



# Denterlein

## *In the News: A Focus on the Waterfront*

*Denterlein's In the News, an event series focused on critical issues shaping the Commonwealth, recently brought together more than 60 business and civic leaders to discuss the city's changing waterfront.*



Peter Howe  
[Senior Advisor](#)  
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With the waterfront at the center of conversations around Boston's economy, climate readiness, transportation infrastructure and public access to this spectacular resource, each panelist brought their unique perspective to the conversation. Maliz Beams, the Interim CEO and a longtime board member of the New England Aquarium, is guiding the institution in planning for the future as a leading cultural institution along the waterfront, including discussions related to the Municipal Harbor Plan and nearby development. The Aquarium, our *In the News* host, was a pioneer in the Harbor cleanup and continues to serve as a steward of the waterfront. Kathy Abbott, president and CEO of Boston Harbor Now, is working every day to "un-silo" Harbor transportation, climate, and development topics to create a cohesive vision for the waterfront and open up the Harbor and Islands to more people. Rick Dimino, president and CEO of A Better City, has been engaged in Harbor issues for decades, keeping his finger on the pulse of what businesses in and around the Harbor need to continue to grow their companies and create jobs.



Katherine Adam  
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**We asked our panel: The collective commitment to transform the Harbor into a place to live, work and visit is creating a new challenge - in a time of rapid change, how do we keep the waterfront accessible and increase awareness about the public's rights to the Harbor?**

Answering this question means building on our successes to develop a unified Harbor strategy that addresses rising sea levels, a building boom, a port economy supporting thousands of jobs and a multimodal transportation network struggling to keep up with our needs. One thing is clear: we are in a generational moment for the waterfront, and only by working together – and connecting the dots between all Harbor issues – can we ensure we get it right.



Maliz Beams  
[New England Aquarium](#)

*Q: How well are we doing in maximizing public access to the waterfront to ensure that people from all parts of the city feel they are stewards of the space?*

**Maliz:** The New England Aquarium is fortunate to be experiencing record attendance this summer, which to us signals a real interest in activities on the waterfront. That said, we need to ensure that tens of billions of dollars and decades of investment continue to be protected and preserved for future generations. We've created the [Blueway Vision](#) as a cohesive design to expand the public's access to the waterfront, and we hope this vision can serve as a model for strategic planning on the Harbor.



Kathy Abbott  
[Boston Harbor Now](#)

**Kathy:** The Harbor belongs to all of us, and protecting and preserving public access is a cornerstone of Boston Harbor Now's mission. Creating a welcoming waterfront needs to be a combination of thoughtful planning, enforcement of public spaces, and public awareness about their rights to the Harbor. One example we're leading is the development of a website and mobile app that will identify all privately-owned public amenities created in the spirit of Ch. 91.



Rick Dimino  
[A Better City](#)

**Rick:** The notion of making sure the waterfront is an equitable asset regardless of the economy, where one lives, or where one comes from just makes so much sense. What really gives me joy is when I go to the fountain just outside the Aquarium on the Rose Kennedy Greenway, and I see kids from every neighborhood in the city really enjoying the space we worked hard to develop through the Big Dig. That's how I know we've had some success at opening up access – but it's clear we have a lot more work.

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*Left to right: Kathy Abbott, Maliz Beams, and Rick Dimino*

*Q: With the current building boom sweeping through Boston's waterfront neighborhoods, how does the Aquarium feel the Municipal Harbor Plan (MHP) process is balancing real estate pressures versus larger vision?*

**Maliz:** As a protected, water-dependent use, the Aquarium has a unique take on the MHP process: we need to both ensure that any significant development that is authorized under the MHP doesn't impact our ability to operate and we must be an advocate for thoughtful waterfront planning that supports accessibility.

There is clearly a balance we need to achieve between private development and waterfront access – both for buildings that have already been developed and those that are being proposed – and we must hold developers to the same standards of quality and accessibility to which we would hold ourselves. Chapter 91 protections are powerful yet poorly understood mechanisms that help to protect the water and public access, as well as encourage thoughtful planning for the future. We at the Aquarium want to serve as a voice that reinforces Chapter 91 protections and as a resource for people who want to experience Boston Harbor.

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*Left to right: Peter Howe, Kathy Abbott, Rick Dimino, Maliz Beams, Denterlein CEO Geri Denterlein*

*Q: Though expanded ferry service is an idea that has been kicked around for years, water transportation seems to be gaining real momentum as an issue. Are you optimistic that we'll get there?*

**Kathy:** Water transportation holds enormous potential to better connect communities and relieve congestion on other forms of public transit. We continue to hear from Harbor stakeholders of all stripes that water transportation needs to be a top priority. If we're serious about expanding ferries as a mode, which Boston Harbor Now is, we need to do a few things. First, we have to do better connecting people to the waterfront – from where they live, where they work, and where they like to spend their time. The “last-mile” problem often talked about around rail also applies to ferries. We also need a solid business plan for every route. The Salem ferry is a tremendous example of tourism dollars being used to subsidize commuter services, and that's exactly the kind of creative thinking that needs to be adopted as we explore these opportunities.

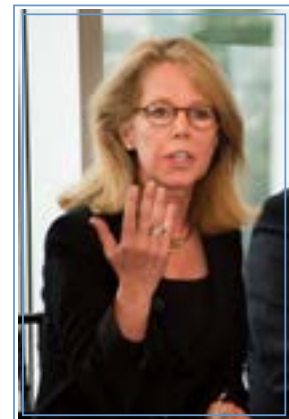
**Rick:** Water transportation is not just about connecting communities, though that is a key benefit identified in the South Boston Transportation Plan we shepherded and continue to move forward. It's also about connecting people to our environment; the intrinsic experience of being on the water. The benefits of water transportation – as opposed to sitting behind a parking lot on the Southeast Expressway – are realized in time savings, but also psychologically. We need to understand and appreciate water transportation for its multifaceted importance, and then make that investment. We need to get serious about water transportation so that it is no longer the neglected child of public transportation planning.

*Q: How are we doing in preparing the Harbor for climate change, and what more can we do?*

**Rick:** We need to start thinking bigger about governance, finance and strategy regarding these issues. We may see up to nine inches of sea level rise in the next 10 to 15 years, and yet we see only fractions of what we need sprinkled throughout capital plans to address these issues. Land use, governance structure, and climate readiness are all critical and interrelated considerations – these are things that are going to happen whether we recognize them and plan for them or not. That said, it is never too late, and so it is critical that we begin to develop inclusive, impactful solutions.

**Maliz:** The city and the state are doing a lot, but it's critical that property developers, owners and local businesses take responsibility upon themselves and say, "How do we make this environmentally sustainable and environmentally safe?" Climate change mitigation is embedded into the Aquarium's Blueway vision, and we're adapting our own environment in preparation for rising sea levels, including moving our electrical infrastructure in case of flooding.

**Kathy:** We like to say that Harbor planning means not just bringing people to the waterfront but also protecting people from the waterfront. The Barr Foundation and the City have done good work in establishing an environment for change; now it is time to turn to action and start building for rising sea levels. We've got a long way to go but the Mayor has put us out in front in a position where we can proactively respond to the threats currently posed by climate change.







*Left to right: Peter Howe, Kathy Abbott, Maliz Beams, Rick Dimino*

*Q: Stepping back for a moment, it's striking how interconnected all these issues are. To what extent do you see these issues getting stuck in siloes, and what can promote a more holistic approach to policymaking for all the stakeholders?*

**Kathy:** There is an opportunity for much more shared stewardship of our waterfront that can help secure accessibility today as well as position the Harbor for sustained prosperity going forward. In New York City, for example, there isn't a single park that hasn't been at least partially funded by abutting businesses. That's something we haven't fully executed yet here in Boston, but I think it's both very reasonable and imminently achievable.

**Maliz:** The city is factionalized, and public access is difficult to address unilaterally. As such, it is important that we take a holistic approach to policymaking around these issues in order to benefit all those involved and affected. The MHP process could be an impactful part of that approach. Bringing an integrated group of stakeholders together to consider how to more effectively use the MHP process as a broad planning tool could be a valuable way to encourage comprehensive solutions.

**Rick:** This issue raises the question of what a long-term strategy for governing and financing these entities looks like. The Rose Kennedy Greenway BID (Business Improvement District) is a prime example of public-private partnership that would mitigate the burden of financially supporting the Greenway, in turn reinforcing both sustained funding and widespread accessibility. Transportation, climate change, development, and public access are not issues that can be effectively addressed from ivory towers, and as such public and private entities need to work together to develop solutions that will last and that work for everyone.



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