



Shore and Harbor Planning Grants

Town of Bar Harbor

Master plan for the former ferry terminal property (Fiscal Year 2023, project awarded 2022)

“This grant allowed us to provide a professional planning process that culminated in a conceptual plan with concrete next steps towards development. Without this funding, the process would not have happened.” – Chris Wharff, Harbor Master in Bar Harbor



Photo: Melissa Britsch

Project Description

The town of Bar Harbor purchased the former state ferry terminal property near downtown Bar Harbor in 2019. The property has a large parking lot with two piers which are currently being used by the CAT ferry that runs to Nova Scotia. The town wants to develop the property into a public marina with a boat ramp and they need a master plan to conceptualize what could be done with the property in various funding and use scenarios, and to outline the steps needed to achieve those goals.

The town hired GEI Consultants, Inc. to prepare the master plan. The plan needed to create opportunities for improved public access to the site and to the water, while also being flexible and responsive to the town’s needs over time and its ability to maintain the site in the future.

Project Results

The project created a plan to develop the marina with a boat launch. The town harbor committee and other town residents were engaged throughout the process to refine the plans and options to redevelop the property. Resilience, accessibility, and connections to the nearby downtown were all considered, as were the needs of the commercial fishing industry, recreational users, and other commercial users like the cruise ship industry.

The master plan has three phases. The first two phases assume that the CAT ferry is still active and using the northern section of the property.

1. Boat ramp: demolition of the south pier and construction of a boat ramp and improvements like reorganizing and repaving the parking lot and creating pedestrian pathways.
2. Partial marina and redevelopment of south pier: construction of a commercial pier in the location of the current south pier and adding floating docks for separate commercial and recreational use.
3. Full marina: if the CAT ferry leaves Bar Harbor, the northern part of the property will be incorporated into the public marina; this phase will expand parking and increase the capacity of the marina.

The phased approach was important to the town. They needed flexibility because the duration of the CAT ferry's use of the pier is uncertain. If the ferry continues using the site, the development of the public marina will be limited to the southern half of the property, but if the ferry leaves, the town will be able to develop the entire site. The phased approach will let the town undertake relatively small improvements, like building the boat ramp, while fundraising for the more costly aspects of the project and taking time to determine the best future use of the property.

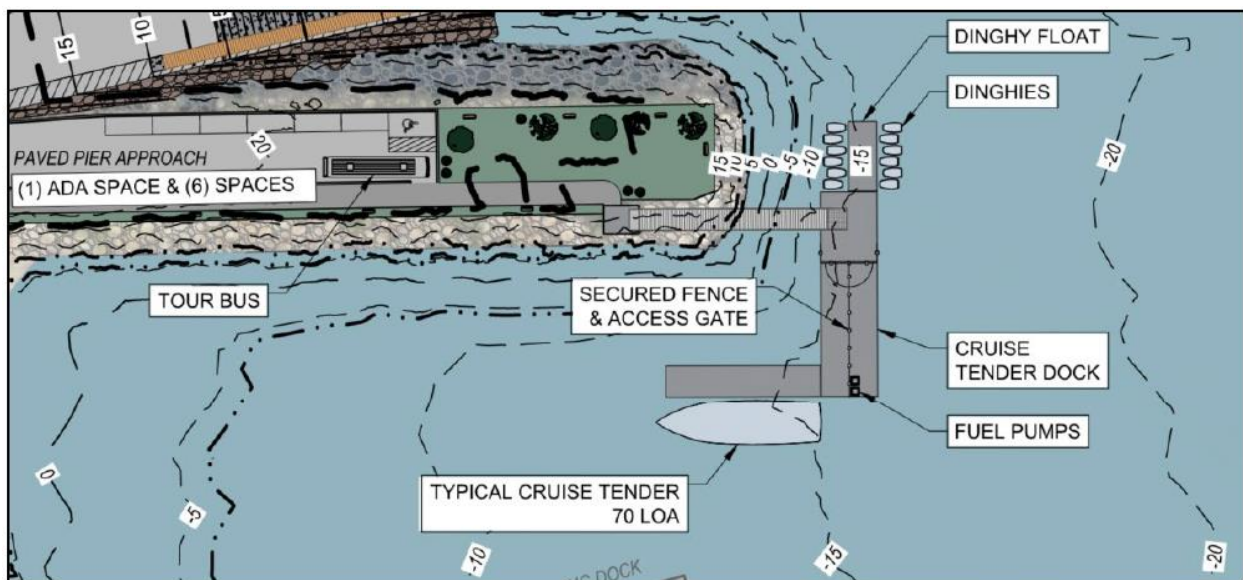


Fig. 20 - Phase 1 Marina

Conceptual design for Phase 1 marina (GEI Consultants)

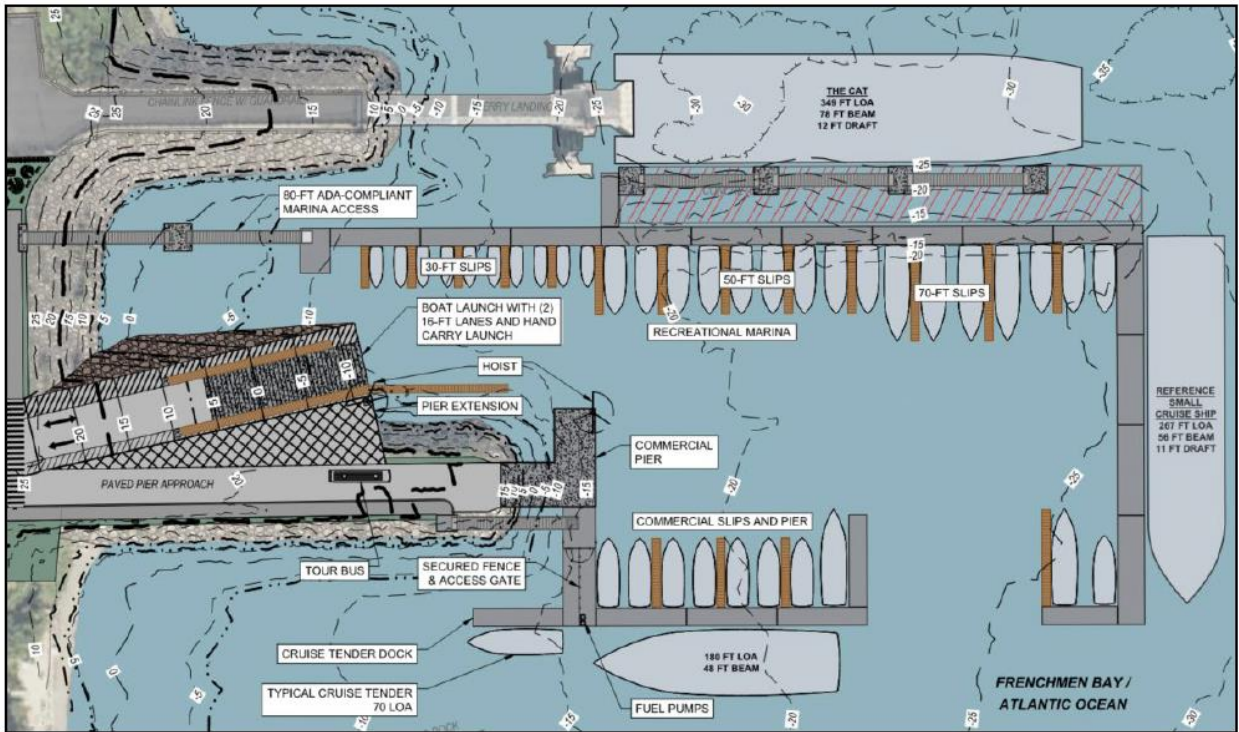


Fig. 21 - Phase 2 Marina

Conceptual design for Phase 2 marina (GEI Consultants)

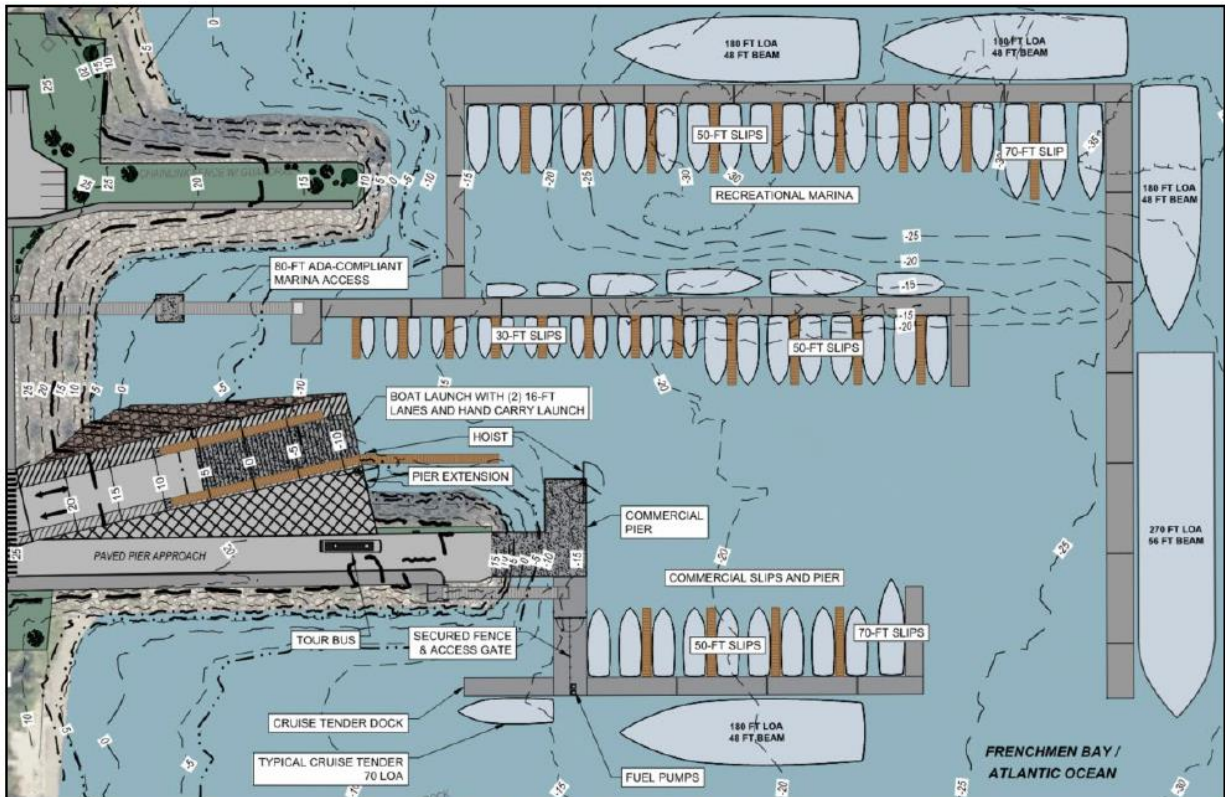


Fig. 22 - Phase 3 Marina

Conceptual design for Phase 3 marina (GEI Consultants)

Future Plans

The town is using the plan to identify their next steps for the project. They are focusing on removing the south pier and building a boat ramp and dock, and they are searching for funding to design and implement those steps. The town and harbor committee were very supportive of the project and the master plan provides a path forward for the town to follow.

Lessons Learned

Managing the expectations of local participants in the planning process is important. The hired project consultants could not be available as much as desired, and communicating the need to balance engagement with the overall grant costs was challenging at times.



Photo: Melissa Britsch

Thanks to Chris Wharff for helping to prepare this summary.

This project was funded by award CZM NA22NOS4190151 to the Maine Coastal Program from the National Oceanic and Atmospheric Administration, U.S. Department of Commerce. The statements, findings, conclusions, and recommendations are those of the author(s) and do not necessarily reflect the views of the National Oceanic and Atmospheric Administration or the Department of Commerce.

