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## Mallets Bay Initiative Overview

### **What is the MBI?**

The Mallets Bay Initiative (MBI) is the all-encompassing project name for the inner bay. The MBI's purpose is to: 1) improve and protect water quality; 2) enhance community access to Mallets Bay, and 3) cultivate economic opportunities. The MBI was the convergence of multiple projects in 2015 when a land use plan for the inner bay was created. Besides the land use plan, the MBI includes: zoning, park planning, transportation improvements, bike and pedestrian improvements, and water quality planning that encompasses both stormwater and wastewater improvements. These projects are to be completed over the coming decades to improve environmental quality and create a lasting legacy of Colchester's future.

### **How did the MBI come to be?**

The MBI was born out of decades of work. The vision for the bay began in first Town Plan in the 1960s and evolved into more specific actions in the 1980s. The first Town Plan in 1964 spoke to wastewater concerns in the bay. In the early 1980s, Colchester worked with the State of Vermont to have the State receive delegation of control of Lake Champlain from the Army Corps. In the late 1980s, the Bayshore Committee undertook more specific planning to develop a plan for improvements and rejuvenation of the bay. Recommendations from the Committee included preservation of the bay, investigating sewer, land use planning, and a harbormaster program. The Colchester Selectboard explored getting delegation from the State for full control of the waters of Colchester however instead decided upon supporting a supplemental force with a police officer to seasonally assist safety and in the bay.

In the late 1990s a plan for the inner bay was developed (referred to as Village on the Bay) that included significant commercial redevelopment. At roughly the same time, a sewer project was developed for the inner bay. The plan and sewer project were both rejected over concerns about changing the character of the bay and inequity (sewer was to be paid through a town-wide bond and the project would only serve a small portion of the town). In 2003, the Town held "Future of Lakeshore Drive" forums held to capture overall concerns and try to coalesce a vision for the area. That same year, the Colchester Strategic Water Quality Plan was developed to identify town-wide water quality issues. A small group also began work around this time to investigate opportunities for a community center. This group would later become the Colchester Community Center Initiative (still listed as an active volunteer board in Town).

In 2007, the Town received a municipal planning grant that was used to create the West Lakeshore Drive Concept Plan that provided a context sensitive and realistic land use

plan for the area. With the uncertainty of the Circumferential (Circ) Highway and how it would impact the area, the conceptual plan was deferred until such time as traffic could be addressed. With the award of an Environmental Protection Agency grant, water quality planning efforts continued with the multi-year Integrated Water Resources Management Plan launching in 2009 and continuing through 2014.

The 2014 Town Plan, 2013 Colchester Economic Development Action Plan, and Colchester Heritage Project's Community Strategic Plan 2012-2022 all called for action on implementing land use plans for Bay. The Heritage Project was a grass-roots strategic plan developed for the community by a collaboration of volunteers. The Heritage Project provides a vision for the Town Plan and the Economic Plan and recommends the following as an action item: "Identify existing town-owned assets and their potential as resources for improving Colchester's water-based tourism and community recreation opportunities. Such assets might include undeveloped land, underdeveloped land, conceptual plans previously created, including but not limited to "The Village on Malletts Bay... (The Town of Colchester needs to list/evaluate current assets and create a master plan for their use and development)."

In 2015 the Town worked with Chittenden County Regional Planning, in the wake of the Circ Highway being discontinued as a project to evaluate transportation limitations and alternatives for the inner bay (referred to as the Bayside Buildout Analysis). While a bypass road similar to the Circ was evaluated, the prohibitive cost of constructing such a road (at the time \$10 to \$15 million a mile) it was abandoned as a solution in favor of more feasible and pragmatic intersection improvements. The AARP (American Association of Retired Persons) also conducted a walking study of the West Lakeshore Drive vicinity to evaluate barriers to accessibility. A Storm Water Advisory Committee was also formed in 2015 to investigate a stormwater utility. The IWRMP was concluded recommending a stormwater utility and sewerage the inner bay. Colchester Fire District Two (a separate government from the Town) began exploring sewer for the inner bay at this time. The Town also received another municipal planning grant to complete plans for the inner bay.

In launching the 2015 land use planning effort for the inner bay, it was recognized that the project needed to be a culmination of previous efforts as well as recognize constraints and opportunities. In order to be successful, relevant, and able to be implemented the plan needed to look at land use in the context of transportation, water quality, recreation, bike and ped mobility, economic impacts, and other infrastructure. The planning project was named the Malletts Bay Initiative.

### **What did the MBI do?**

The MBI linked various projects together. The community center planning efforts evolved into the creation of a master park plan for the three Town parks in the inner bay

as part of increasing access to the Bay. The transportation infrastructure was evaluated to identify possible improvements and limitations. Without the Circ Highway, total traffic volume in the corridor is constrained. Other bypass roads are not viable due to cost. Land use plans needed to limit new uses and not create more traffic than could be handled by improvements. Improvements to the transportation corridor identified through engineered scoping are: 1) intersections of Prim and West Lakeshore Drive and 2) East and West Lakeshore Drive and Blakely Road. In 2017 the Selectboard identified a roundabout for the East and West Lakeshore Drive as being the preferred alternative. Both intersection projects are being advanced but without specified construction dates. Planning for a community center, revitalizing Upper and Lower Bayside Parks, and the development of the Bayside Hazelett property as a park continued into 2018 with the Selectboard adopting a Bayside Master Park Plan in April 2018. In 2017 a stormwater utility was implemented for Colchester to address stormwater comprehensively for the community including within the bay. In December 2018, the Selectboard advanced a sewer project for the inner bay to provide municipal sewer for the West Lakeshore Drive, East Lakeshore Drive, and Goodsell Point areas.

New zoning was created (Lakeshore One and Lakeshore Two) in 2015 and subsequently adopted by the Town to allow for existing uses to grow and not have adverse impacts on the transportation network or the environment. Green infrastructure and other water quality improvements were included in the new zoning to require redevelopment to improve water quality and limit new development. Bike and pedestrian improvements are planned for the corridor. A comprehensive storm water system is being developed for these areas with the goal of infiltrating as much of the runoff from both current and future development into the ground. While the MBI created a land use plan and zoning to set a course for the future of the inner bay, these other related projects will also need to be implemented to bring the land use plan to fruition.

**With a lot of work needed, what are the priorities?**

The MBI land use plan was adopted and put into regulation. The new LS1 and LS2 districts limit redevelopment and new development within the West Lakeshore Drive area. With recent redevelopment on East Lakeshore Drive, the Planning Commission has identified the need to do similar planning in this area as well. The land use plans set the vision for the area moving forward.

The park plans will require improved links between these three adjacent parcels. The improvements planned at the East Lakeshore and West Lakeshore intersection will reconfigure access to upper and lower Bayside Parks. New paths and sidewalks are also planned at the time transportation improvements are made. Prior to the transportation improvements, the Town hopes to complete all necessary stormwater and septic / sewer work so as to not tear up the road more than once. In utility work, sewer infrastructure lies deepest with stormwater not requiring significant depth. The sewer would therefore

need to be the first component of the plan implemented to have all of the other components built on top of it.

**Can the MBI be accomplished without one of the components?**

The MBI was a holistic solution. Without one of the components, the solution is not balanced. Without transportation improvements, land use plans will suffer as congestion increases and the area becomes increasingly difficult for bikers and pedestrians. Without a park plan, access to the Bay is not improved and one of the major draws to the area remains a diamond in the rough. Without stormwater and wastewater improvements, water quality will continue to degrade and create an unwelcoming depressed area.

**How long will the MBI take to complete?**

Decades. While a sewer project was brought before voters in 2019, it was not to be completed until 2022-24. Park projects are anticipated to take a decade. Land use plans will gradually be seen as properties transition. By implementing these projects over time, projects can be implemented as there are funds available and decrease the total cost to the Town. Recreation impact fees and grants can be used to leverage park plans. State and federal funds can be used for transportation improvements. Several stormwater grants have already been received by the community for water quality improvements.

**With the sewer project not approved by voters, what happens to the MBI?**

The Colchester Selectboard has tasked the Planning Commission with the following: reviewing and analyzing options to address the lack of effective wastewater disposal capacity on inner Malletts Bay; the problem of inadequate human waste disposal in this concentrated area remains unsolved and affects those that live along the Bay as well as the larger community that enjoys recreation opportunities the Bay offers. The lack of sewer impacts both the water quality of the bay and the MBI's implementation. This scope is limited. The purpose and intent of the MBI and its components are to remain intact. While improvements to zoning in the East Lakeshore Drive area should be considered, the basic tenants of the other existing land use plans, transportation, parks, and other plans are not to be re-examined. The MBI is therefore on hold pending another viable solution to address wastewater and water quality.