

Good Morning!

My name is Jim Whittemore and I have been a Castine resident for 15 years. I am speaking to you as a Castine resident as well as a member of the Castine Citizens Action Group, a group of over 200 Castine residents, taxpayers and regular visitors. Our mission is to give a strong and constructive voice in response to Maine Maritime Academy's actions and to promote a cooperative and balanced relationship with the Academy in order to preserve and protect Castine's heritage and its fragile infrastructure.

My association with the maritime industry dates back some 50 years and includes a stint as Executive Director of the Seamen's Institute of New York and New Jersey. I have immense respect for the maritime industry and that respect extends to the Maine Maritime Academy. However, my respect has been put to the test recently with the Board's apparent decision to purchase the Abbott House. Allow me to briefly state the basis for my concern and the Group's concern:

First – It is clear to us that the Academy has disregarded the letter and intent of Castine's zoning ordinance thereby challenging Castine's right to self-governance

Second – As more and more financial information surfaces about the purchase price of the Abbott House, the annual maintenance costs associated with this beautiful Castine relic, the cost of renovating the current President's house, and the extent of the deferred maintenance on other MMA properties, we are concerned whether the Academy has its fiscal priorities in order. And this does not take into consideration MMA's obligation to help ease the tuition burden on students and their families.

Third – We have thoroughly searched the minutes of recent Board meetings and can find no record of a Board vote on the purchase of Abbott House. This causes us to question statements made by a number of Board members, such as “The Board of Trustees authorized the purchase of a residence in a residential zone...”.

Fourth, and finally – Castine on-neck is essentially an island with limited land and, therefore, limited natural resources. If Maine Maritime Academy fails to recognize the fragility of this small “island” and the trustees place a greater importance on Academy growth than respect for town laws and their intent, the unique character of Castine will be lost for ever.

This situation can be easily corrected by divesting yourselves of the Abbott House property and initiating a new era of active mutually supportive cooperation between the Town and the Academy. In the end, what is needed is a balanced – repeat, balanced – relationship between the Town and the Academy. There are many talented and resourceful members in our group. We are anxious to bring these resources to proactive programs in support of MMA and its future. However, there can be no cooperation when we feel that our right to self governance and self determination are threatened. And, we are ready, willing and able to stay the course.

Thank you very much.