

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

Monday, March 1, 2021, 5-6:00 pm, via Zoom

In attendance

Board: Seb Milardo (Committee Chair), Sandy Marsters, Steve Bushey, Bud Higgins, Pat Ianni, David Kaufman, Malcolm Poole, Joan Samuelson, Lori Thayer, Jack Thomas

Staff: Cathy Ramsdell, Will Everitt, Sarah Lyman, Sara Biron, Robby Lewis-Nash

## **1. Staff Writer**

Will introduced our new Staff Writer, Robby Lewis-Nash, to board members. We are excited to have him aboard officially starting next Monday, March 8. His writing skills are impressive. If you Google him, you will find many great stories; he writes about, and translates meaningfully, complex policy and science issues. In addition, he has a passion for environmental issues and environmental justice. Cathy and Will, through the course of three wonderful interviews, feel he will be an amazing fit for our organization and work culture.

Board Members completed a round of introductions. Everyone congratulated him and shared their excitement to have him aboard.

Robby thanked everyone for the warm welcome. He shared that he is mutually excited to take on this new role. Growing up as part of a generation with climate change degradation around them, figuring out how to work on climate change is among his highest aspirations. In college, he explored using two polar opposite disciplines to do the work he wanted to do (biology and the arts). Many thought with his art background, he would go into science illustrations. Instead, he found synthesis in environmental writing. He has found the most fulfilling work thus far to be working on Maine climate change issues, specifically, translating data for specific audiences and using his creative artistic side. He is very much a people person, he looks forward to joining this team, and this is an opportunity to write about a place he is passionate about, making this sound like the perfect job for him. As he started telling those he knows about the position, many folks shared positive opinions of the organization, solidifying his decision. He looks forward to supporting advocacy for the Bay and to communicating that work to the community.

## **2. Casco Bay Matters event on Wednesday, March 3<sup>rd</sup>: Sea level, storms, and surges, oh my! Join us Wednesday at Noon.**

345 people have registered for the event so far! We had a lot of support as we promoted this event, with [media coverage](#), volunteers reaching out to island folks to share the event through island distribution lists, and website postings. The State shared it to their Maine Climate Council email list. Lots of people who signed up are new to us. As Board Members shared the event, they heard that many already knew about it. The event is Wednesday, March 3 and you can still help to spread the word.

This is clearly a topic of interest to many. Portland and South Portland's Vulnerability Assessment, a part of preparing their One Climate Future plan, indicated that sea level rise is of top concern. It is also one of the most visible impacts of climate change. For those who have been following the Climate Action Plan release, the timing of this event is good.

Already we are looking ahead. After this event takes place, how can we continue to leverage it? Ideas generated included:

- Article for newsletter/email

- Create a media release and pitch to some specific publications
- Consider why there are over 300 people registered and repeat that for future events: promotion by others, a topic of wide interest
- Consider how many people joining are new to the Casco Bay region? With more people moving here from out of the state, it would be interesting to find out if these new folks are attending and trying to learn more.
- Reach out to coastal and island residents who are here only seasonally, to share the event when they return.
- Possibly share with island residents through the Peaks Island Library in the summer.
- Offer it for distribution on all the coastal local access channels. Specifically, South Portland, Brunswick and Harpswell were mentioned.

As an organization, we are encouraging getting ahead of some of the impacts of climate change through building resiliency. Laws look back retrospectively, and while it takes a lot to change laws, we need laws that are forward looking. Ivy will speak to this during the event.

### **3. Operating Plan workshop reminder: Monday, March 8, 5:30-7 p.m.**

The FY22 operating plan and budget will be in your email tomorrow morning. Ivy will be on vacation next week. Please read the Baykeeping section first and email Cathy and Ivy with any questions or concerns this week.

Please make sure you reserve sufficient time to read the plan. It is a dense, slow 50+ page document, including appendices. Staff wrote 80% of the plan. Not too much will be a surprise. If you have any questions, please reach out. Keep track of questions, ideas, concerns, typos, and edits. This document is for internal use only.

You will see the budget has an additional worksheet this year, a 2 page budget analysis of FY20, FY21, and FY22, to identify the big swings in the numbers one year to the next, to understand why those differences exist. We will walk through the dynamics of budget together in this online workshop.

### **4. Individual giving and the Climate Change and Casco Bay Fund**

This year will turn out a bit better financially than forecasted in January. The Board resolution, to pull funds from the Unrestricted Undesignated Net Assets, will fill a small projected operating deficit this year in advance of the PPP1 loan funds being forgiven, which will then replace whatever we use this year to get to break even.

For next year's FY22 budget, there is a big gap. We look at income, especially fundraising, on a conservative basis. At the same time, individual giving is the area where we know we can implement certain tactics and get results. When you see the budget for FY22, you will see that the individual giving line item is the same as the budget for the current year, \$375,000; we are projecting actual receipts from Individual giving to operations this year to come in about 30k below budget.

Will is confident we can meet or exceed \$375,000 for individual giving next year for a few reasons:

- 1.) A lot of people supported our work this year. In FY20, 1,300 households gave to us, and that was a high for us. This FY has not yet ended, and to date, 1,492 households have supported our work, a new high.
- 2.) While we are not meeting our individual goal this year, through the campaign, we brought in around 100 new donors who are giving to us for the very first time. In addition, around another 100 new donors supported our operational work. Lots of lapsed donors came back aboard because the

campaign was so compelling. This next year we can build on these new and renewed relationships. These folks are more likely to give to us next year simply because they gave to us this year.

- 3.) The third important factor is how much these new donors gave. Of the 100 donors new through the campaign, some gave \$10, \$25, \$50; however, overall the average gift was \$300, which is really good. The average gift for members last year was lower than that, at \$260. This speaks to the strength of the campaign including the really good materials, and the visibility it brought us.

Essentially, this year, we were competing against ourselves, and operating funds were robbed a bit by the campaign. Many donors will give only once to an organization in a calendar year. This year, we sent 7,500 packets to everyone who has ever given and many who never given. Next fiscal year, we will not be actively pushing for support to the campaign nor seeking to create specific opportunities to support it as we did last year (though we will still accept gifts to it).

Usually, after a capital campaign, people who have enough wealth to give are happy to continue giving to the organization whose capital campaign they supported. Our renewal rate is about 70-75% (compared to a 55-65% benchmark), and this should bode well for meeting and exceeding our budget for individual giving for FY22.

Cathy added: thank goodness we have been focused on individual giving for years as that is the area of fundraising where we can have the most influence on meeting our goal.

## **5. Annual Fund letter mailing update**

Closely related, one key component of our individual giving is the twice a year Annual Fund. We complete this mailing every spring and fall.

In the first year of the pandemic, when we did not know as much about how the virus was spreading, we did not distribute Annual Fund letters for Board Members to pen notes on, and instead had Cathy's signature and notes printed in a professional manner. Given where we are with the pandemic, what we know about the effectiveness of handwritten notes, and importance of individual giving, we would like to ask you all as Board Members to return to the practice of adding notes to the letters this spring.

This means Cathy will hand-sign letters and then Board Members will each take a stack of letters on which to add notes. Board Members offered to relieve Cathy of signing them; however, Staff shared that it is a much less burdensome process overall to have one signatory. When you look at other groups' solicitation letters, it is unusual to receive an inked message, and folks are inclined to look at those letters in more detail. It truly does help raise the return rate dramatically.

## **6. Update on ideas generated by this Committee: Beginnings of the work on Climate Change and Casco Bay Fund Celebrations (more on this next month!)**

In a previous meeting, the Committee generated ideas about making online events as warm and personable as possible. Staff took that to heart and are exploring ways to do this. At the Casco Bay Matters event this week, after Pete Slovinsky gives his presentation, Ivy will try to make the Zoom event more personable by using polls and speaking directly to the audience, rather than using slides.

Additionally, the Committee's ideas about commemorating the Climate Change and Casco Bay Fund and celebrating the new Continuous Monitoring Stations are in the planning stages.