

Island Safety Services Discussion Guide for Public Deliberations Forums on Peaks Island, Maine



“Living on an island is not just residing a few minutes away from the mainland; it is worlds away. It requires a delicate balance of independence with reliance on others, resourcefulness, community involvement with privacy. To live successfully and enjoyably on an island, one’s ‘deck chairs’ must be arranged differently.” Jane Girard

“I love working on an island because your mistakes come right back and hit you in the face.” Save the Children staff member on the island of Dominica, 1985.

Peaks Island is a neighborhood of Portland, Maine. The citizens of Peaks Island pay city taxes and benefit from city services such as a public elementary school, a public library, a transfer station and a police & fire station. Because Peaks Island is only accessible by ferry or private boat, the city government and the island face unique challenges in providing adequate safety services for its 800 year-round and several thousand summer residents.

In an effort to engage the citizens of Peaks Island in meeting these challenges, the Peaks Island Council convened two public meetings to name and frame the issue. By listing the things they valued, citizens renamed the issue Island Safety Services. During the second meeting they clustered their concerns and then framed them into three alternative approaches to the challenge, all of which would involve both citizen and city government action.

This framing of the issue will begin public deliberations by all Peaks Island citizens. In these meetings Islanders will be able to weigh the pros, cons, and tradeoffs of each approach to the problem, and may also choose to combine parts of all three approaches into one overall plan.

Approach One

Make Fire Protection Our Top Priority-

Create a volunteer Fire Department or Lobby for More City–Provided Fire Protection

Two recent fires brought fire protection to the attention of islanders. In each case, professional city firefighters responded quickly and well, but both houses were lost. Police are trained as first responders and can begin fire suppression, but since state law requires a minimum of 4 or 5 firefighters in order to enter a burning structure, more extensive protection is delayed until unscheduled volunteers and city-based firefighters arrive on scene.

Deficient fire protection is a very serious issue on the island. Virtually all buildings are made of wood, and most of them are located in clusters that could spread the fire from one to another. Secondly, pine forests and scrub cover much of the island and can be vulnerable to fires, particularly in a dry summer. Some sections of the island do not have ready access to year-round water. The city shares a strong interest in fire protection with the residents of the island-- protecting its property tax base.

Action Steps

<p><u>Citizens:</u></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none">• Citizen plan needed• Develop accessibility plan for all houses on island• Volunteer fire department, including recruitment and training of younger volunteers• Retraining/redefinition of CERT• Retraining/redefinition of other emergency volunteers• Self help education• Forestry management• Numbering houses consistently.• Elicit financial support from summer residents whose homes are at risk all year	<p><u>City:</u></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none">• Encourage coordination of fire and police• Street signs need to be provided everywhere on the island.• Get E911 online• Provide financial support and/or reallocation of funding for additional fire protection• Lobby State for local option tax• Change city policy so that firefighters who live on the island are not on the same shift.• Snow plowing should include all streets• Research and implement improved response time for firefighters getting to island for emergencies, including transportation, logistics
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Analysis:

<p><u>Pros:</u></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none">▪ Would also increase provision of EMTs. “Two for one” (EMT and firefighter = 1 position)▪ Addresses our most urgent and widespread need.▪ Fire affects more people per incident▪ Addresses risks (such as empty houses)	<p><u>Cons:</u></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none">▪ May not be logistically possible (water, roads)▪ “Rule of 5” firefighters is inflexible/expensive▪ The # of calls is down▪ Citizen involvement is low right now▪ Need a facility?
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Trade-off statement:

Making fire a priority enhances the efficient use of resources between fire and medical emergencies even though we may have to give up the current level of police staffing.

Approach Two

Make Emergency Medical Response Our Top Priority- Create A Volunteer or City-Provided EMT Squad

Given limited resources, we should give first priority to providing emergency medical services. This would benefit victims of fires as well as other medical emergencies. A trained EMT squad can fill the gap between current off-duty and city staff volunteer service and CERT team disaster response.

Island residents are fearful that the current provision of emergency medical services will not provide for their most urgent medical needs. At the end of 2008, for example, a city policeman stationed on Peaks Island responded to an acute medical emergency involving a man with pulmonary fibrosis with the island ambulance. Because the policeman wasn't able to carry the man by himself, a neighbor had to drive the ambulance to the rescue boat. The pages of most of the emergency volunteers did not work, and those volunteers who did respond were unable to find the house.

Action Steps

<p><u>Citizen:</u></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Volunteer for training and be available • Research and map out existing response patterns, including existing volunteers <i>and CERT team.</i> • Research EMT provision on other islands, including coordination with Health Center • Develop transportation plan from health center to boat. • Get to know your neighbors- commit to care 	<p><u>City:</u></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Provide two triple-trained EMTs – <i>not necessarily police</i>, on duty 24/7/365. They could also provide additional fire protection. • Hire off-duty EMTs • Research and take action on high turnover/low interest of EMT training. • Make sure police are trained and consistently stationed at the ferry for arrivals and departures. • Provide additional EMT training to strengthen existing volunteers
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Analysis:

<p><u>Pros:</u></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ▪ Most common need ▪ Fits aging population ▪ May have possible spin-offs such as improved emergency care during fires ▪ Cost effective ▪ Better emergency health care ▪ Reduces anxiety ▪ Realistic 	<p><u>Cons:</u></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ▪ Insufficient need to shift resources from other priorities ▪ Younger islanders don't see the need ▪ Doesn't address fix drug/alcohol problem ▪ Doesn't address fire issues ▪ Summer would be a mess if this resulted in fewer cops
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Trade-off statement:

Deciding to implement this emergency priority is realistic and will enable us to work with existing city resources to meet our most urgent needs, even though it may not address all aspects of other public safety concerns such as fire protection.

Approach Three

Continue As Is: City Provides All Services, Island Residents Lobby or Accept.

Some island residents feel that the current system is just fine, and that island living necessitates that we forego benefits accorded to mainland residents. Some feel that our identity suffers when we request more services from the city; others feel that we should have fully staffed triple trained response systems in place.

The current city approach of assigning police to the island that also provides other services works well, but suffers from inadequate funding. Either we accept staffing as is, or the city should fully fund the provision of all emergency services for the island through the police.

Action steps

<u>Citizens:</u> <ul style="list-style-type: none">• Lobbying at city and state level▪ Develop a citizen’s plan▪ Be willing to pay higher taxes▪ Creating “block watches” – personal responsibility▪ Educate for safety▪ Organize block watches for all emergencies▪ Live a healthy lifestyle	<u>City:</u> <ul style="list-style-type: none">• Spend more (on staff and building)• Re-allocate staff• Lobby State for local option tax• Fund it• Improve communication between police and fire
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Analysis:

<u>Pros:</u> <ul style="list-style-type: none">▪ All services provided, done for us▪ Coverage automatic▪ Alleviate stress/fears/worry▪ Could be used as a bargaining chip▪ Most visible/reassuring in summer when needed▪ Addresses: crime, youth, alcohol issues▪ Preventative/deterrent▪ Doesn’t require change	<u>Cons:</u> <ul style="list-style-type: none">▪ Expensive▪ Unrealistic▪ Citizen lobbying would take too long▪ Citizen lobbying might not work▪ Makes us beholden to City▪ Inadequate for fire protection▪ Off-islanders in charge of us▪ Asking for increases/expensive
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Tradeoff Statement

This approach will provide Peaks Island with all services needed, but it may be more costly and raise taxes, with no guarantees that it will be sustained.