

## UNE RESEARCH PIER TIMELINE

### A considerable amount of rumor and misinformation has circulated regarding the University of New England's proposed research pier.

#### Here are the facts:

**January 2009:** UNE begins consideration of a new all-season pier on its Biddeford Campus to replace its existing research dock allowing students and faculty to conduct studies on the Saco River and Gulf of Maine in conjunction with the **Arthur P. Girard Marine Science Center**.

**February 2009:** Engineering review consultants provide Site Options Plan with 9 sites reviewed – identifies **Site 7 as best option**.

**March 2015:** Survey and geotechnical borings completed to verify water depths and subsurface conditions. **Site 7 best satisfied all criteria**.

**April 2015:** UNE notifies Biddeford Assistant Harbormaster Lariviere in writing that Site 7 is the preferred choice. There is no response.

**November 2015:** On a site walk, Harbormaster Alexander and Assistant Harbormaster Lariviere express the **opinion that Site 8 would be an inappropriate location** for the pier. Assistant Harbormaster Lariviere subsequently changes his opinion and mandates the use of Site 8.

**January 6, 2016:** Planning Board reviews the Master Plan including the Pier location. A vote on the Master Plan was tabled to allow for public comment and further clarification.

**January 26, 2016:** UNE and its engineers met with the City Manager Bennett, Lariviere, Alexander, Biddeford's representative of the Saco River Corridor Commission (SRCC), and City Planner

Tansley to discuss the pier. UNE presented a detailed presentation outlining the selection process and reasons for choosing Site 7. The pier's location potentially impacted one existing mooring requiring relocation approx. 100ft away with all costs borne by UNE.

**February 3, 2016: Planning Board votes unanimously to approve UNE's latest Master Plan.**

**March 22, 2016:** UNE's marine engineers redesigned the pier rotating it to parallel the current and later made substantial changes in response to input from regulatory agencies resulting in **a 22% reduction in the footprint of the fixed pier, a 47% reduction in the footprint of floating docks, and a 17% reduction in the quantity of pilings**.

**October 2023:** UNE representatives meet with the Harbormaster, City Manager Bennett, and others to present refined construction drawings for the project. At that meeting, the Harbormaster insisted that the pier must be built at Site 8 - **the site he previously identified as not viable**.

**January 2024:** Before any application had been filed, Lariviere stated clearly that he would not approve the pier in the location determined most viable (Site 7) **insisting he would not approve it under any circumstances and that no evidence would sway him** even though he had no legal authority over the siting of a pier. He clearly

indicated his intent to actively block development of the research pier.

**February 13, 2024:** UNE's attorney sent a letter to the City Attorney recounting the history of the process, **highlighting the Harbormaster's well-documented historical bias toward UNE and arguing that the Harbormaster was acting arbitrarily**.

**February 21, 2024:** The Chair of the Harbor Commission held a meeting on the pier issue in violation of Maine's sunshine law - **without public notice, a published agenda or notice to UNE**. Despite the fact that no application had been submitted, the Harbormaster said that he had already denied UNE's pier proposal twice. **The Chair widely distributed minutes of the illegal meeting highlighting the Harbormaster's opposition**.

**March 7, 2024:** UNE sent a letter raising concerns about the February 21 Harbor Commission meeting, arguing it **"made it very difficult, if not impossible, for the City to move through an unbiased, objective approval process."**

**May 15, 2024:** City Solicitor, Harry Center, documents, in part:

*"There is no factual issue that the City has tainted the pending pier application by UNE, based on the February 25, 2024, Harbor Commission Chair email and the February 21, 2024, Harbor Commission minutes. **Evidence of bias, violations of due process and general unfairness are established in the record.**"*

**May 22, 2024:** Based on the City Solicitor's advice, City Manager Bennett writes to Lariviere to let him know that he, the Assistant Harbormaster,

and the Harbor Commission would be **recused from being involved in the process governing UNE's proposed pier.**

**June 2024:** UNE formally submits its pier proposal to the City of Biddeford

**August 2024:** UNE receives a permit from the Saco River Corridor Commission (SRCC) approving the pier at Site 7.

**March 28, 2025:** UNE receives approval and a permit from the U.S. Army Corps of Engineers.

**May 2025:** UNE receives a permit from the Maine Department of Environmental Protection.

**May 2025:** First Biddeford Planning Board meeting to consider the pier proposal.

**June 2025:** The Planning Board conducts a site walk of the proposed pier location.

**July 2025:** The Planning Board conducted a second site walk and votes 3-2 to grant preliminary site approval the pier at Site 7.

**August 2025:** Planning Board gives final approval to the pier project on another 3-2 vote.

**September 2025:** John Schafer, former chair of Biddeford's Harbor Commission, files an appeal of the Planning Board's decision with the city's Zoning Board of Appeals (ZBA). His appeal argues that the university's plan required the expressed approval of a harbor master, which had not occurred.

**October 2025:** UNE and the City submit their response to Schafer's appeal arguing he lacked legal standing and that the issues raised were not relevant to regulatory criteria.

**October 2025:** Biddeford City Council passes a resolution (introduced by mayoral candidate Liam

LaFountain) noting the status of development within the buffer was unclear and requesting clarification from the Maine Attorney General's Office. The resolution prohibited any City office from issuing further permits until clarification was received.

**October 2025:** The SRCC's Executive Director writes to the City's Code Enforcement Officer expressing the opinion of the AG's office that "The Commission is not restricted from granting further permits for development within the 250-foot buffer by the above-stated 2001 permit condition."

**November 2025:** The City Solicitor changes his position and files a motion with the ZBA requesting that the board stay Schafer's appeal and remand the matter back to the Planning Board for reconsideration. Represented by objective outside counsel, the ZBA rejects the appeal by a 3-0 vote, allowing the planning board's approval of the project to stand.

**November 20, 2025:** The City files a lawsuit against the Saco River Corridor Commission (SRCC) and included UNE as a "party-in-interest." The lawsuit was based on two claims made in the Biddeford Gazette. First, the suit claimed that the SRCC's permit for the pier was issued "by mistake." Second, the suit erroneously claimed that the "vegetative buffer" along UNE's shoreline created by the SRCC back in 2001 prevented any development, which is not true. The relevant legal regulations from both the SRCC and the City itself are clear that appropriately permitted development is allowed within the vegetative buffer. In addition, the Maine Attorney General's office declared that the SRCC's permit for the

pier is indeed legal and that it will defend the SRCC's actions in court.

**November 21, 2025:** the Maine Attorney General's Office responded to the City Council's resolution, declining to provide an opinion on the vegetative buffer zone issue primarily because the AG's office does not provide opinions of the kind requested and further because the AG's office represents the SRCC.

**December 2025:** Both the SRCC and UNE file motions to dismiss the City's Complaint under largely the same legal theories. The City opposed the motions, arguing at one point that the 2024 Permit was not final agency action at the time. Both the SRCC and UNE filed replies.

**January 2026:** Biddeford City Council votes to impose a moratorium on UNE development projects and creates an ad hoc Institutional Zone Review Committee to review zoning regulations affecting institutional uses in the city.

**After 17-years, establishment of UNE's Biddeford research pier remains bogged down in bureaucracy, red tape, rumors and misinformation.**

**Questions?  
Contact us at  
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