



## Maritime site boundaries could be expanded beyond Salem

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Salem, Mass. — The Salem Maritime National Historic Site has always been just that — a Salem property.

That could change, after U.S. Rep John Tierney, D-MA, files legislation calling for a study of the National Park's boundaries.

Tierney announced plans for the legislation at a recent meeting of the Essex National Heritage Commission, one of the groups that has supported the study.

Essex Heritage and the staff of the Salem Maritime site have both been interested in expanding the boundaries for some time, Tierney told the Salem Gazette.

“Our advice to them was to get the study first; make sure it’s an appropriate and favorable thing, and something the Interior Department wanted to do,” he said. “[And] make sure it’s something that benefits the region.”

Much of the National Park Service (NPS) property in Salem is on Derby Street. Most North Shore residents are familiar with Derby Wharf and Central Wharf, where Salem’s elaborate Fourth of July activities are held, where the tall ship Friendship is docked and where a visitor center is located.

The NPS also manages or owns other properties clustered in the area, including the historic U.S. Custom House, the Hawkes House, Derby House, West India Goods Store and more.

The study, however, would look not just at additional public lands in Salem, but in areas throughout southern Essex County.

The key to the plan is that the NPS wouldn’t have to purchase or manage any new properties that are added to the Salem Maritime National Historic Site. The additional attractions or locations would simply be integrated into the Salem Maritime promotions, activities and educational materials.

Tierney said it would be modeled after the Boston Harbor Islands, which are not owned by the federal government, but where interpretation and recreation services are provided.

“I think it’s a good model [for the North Shore],” he said.

There are some U.S. lawmakers who don’t want to government involved in anything, Tierney said, so it could take a year or more to get the legislation passed. The fact that the study doesn’t rely on purchasing or managing lands will help ease it along, he said.

Annie Harris, executive director of Essex National Heritage Commission, said the North Shore’s resources and attractions are part of what entices people to live and work in the region.

“We feel this is very strongly important to the economy of the region,” she said.

Some of Essex Heritage’s trustees are bankers, and they say the cultural and recreational offerings are part of how they attract and retain good workers, said Harris.

### Less about ownership, more about promotion

Harris said the North Shore has a multitude of potential sites that could be incorporated, from salt marshes to historic properties. By combining forces, NPS would be able to play a larger role in promoting these resources — making area residents aware of the offerings and enticing visitors to come to the area.

The kinds of tours, activities and special programs found at current NPS sites could be extended to whatever properties are added under the Salem Maritime site, she explained.

Harris said her organization has been working for years on this type of promotion of the region, but “we feel even more can be done in this region by having a National Park Service here.”

Expanding the boundaries might allow the new sites, as well as the Salem Maritime organization, to qualify for more grant money, Tierney said.

The study would be conducted strictly by the NPS, likely with a combination of its local staff and people from its central management, Tierney said.

Tierney and Harris declined to speculate on what areas might be good to incorporate into the Salem Maritime site. That will depend on the results of the study, they said.

“This is beginning of a process,” Harris emphasized.

Harris, however, did say that waterfront areas might make sense, since Salem Maritime is already a coastal site. But there are areas outside of the Derby Wharf area in Salem that could be good locations for NPS programming, she said, such as lighthouses, Salem Common and Winter Island.

Harris said it would be good to find ways to make it easier for residents and visitors to access the waters around the Salem area. She used an example of past partnering between Essex Heritage and NPS to bring youths from the Boys & Girls Club out boating.

“The National Park Service could help get kids out on water [in the future],” she said.

Could the Salem Maritime site end up needing a new name, if its boundaries are expanded? Harris said it’s possible, but a far-off decision. Personally, she likes the idea of tweaking the name a bit to reflect the size and scope of the organization’s offerings in the North Shore.

A “site” sounds like a small thing, she said, so “Salem Maritime National Historical Park” might be a better fit.

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