



UNIVERSITY OF
NEW ENGLAND

INNOVATION FOR A HEALTHIER PLANET

UNIVERSITY OF NEW ENGLAND PROPOSED RESEARCH PIER FAQ

May 2025

The University of New England has proposed construction of a new, all-season pier on its Biddeford Campus to replace its existing seasonal research dock, allowing students and faculty to conduct their studies 365 days a year. The pier will also be used as the docking site for the City of Biddeford's fireboat.

As UNE has worked through the design and approval process, a variety of misunderstandings have emerged about the project, the approval process, and UNE's intentions as neighbors and community members. This FAQ aims to clear up misinformation that has circulated about the project.

The information provided below is a summary. Representatives from the University are happy to meet with members of the public to discuss the project and answer questions in greater detail.

WHAT IS THE CONTROVERSY SURROUNDING THE LOCATION OF THE PIER ABOUT?

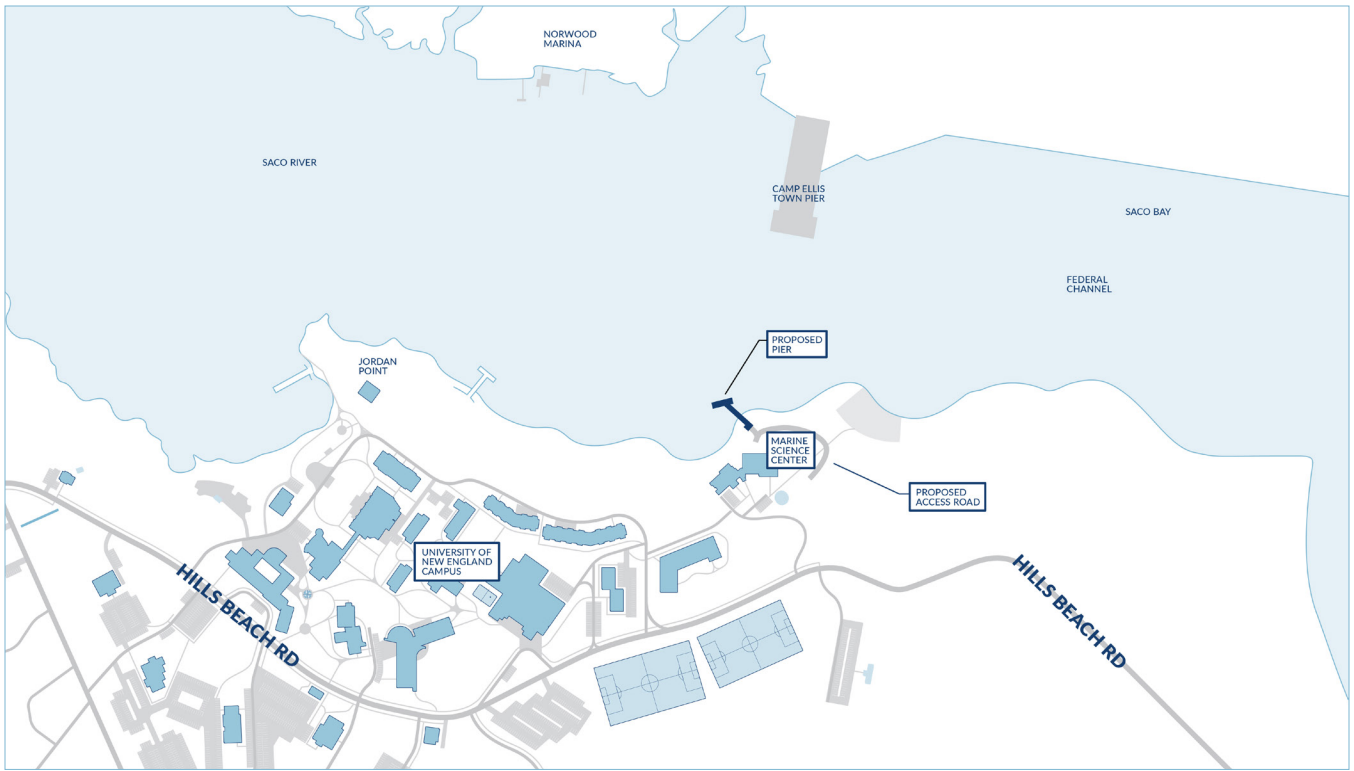
Over many years, UNE worked with expert marine engineers to analyze possible locations for the pier. The University had no pre-conceived preference for the pier's location. The University asked the engineers to study the pros and cons of possible sites along the river according to a set of criteria that included environmental impacts, berthing conditions, access to sufficiently deep water, shore and waterside development challenges, desired pier dimensions, configuration of fixed structures and floating docks, pedestrian access, minimized disruptions to boats navigating in the river, and minimized impact on moorings.

The engineers identified nine possible sites for the pier along UNE's campus and, based on a careful analysis of each possible location, recommended a location known as "Site 7" as best meeting these criteria. UNE informed the Harbormaster of this preferred location in 2015 and conducted a site visit to review it with the Harbormasters and Chair of the Harbor Commission. UNE then met with City staff in 2016 to share details of its site analysis and continued with advancing the pier's design. However, at a meeting with the City in late 2023, the Harbormaster informed UNE that he prefers a different site and design slightly downriver from Site 7, known as Site 8.

WHY DID UNE CHOOSE SITE 7?

The proposed pier design at Site 7 extends 142 feet from the shore with a 118.8-foot approach and attached 23-by-80-foot pier head.

Of the nine sites studied by the engineers, Site 7 best meets the combined criteria described above. It is located where there is a small intertidal zone, comprised primarily of rock without sea grass, and the currents are slower because it is farther from the river channel. The dock's main berth would be aligned with the current in the river and would be deep enough to provide all-tide access for the range of vessels expected to use the facility with the smallest overall footprint, thereby minimizing environmental impacts.



The Site 7 pier will also minimize exposure to adverse current and icing conditions. This proposed design is over 200 feet from the federal anchorage area and is, therefore, well out of the way of boating traffic in the river. UNE will remove the existing 120-foot seasonal dock and floats upon completion of the new pier.

WHY DIDN'T UNE CHOOSE SITE 8?

Opponents to the Site 7 location are now advocating for an alternative design and location slightly downriver at Site 8, where they propose a 200-foot pier head that runs parallel to the shore and begins at the water's edge. They argue that this site would provide sufficiently deep water.

There are many reasons that such a design at Site 8 is a poorer choice than the design and location UNE proposes:

- A 200-foot pier head proposed by critics would only allow the pier head to be used on one side because the shoreland side would be on dry land or in very shallow water during low tide. This is less efficient than UNE's design, in which the pier head can be used on both sides. Moreover, this design would still require a long pier to connect to the shore during high tide, further increasing its overall footprint.
- An 80-foot dock designed to be used on multiple sides at Site 8 would need to be placed in sufficiently deep water to accommodate boats on all sides of the dock at low tide. To make that possible, there would need to be a long pier approach to connect the dock to the shore at high tide because the intertidal zone is wider at Site 8 than Site 7. When these two pieces (the dock and the pier connecting the dock to the shore) are combined, the overall size of the structure would be larger, and therefore more environmentally impactful, than UNE's proposed design at Site 7. An 80-foot pier in sufficiently deep water at Site 8 would also come closer to the federal channel than UNE's proposed design at Site 7. It would also be more affected by channel current, would have more velocity exposure to icing, would experience less safe berthing conditions due to ledge, and would impact at least one mooring holder, if not more.
- There are shallow ledge outcroppings at Site 8 that would pose a safety hazard to boats unless the pier was built on top of or in front of them.
- The intertidal zone at Site 8 is comprised of a stony beach with large areas of sand and sea grass, which could be adversely impacted by the alternative pier design.

For all of these reasons, Site 7 is a better location for the pier than Site 8.

WHY WAS THE HARBORMASTER REMOVED FROM THE APPROVAL PROCESS?

The Harbormaster publicly stated, prior to the submittal of the formal application, that his preferred site was the only acceptable location for the new pier and that he would not entertain any alternative locations under any circumstances. He took part in active discussions at Harbor Commission meetings regarding the merits of UNE's forthcoming application, without the public being informed in advance that the topic would be on the agenda, and without UNE being notified, in violation of Maine's sunshine laws. He also assumed authority over issues that were not within his purview per City Ordinance. Due to this demonstration of bias, the City Manager removed him as the administrative hearing authority for this application. [UNE encourages the public to read more about this matter in a detailed FAQ on the City's website.](#)

DID UNE THREATEN TO SUE THE CITY?

When the University became aware of the Harbormaster's bias in the approval process, UNE's attorney wrote to the City's attorney to raise concerns about serious due process errors. The goal of this communication was to correct these errors to avoid having to appeal to a court. In other words, UNE's lawyer sought to correct significant due process errors *before* the University was forced to appeal to Maine Superior Court.

HAS UNE SOUGHT SPECIAL TREATMENT FOR THE REVIEW OF ITS PROPOSED PIER?

No. UNE has not sought special treatment for its review. It only requested a fair, impartial, unbiased review according to City Ordinance, just like any other applicant. UNE has followed the "blueprint" set forth in the Biddeford City Ordinance, carefully following the rules established by the various regulatory bodies from whom it must obtain approval for the pier.

WHO IS LOOKING OUT FOR THE PUBLIC'S INTEREST IF THE HARBORMASTER HAS BEEN REMOVED?

According to City Ordinance, the Harbormaster's role is to guide an applicant through the regulatory approval process and to sign off after an applicant obtains all required approvals from other regulatory bodies. By law, the Harbormaster is explicitly *not* empowered to tell applicants where to locate a pier or dock nor what design it should be. Due to the Harbormaster's demonstrated bias, the City decided to hire an external consulting firm to serve in this capacity for this project. The approval process also includes review from several regulatory bodies that serve the public interest, including the Maine Department of Environmental Protection, the Saco River Corridor Commission, the Army Corps of Engineers, and the Biddeford Planning Board. The Maine Department of Environmental Protection, the Saco River Corridor Commission, and the Army Corps of Engineers have all found that the Pier design proposed by UNE meets all of their regulatory standards and have approved the pier for construction.

IS UNE AT RISK OF LOSING FEDERAL FUNDING IF THE PIER IS NOT BUILT AT SITE 7?

No. The University received a federal appropriation of \$3.5 million to support building the pier. These funds are not contingent on location or on a specific timeline for the project.

HAS UNE PAID CITY STAFF FOR A FAVORABLE REVIEW OF THE PROJECT? IS UNE UNDER INVESTIGATION BY THE FBI?

No. UNE has not paid anyone involved in the review of the pier, nor any other city, state, or federal official. After others claimed that the FBI was investigating UNE, the University reached out to the FBI and offered to meet with them, which they said was not necessary. UNE has no reason to believe that the FBI is investigating the University.

WILL UNE ANSWER QUESTIONS ABOUT THE PROJECT?

UNE has responded to all questions posed by the various regulatory agencies. As noted above, UNE is happy to meet with any interested community members to address questions about the proposed pier. In fact, UNE has proactively reached out to the principal critics of the project with offers to meet.

WHAT IMPACT WILL THE PROPOSED PIER HAVE ON EXISTING MOORINGS?

The Harbormaster has communicated that there are two moorings that will be impacted by the proposed design. It is worth noting that one of the moorings was placed at the Site 7 location **after** UNE's application was submitted to the City, which underscores the Harbormaster's desire to undermine UNE's application process. Regardless, UNE will pay to relocate those two moorings to nearby, comparable locations on the river, where there is more than ample space for their placement. Such relocations of moorings are not uncommon. In fact, mooring permittees are notified explicitly by the City that the location of their mooring is subject to change. Claims that the City would have to use its "eminent domain power" to move moorings are simply not accurate.

HOW WILL THE PIER BENEFIT LOCAL COMMUNITIES?

UNE's marine and environmental scientists are engaged in important research of direct relevance to the residents of Biddeford, Saco, and adjacent communities. This research includes topics like mapping and mitigating shoreland erosion, seaweed aquaculture in Saco Bay, the effects of climate change on marine animal migration patterns and invasive species, and changes in plankton populations, among many others. Much of this research requires access to Saco Bay and beyond in the Gulf of Maine throughout the year, including during the winter months.

UNE has also offered to allow Biddeford's fire boat to use the pier, thereby significantly improving response times for marine emergencies.
