boats of the river, and is arguably less so.

In terms of the houseboat being an eyesore - there's not much to say. Beauty is in the eye of the beholder. I see the houseboat as a beautiful piece of Maine's history. I think mega yachts and some of these newer plastic boats are plain unsightly. Some people see the various oyster farms up and down the river as nuisances and eyesores - I see them as valuable resources that bring economic value to the state and provide the ecosystem service of improving water quality.

Without knowing the subject of the other complaints, I cannot address other topics. I'm happy to be put in contact with any of the complainants to address their concerns directly. Thank you for your time and please feel free to reach out to me directly with any questions you have.

Best,
Sophie Scott
MS Plymouth State University
BSc McGill University

Sophia Scott
South Portland
LD 1763

I write in strong opposition to LD 1763, “An Act to Prohibit Floating Structures on Maine Waters.” This bill, while perhaps well-intentioned, would have far-reaching and harmful consequences for working Mainers and the cultural and ecological integrity of our coast. I urge you to consider the broader implications of this legislation, particularly in light of three urgent realities: Maine’s worsening housing crisis, the environmental neutrality of houseboats compared to other marine uses, and the accelerating gentrification of our working waterfronts.

1. LD 1763 would exacerbate Maine’s housing crisis.

Maine is in the grip of an unprecedented housing crisis. Coastal and waterfront properties are increasingly unaffordable to working Mainers due to out-of-state buyers, second-home ownership, and short-term rental conversions. For some, modest non-powered houseboats are among the last affordable options to remain close to work, family, and the communities they’ve long called home.

Under LD 1763, these homes would be banned. Not only would that displace their residents, but in at least one known case, the bill would directly result in homelessness. Maine should be looking for creative, low-impact housing alternatives—not eliminating the few that already exist.

2. Houseboats are no more environmentally harmful than other marine uses—and often less so.

Opponents of houseboats often cite environmental concerns, but these claims lack scientific backing and ignore the realities of current marine activity. Most houseboats are outfitted with composting toilets and simple graywater systems. Their power consumption is minimal, and their footprint is smaller than many motorized recreational vessels.

Contrast this with large powerboats, some of which discharge waste directly into the water, burn fossil fuels, and generate noise and wake that can disturb ecosystems. Yet these boats are not banned by LD 1763. It is hard to justify a prohibition on stationary, low-impact floating homes when higher-impact vessels are allowed to operate freely. Any legislation addressing marine pollution should be rooted in data, not perception—and certainly not in aesthetics.

3. Banning houseboats accelerates the gentrification of Maine’s coast.

Perhaps most troubling, LD 1763 reflects and reinforces a growing pattern of coastal gentrification that is displacing lifelong Mainers. Many of the complaints about houseboats come not from environmental watchdogs or local municipalities, but from seasonal property owners who view houseboats as a disruption to their scenic views. This bill would privilege their preferences over the housing needs and cultural traditions of working families.

To ban houseboats across the board is to send a clear message: Maine’s waters are no longer for those who work them, live on them, or rely on them—but only for those who can afford a certain kind of ownership. That is not the Maine I know, and it’s not the future I want for our coastal communities.

LD 1763 is a blunt and harmful response to what could be addressed through far more targeted, equitable, and science-based regulation. If the Legislature is concerned about sanitation, water quality, or taxation, those issues can be dealt with directly and reasonably—without criminalizing a small but meaningful form of housing and erasing part of Maine’s maritime culture.

I urge the committee to reject this bill and instead support legislation that respects Maine’s working waterfront, addresses our housing challenges, and bases environmental policy on facts, not fear or aesthetics.

For disclosure, my father owns a houseboat which he moors in South Bristol. Attached is an email I wrote last year to the South Bristol Board of Selectmen who

were holding a meeting on the topic of the houseboat.