

**Friends of Casco Bay**  
**Community Engagement Committee**  
**Minutes of Meeting via Zoom**  
Monday, April 6, 2020, 5-6:30 PM

In attendance

Board: Sandy Marsters (Committee Chair), Bud Higgins, Pat Ianni, David Kauffman, Seb Milardo, Malcolm Poole, Ann Thayer

Staff: Cathy Ramsdell, Will Everitt, Sarah Lyman, Sara Biron

**Update on working from home and check-in on how staff are doing**

Cathy reported that staff are doing well. Since March 16<sup>th</sup> at 3:30 pm, staff have been working from home. We are going into the office only to perform particular tasks that can only be done in the office. Everyone is being very careful to follow protocols to keep everyone healthy, including allowing for a period of three days between visits to the office by different individuals, when possible. Everyone is regularly checking in around mental health. The health of everyone, from individual staff members to their households, their families, and our community, comes first.

Since mid-March, the mail, being an essential function, is being forwarded to Cathy's house. She is managing it, including making bank deposits and paying bills, before sending on the crucial information needed for development and bookkeeping to Will, Sara, and Jeff.

Staff have continued their work with lots of energy and structure, including, initially, meeting daily as an entire staff. We are also having topic specific online meetings. As of this week, a recalibration is in process. Staff meetings will only be a few days a week moving forward, and we will be closing on Fridays. This allows for extra downtime, keeping physical and mental health as the priority. Removing pressure about work is essential.

There are silver linings. Regular check-ins are allowing staff to collaborate in an even deeper way than normal. Fantastic ideas and creativity are coming from the staff, even outside their typical areas of work. Another advantage is the organization's decreased carbon footprint due to staff not commuting. When we do return to the office, Cathy is considering having staff work from home 1-2 days per week to continue that decreased carbon footprint.

As we've heard, many research vessel trips have been cancelled. Thanks to our Continuous Monitoring Station and Mike's work to maintain it, our data collection continues. The entire staff is working together to ensure that we continue to communicate the conditions we see in the data to our supporters.

Mary retired on March 27<sup>th</sup>, and we gave her a virtual send off. She was very appreciative of her gifts and the kind words.

Both boats have been launched and are in the water. We went ahead with our original launch dates, as we had concerns that boatyards might close or later we would have to wait to launch later than we would like (some yards have already closed).

Staff regularly express their appreciation for the Board generously approving the Operating Plan and budget at the first online Board Meeting on March 17<sup>th</sup>.

Board members agreed: The staff is doing a terrific job. The whole team is handling it admirably. Family can take a lot of time and emotional energy.

## **Update on our Communications strategy**

As we continue to work, communications is still job one, to let our supporters know that our work continues.

In our first week of social distancing, we sent four email updates and posted related social media. In the Operating Plan, we set out to share one story every two weeks. We will continue to work out a balance between these two rates of output, aiming to send two stories a week, as we are able. We know it is really important to keep folks informed when we cannot meet with them face-to-face.

We continue to have discussions to find the right tone to share our work. We are hopefully getting it right without calling out COVID-19 in the subject or first paragraph of our communications.

We are appreciative that Board Members and other supporters send kind and encouraging responses to our emails and posts. Some are eager to share our messages on social media. Donations are slower than we typically see this time of year, but folks are still making donations, including in honor of Mary. Water Reporters are signing up and taking part. We are finding all of this very heartening.

Malcolm discouraged overdoing things now, especially when there is so much to think about and adjust to.

Board Members suggested it will be helpful to compare our donation levels during this time to our own history and to that of other organizations. Staff are in touch with colleagues regularly to seek advice, give support, and compare how things are going.

## **Development and Communications timeline: Timing of Annual Fund and 30<sup>th</sup> Anniversary Celebration and public launch**

**Update on 30<sup>th</sup> Anniversary Celebration and Members Annual Meeting:** Cathy shared that after a lot of deliberation, the order of the 30th Anniversary Celebration and public launch of the Climate Change and Casco Bay Fund, and the Annual Fund Mailing will be switched. This means the Annual Fund will be moved up from the planned June send date to April/May.

We have shifted the 30<sup>th</sup> Anniversary Celebration/Climate Change & Casco Bay Public Launch to later in the year, with the form of these two currently linked events uncertain. Staff will continue explorations of an online, virtual 30<sup>th</sup>, and we'll just have to see about timing for the large mailing for the public launch.

This means the Annual Fund will likely land about the time that many folks are receiving their checks from the stimulus/relief package. For those who are still getting paid, some may see that as extra money that they would like to donate back to the community.

**How we will process the Annual Fund differently:** To limit the number of people interacting with the mailing pieces, the Annual Fund will not have notes signed by individual Board Members this season, nor handled by staff. The print and mail house we regularly work with, Franklin Printing, will do the entire mailing. This means notes from Malcolm and Cathy will be printed on the letters, a method we have used for large acquisition mailings. These are so well reproduced that folks can't tell they are not hand done. We are also planning to include a separate piece explaining the changes to the tax benefits around charitable donations this year as a result of the CARES Act.

## **Keeping our supporters engaged: offering online Casco Bay Matters interactive presentations on our work**

We will be working to roll out new ways of communicating including interactive online events and videos on Baykeeping, Science, and Community Engagement topics.

The first will be a presentation by Ivy to update our supporters about the Maine Climate Council's work. This will be a repackaging of a different presentation she's giving this week to the Maine Climate Funder's Network. We will be going over the logistics of this on Thursday.

The staff are taking initiative to generate ideas and ways to create short informational videos as well. At the same time they are being thoughtful and practical about the technology and the messaging.

If you get any ideas, do not hesitate to reach out to Cathy with them.

Bud shared that with us all drowning in COVID-19 messages, people are looking for ways to stay up to date on other things, especially data they can track locally. We are fairly unique in having it. Sandy pointed out that he noticed some differences in our data compared to previous years, so it will be great to have context around that. Staff ask that as you read our stories, please send feedback so we can improve our postings over time.

Carbon emissions and air pollutants are decreasing significantly as a result of the change in our habits. A great discussion resulted in the recommendation to staff to message about this in May, June, and July, and talk about how we can "restart" differently as we "return" to the new normal.

### **Things we are watching/thinking about closely:**

**CARES Act:** Cathy, with help from Jeff and Will, invested a huge amount of time, energy, and emotion (waiting for application process to open) between Thursday morning and Sunday at noon to complete the application through Key Bank for the Paycheck Protection Loan. This will cover payroll and a little overhead, with most or all of the loan forgivable, if everything goes well. She was appreciative to Malcolm and the Board for fast-tracking the decision to move forward. The process was not easy and was certainly not clear. There were hiccups along the way on the bank's process end, but Cathy persisted. It was very frustrating and stressful, but if we get approved and the loan is forgiven, it will all have been worth it. The Board was very appreciative of Cathy's work.

**Office space:** The agent and owner have not reached out. That's good as we wouldn't want to commit to paying three times the price for rent at this time, and the landscape of what will be available will likely look very different soon.

**Hiring a new staff person:** Cathy will start working on the job description for the writing position soon, though we will hold off on posting and hiring.

Malcolm thanked the Board for the swift vote on the Paycheck Protection decision. He shared that he sees April as a time where things will be operating normally for half the time. After this month we will know a lot more. This is not a race. No one will be receiving a medal at the end for doing the most.