

Castine Citizens Action Group

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An open letter to the Maine Maritime Academy Board of Trustees:

We are writing once again to extend our hand for constructive dialogue between the Trustees of Maine Maritime Academy, the Castine Citizens Action Group (CCAG) and the Town of Castine with the intent of establishing a long-term balanced and collaborative partnership between the Town and MMA.

To date, our efforts to meet with the Trustees have been rebuffed. We were left with no alternative but to take our case to our legislative representatives and others stakeholders of MMA to help them understand our longstanding concerns about the absence of a mutually respectful and open relationship between MMA and the Town of Castine. The defining moment occurred when MMA openly defied the intent and letter of our zoning ordinance.

On February 8th the board may well be asked to ratify Maine Maritime Academy's decision to purchase the Abbott House for the President. Because of lapses in the approval process in August the purchase is currently not in accordance with Maine state statutes. The Abbott House purchase has already caused a great deal of embarrassment to the legislators who fought to include MMA for \$1.5 million on the Maine state bond initiative. Those legislators were unaware that MMA had a "reserve fund" of \$1.8 million. The purchase of a residence for the MMA President for \$1.4 million, given Maine's present economic environment, will undoubtedly give rise to increased legislative scrutiny, both in terms of MMA's financial situation and its governance.

The manner in which the Abbott House purchase was conducted has catalyzed a rift with the Castine community that will be difficult to heal as long as MMA holds the Abbott House property. The huge potential for a collaborative and beneficial relationship between MMA and the community is in jeopardy until this challenge to Castine's ability to govern itself is removed. Nobody wins if this dispute has to be settled by the courts.

In August the MMA Board of Trustees was asked to approve the purchase of the Abbott House without all of the information to support an informed decision. At this time we respectfully request that they evaluate all of the consequences of this purchase. There is currently a formal letter to MMA administration offering \$1.6 million for the property. That offer is still valid. We respectfully urge the Trustees at this time to vote against this purchase and to accept the existing offer.