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U.S. to study Salem Maritime site boundary

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SALEM — The National Park Service will be asked to study a possible expansion of the boundaries of its property in downtown Salem, Congressman John Tierney announced yesterday.

Tierney (D-Salem) said he would file legislation that will direct the National Park Service to conduct a study in Salem and along Essex County's southern coast to determine the "suitability and feasibility" of including portions within the boundary of the Salem Maritime National Historic Site.

The study will look at "nationally significant historic resources" on the lands in and abutting greater Salem Sound, according to a press release issued by the Essex National Heritage Commission.

The lands will be publicly owned or places where the public is welcome and, if included within the boundary of the Salem Maritime site, the National Park Service would be able to expand its local presence and offer education and heritage preservation programming beyond its nine acres in Salem.

Essex Heritage has been a strong proponent of boundary extension and Tierney announced his legislation at the group's annual meeting in Rockport. Annie Harris, Essex Heritage's director, said Winter Island in Salem or Lynch Park in Beverly were possible locations that could be added. It wouldn't mean that the National Park Service would take control of the properties, but it would create an opportunity for the agency to partner with municipalities and offer programming or put federal resources, including money, toward improving the sites.

The National Park Service, for example, might be able to tap federal dollars to enhance signage.

"It's really theoretical at this point," Harris said. The study could take two to three years to complete.

Along the way, public input will be collected, said Patricia Trap, superintendent of the Salem Maritime National Historic Site. The public's involvement will help generate "a swelling of

rationale and support to expand the boundary." And the study, Trap said, should identify ways for federal and local authorities to "better collaborate to bring maritime history alive."

"Annie Harris and her team at the Essex National Heritage Commission deserve credit for championing the extension of the Salem Maritime National Historic Site's boundary," Tierney said in a prepared statement. "This legislation is the necessary first step in advancing this concept."