

**Friends of Casco Bay  
Community Engagement Committee  
Meeting Minutes**

Monday, October 5, 2020, 5-6:00 p.m., via Zoom

In attendance

Board: Seb Milardo (Committee Chair), Sandy Marsters, Stephen Bushey, Pat Ianni, Bud Higgins,  
Malcolm Poole, Joanie Samuelson, Lori Thayer, Jack Thomas

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

**Community Engagement Committee Meetings: A Discussion**

This meeting was a departure from our normal meeting format. We took time out to review the Community Engagement Committee meetings to consider their effectiveness and explore ways to make them more engaging they are.

**Summary of key takeaways from the discussion:**

- Generally folks feel positive about the committee and meeting format. This was a candid conversation, with good back-and-forth on issues of how we engage in this work together.
- This Committee's focus is to support Staff. Staff use feedback and ideas from the meetings to make course corrections, adapting plans or to help think things through more fully.
- Nothing is specifically wrong or needs to change, and we can make some tweaks and improvements by:
  - Make sure we involve people in engaging ways.
  - Summarize at the end of each meeting any action items, when it makes sense from particular discussions.
  - Share the outcomes of the meetings, especially down the road, recognizing the distance between the inception of ideas at the meetings and their realization in the future
  - When reporting out at Board Meetings, a summary identifying any Board action items is important. Avoid regurgitation. The Committee Chair can use a check-in with the Executive Director and Board President just before the Board Meeting to identify anything that is important for emphasis for all Board Members or for any results from the committee meeting that the Staff are moving forward with. Share how the dots connect.
- Many Boards are not as engaged like this one. It is important Board Members feel involved, welcome and listened to.
- It is hard to remember all the things that happen as a result of this committee. It is good that we are making contributions.

The details of the discussion follow.

**What is positive? What do you like about the meetings? Why are they effective?**

- Informal format, feels like an open door meeting where we can wander in and be ready to tackle whatever comes. Unfortunately, the free for all does not work as well in Zoom.
- The feedback and that there is a discussion. We learn by discussing, not simply taking in information. Helps Board Members feel more engaged with the work and we take it out into the community.
- The name indicates that the committee deals with issues related to getting the community to engage with the organization. Engagement in the community increases the likelihood and opportunity for raising money.

- Sarah's reports out on Social Media Metrics and Water Reporter are things that really fit the name of the committee and are a good use of the group. If we focused solely on Community Engagement, there would still be a lot to do.
- Board Members participate in this meeting to get involved, offering their sweat and time. This meeting is where we talk about things. We need to start planning for when the crisis ends, so we can hit the ground running when it does. Enjoy that the meeting is brief and the agenda guides us while keeping it informal and less structured than a Board meeting.
- Like the freedom of thought. We work to try and engage the community. Hopefully, we will be able to hold engaging in-person events again soon. There are things we can be doing to include members or volunteers, such as considering adopting some virtual experiences with guest speakers or hold beach cleanups with social distancing. Bayscaping is a huge opportunity for us right now because folks are tending to their garden and canning. We can have more activities when members can get involved. What can we do to keep the organization name and mission out there?
- Staff needs Board support to know they are on the right track for Community Engagement work, including the related Development and Communications.
- Holding these meetings on the first Monday of the month at a set time was key, instead of the meeting floating around. Board Members adapt to attend. This work is about how we can reach out to the community, not how we can pull them in. This is the space for Staff to use the Board as a sounding Board.
- A 5 PM start time may be difficult for working Board Members, even during the pandemic.
- These meetings are a melting pot of sorts where we throw out all the ideas and see what comes out to work with. Anyone can say anything. We keep it unscripted and get the best ideas that way.
- Love the brainstorming aspect. Do we have to be more creative, especially during the pandemic?
- Zoom makes it easier for some Staff to attend the meetings. It has been great for them to be a part of the meetings and see what is happening.
- Staff appreciate getting feedback as we make decisions at the staff level.
- It is a pleasure to take part in the meetings and to have the opportunity to politely disagree and meander. Really appreciate the group. The meetings are effective, and inviting.

Seb summarized sharing that the give and take is really important to Staff, as is the Board's ability to be supportive of Staff. This meeting provides a place where Staff and Board Members can mutually support one another while being candid. That is what makes the meetings work well.

### **How to improve and enhance meetings?**

Consider both what we can learn about increasing our effectiveness from what we have been doing and what these meetings could be if we were to start fresh today with our current circumstances and necessary adaptations.

- The report out at the Board Meeting could be more than a regurgitation of what happened at the meeting, yet we need ideas on what that could be.
- Sometimes Board Members leave feeling it was only open ended discussion. Those conversations keep the meetings alive, but one can be left asking if they are helpful. It would be good to know what is resulting from the rich discussions, whether Cathy is taking something to the Staff to flush out or to the whole Board to engage them. Take 5 minutes at the end of the meeting to identify what the next step is on the topics discussed, noting who owns what. Consistently clarify the productivity coming from the meeting. We know this is happening, but take the time to really call it out.
- If we leave the meeting with one actionable item per meeting, that is 12 items a year. They can be simple or more complex. People like actionable items, because people like to know what to do.

- This committee meeting serves the Staff and their functions with support from the Board. The Board meeting is the place where the Staff supports the Board. How can we best support the Staff through these committee meetings?
- In person meetings are much more enjoyable. Staff bring what they are working on and ask for feedback. The Board indicates if Staff are on the right track and shares how to build on the idea or pivot when needed. Cathy touches on the outcomes in her Executive Director's report at the Board Meeting. That is a good approach because Board Meetings are a couple of weeks after these committee meetings. And some things do not lead to actionable items.
- A different approach to the agenda of discussion items is to assign Board Members to brainstorm, writing their ideas out. For example: everyone is asked to brainstorm virtual activities for membership, writing out a 3-5 sentence statement of each idea. Then ideas can be collated. Writing can be more interactive than simply sitting at a Zoom meeting. Provide more activities for Board Members to engage, bring ideas, and be more active during the meeting. Identify thoughtful questions that Staff want to put out to the Board.
- Staff love the committee and the way it has been working. Staff work with the committee chair to put together an agenda that is meant to both inform and engage. For every meeting, we work to identify at least one item to engage Board Members on that helps us move things forward. Staff then take that back and assess the new ideas and information. This informs what actions we take or do not take. Cathy works to create formats at both the Staff level and at this committee to allow for disagreement and divergent thinking. This creates freedom and safety to share your thoughts in these meetings. As Joanie has shared in the past, she generates ideas yet is not attached to outcomes. When Board Members do that, it is invaluable for Staff. Ideas have a long gestational period at the Staff level. We have a process where we need to have discussions at the Staff level after committee meetings. Because we are stuck with the Zoom format, Staff need to consider how much more engaged we can help you feel. Staff do so much with the ideas and thoughts you all share. Staff will work to try and connect the dots, so you can see the outcomes of this work more specifically and directly.
- Make sure in meetings Board Members are active and making sure there are different ways of doing that.
- The committee is not meant to be directive of Staff, rather it is meant to support Staff and provide feedback on ideas. Staff then use those to inform directions, as a result of the wide ranging discussions.
- The committee agenda comes out of the Staff, specifically Cathy, Will, and Sarah, meeting with the Committee Chair, Seb. When able, the Board President, Sandy, has been sitting in on these meetings, increasing the opportunities for Staff to connect with these two Board Members. That meeting is a whole other level of discussion to widow out what makes sense to place on an agenda.
- These committee meetings pull together 13 or more people, each giving an hour of their time. Whether they are Staff or Board is not as important as 13 people coming together to not just talk, but talk about important things and how to move forward and support what Staff is doing. Help them stay on track and in sync with Board thinking.
- Board Members want to know they are adding value. For example, if Will presents something for discussion, we may ask at the end, "Based on what you heard just now, is there anything that you are taking away that is helpful and is there anything the Board can do to help?" This would be an opportunity to make sure the Staff feels that we are engaged with the issue Staff are bringing forward. We do not have to be task oriented. We just want to make sure the time everyone is giving is helpful to Staff in a tangible way.
- Does Staff get to ask all the questions they want to? Will: I feel supported by these meetings. We bring ideas and we trust your honest answers about whether something is a good idea or a bad idea that we can try to make better. There are countless ways this committee influences and improves our work. The BayCaper for Baykeeper event came out of this committee after we

ditched the auction, and you all came up with a new event based on sponsorship that then helped us later pivot to the Film Festival. Additional events and activities are a result of discussions at this committee including House Parties, the Donor Appreciation Event, resurrecting Storm Drain Stenciling, collecting quotes from our partners and donors for the 30th Anniversary. This committee helped us move from the Water Quality Monitoring Program to the Water Reporter project. You all helped shape our new website in very tangible ways. Those are just some examples of where the rubber hits the road.

- The Community Engagement Committee Meeting does allow Board Members to get satisfaction sometimes, differently from the Board meetings. How do we keep the whole Board engaged and satisfied, when not everyone attends these meetings. Sandy worked hard to get others involved, and that is important.
- There are seven times more Board Members on this call than 5 years ago. Seb is a first class leader. He is absolutely trusted to work with Staff to bring the best questions and topics to Board Members at these meetings.
- What are Staff looking for around expanding membership engagement? Do we need to promote membership engagement? Do we need to support ongoing activities or come up with new ideas?
- Anyone, at anytime, is urged to bring any idea for engaging our community to Cathy, Sandy, or Seb for consideration for the committee agenda for further discussion. Come forward with ideas. No one has to wait for an invitation. All generative ideas are welcome.
- When the pandemic started impacting Maine, Staff quickly pivoted our events to online in various formats, including:
  - April 30 Casco Bay and the Maine Climate Council: *A Casco Bay Matters Event*
  - two May open office hours for Water Reporters
  - June 3 Algal blooms and other green growths: A Water Reporter Training
  - July 27 Celebrating Water - 30 Years of Friends of Casco Bay event
  - upcoming October 21 What Casco Bay Is Telling Us: *A Casco Bay Matters Event*
  - upcoming November 18 event with Knack Factory about our film.

Please share any suggestions in the weeks and months ahead. Seb welcomes input to be as effective as we can be.