

Friends of Casco Bay
Community Engagement Committee
Minutes
Monday, September 13, 2021, 5-6:00 p.m., via Zoom

In attendance

Board: Seb Milardo (committee chair), Sandy Marsters (board president), Steve Bushey, Deb Diebiegun, Bud Higgins, Pat Ianni, David Kaufman, Malcolm Poole, Joan Benoit Samuelson
Staff: Mike Doan, Will Everitt, Ivy Frignoca, Robby Lewis-Nash

Welcome – Seb began the meeting at 5:01 p.m. Seb opened with remarks about the seriousness of the meeting's topic: how we communicate about climate change. Seb said he wants for us to put our heads together and consider if our communications are as good as they can be and if there are other ways we can be communicating.

Communications and Climate Change – Will Everitt

Will followed Seb's remarks by sharing that we want to discuss if there are ways we can improve our communications and reach more people. Will said we will use our climate change communications from the past six months as a lens to consider our communications work as a whole. Many of the ideas generated about our climate change communications will likely be applicable to other topics that we work on.

Will asked that board members share their comments on the list of climate change stories, events, and earned media from the past six months. After considering these communications, Will asked board members to answer the following questions:

- How can we present this information better and in what different ways can we share it with the public? How can we better engage the broader community?
- What are interesting ways you get information or news that Friends of Casco Bay can learn from?
- What questions are people asking you about the Bay and our work? What information would people like to know more about?

After posing these questions, Will split the meeting into three breakout rooms for 15-minute discussions. Following the breakout room discussions one member from each group summarized their conversation.

Robby shared that his group first considered a different question: why do we write about climate change? The group agreed that climate change presents a threat to the health of the Bay, and that therefore it falls under our mission to address climate change. There was a discussion of the importance of making sure *Friends* is addressing issues affecting Casco Bay, and to not broaden our reach beyond the Bay. At the same time, climate change is a global issue that impacts the Bay, and quickly complicates the notion that the scope of our work remains inside the Bay. For example, the Gulf of Maine is the fastest warming marine water body on the planet, which directly impacts Casco Bay. Robby said his group talked about our human ecology approach to environmental issues, and

because climate change is human driven it fits into that approach well. Malcolm raised the idea that we should work like a “nimble snail,” taking our time to formulate our opinions and actions while being prepared to change quickly when necessary. Joanie shared the idea of having a news page on our website for our members titled, Message in a Bottle.

Deb shared that her group spoke about the content of our communications and how they are tracked internally. They also questioned if there is always a specific goal for our communications, such as an action item, or are they more broadly about raising awareness. Deb said her group also talked about the scope of our work. There are 27,000 households on Casco Bay, but the overall watershed has 150,000 households. If we expanded our reach, what constituencies or organizations would we connect with? Deb’s group also discussed the idea that climate change impacts all parts of the oceans and planet, Casco Bay included, and therefore the scope of our work could be very far reaching. Deb’s group talked about future communications incorporating short videos, Tiktok videos, working with schools, and in-person field trips and meetings.

Bud began his overview of his group’s discussion by mentioning that he and Steve have noticed that younger people (both Steve’s younger colleagues and Bud’s daughter’s peers) are not very interested in or concerned about climate change. Bud then said that his group discussed the importance of connecting the data from our Continuous Monitoring Stations to more of the stories we tell. We could provide more analysis about what the data is telling us, or work with local experts, like fishermen or scientists, to talk about the implications of changes we are observing in Casco Bay relative to their work. Bud’s group also talked about the need to engage in-person with our high-end supporters and donors, like taking them out on the boat; those relationships keep our organization afloat. We have been very COVID cautious, and we need to maintain these important relationships. Bud said Seb also raised the idea of contributing a regular column to a local news organization.

Steve shared that he sees marketing potential in the nimble snail. Sandy asked staff members if they thought the conversation was fruitful. Both Ivy and Will commented that the discussion was valuable. Ivy took lots of notes in her group’s discussion, and Will appreciated the ideas raised, including Joanie’s Message in a Bottle idea, the book club, and the newspaper column ideas.

Seb asked if the breakout rooms were productive, and if we should use this format in the future. Malcolm thought that they worked well. Sandy expressed skepticism for our ability to record the discussions and ideas from each group. Will commented that Robby takes detailed minutes, including each group’s report-back. Seb shared that he liked the breakout group format.

Summer Event Debriefs – *Seb Milardo*

Seb asked for board members to reflect on events we attended and hosted this summer. Seb first asked for board members to consider our tabling at the Maine Boatbuilders Show. Sandy responded that we should not participate in the show again because there was a lot of time invested and event turnout was low. Bud agreed, noting that he did connect with a few people at the show, but that the event’s low attendance made it not worth it overall. Malcolm agreed with Sandy and Bud. Pat recalled the boat show having higher attendance in previous years when it was held in March.

The board then reflected on Cathy's retirement party. Sandy thought the event was great. He loved seeing so many people there, and the party made Cathy very happy. Will agreed, noting that with so many familiar faces the event showed a rich slice of Friends of Casco Bay history. Seb shared that he talked with some guests who were less familiar with our work, and that they loved the party, often sharing that everyone had good things to say about us and that Cathy was very well spoken.

Will shared that on Friday September 3, Ivy and Sarah Lyman led a field trip for Water Reporters in Brunswick. Ivy said that the event went very well, noting that she has always wanted to do field trips or meetups. Ivy said they visited two different salt marsh sites in Brunswick: Mere Point boat launch and Wharton Point. Water Reporters asked many good questions and learned a lot. Ivy and Sarah received a lot of positive feedback at the end of the trip. Ivy said it was particularly exciting to see Water Reporters getting to know each other in-person. She is already seeing this meetup as having strengthened the community because Water Reporters are commenting on each other's posts more. Ivy is looking forward to holding more field trips in the future.

Seb said he enjoyed hearing Ivy's summary. It makes a big difference when we get people to connect in-person, and there are often big payoffs. Seb thought it was great that Water Reporters got to meet, and that they are building a sense of teamwork and commitment. Pat shared that this enthusiasm from Water Reporters harkens back to the dedication of our citizen steward water sampling volunteers. These Water Reporters seem to feel a similar connection to our work and mission in a meaningful way. Pat said she thinks we should organize more of these events. Ivy agreed with Pat, and shared that it was also great for staff to connect with Water Reporters. Pat noted that the logistical limits to events like this are much less than trying to get people out on the boat.

Seb closed the meeting at 6:07 p.m.