

**Friends of Casco Bay
Community Engagement Committee
Minutes
Monday, March 7, 5-6:00 p.m., via Zoom**

In attendance

Board: Deb Debiegun, Howard Gray, Megan Hallett, Bud Higgins, Kirsten Piacentini, Pat Ianni, David Kaufman, Sandy Marsters

Staff: Susan Bosco, Will Everitt, Robby Lewis-Nash, and Sarah Lyman

FY23 Operating Plan Workshop; Community Engagement, Communications and Development – Will Everitt

Will opened the meeting with a brief overview of the agenda. He noted that these Operating Plan workshops do not follow a line-by-line review of the Plan. The agenda for the meeting was:

- Short overview of Operating Plan with regard to these sections (Will) 5 minutes
- Overview of Community Engagement and Water Reporter Work (Sarah) 15 minutes including Q&A
- Overview of Communications work (Robby) 15 minutes including Q&A
- Overview of Development plan (Will) 15 minutes including Q&A
- Time for other questions about the plan [Including any portion of the plan]: 10 minutes

Community Engagement in FY23 – Sarah Lyman

Sarah reviewed the Community Engagement section of the FY23 Operating Plan. In FY23, our Community Engagement efforts will include:

- Deepening our relationships with Water Reporters. Water Reporter is our flagship volunteer program. Deepening our relationships with Water Reporters will strengthen the program. We can do this by hosting more Water Reporter trainings and meet-up events. We can also do this by asking Water Reporters what concerns they have for the Bay, and including those concerns or ideas among the issues we ask them to observe and document around the Bay.
- Recruiting more volunteer Water Reporters. Hosting events will help us recruit volunteers, and we will use the relaunch of the Pumpout Program to connect with boaters and recruit them to Water Reporter.
- Connecting the work of Water Reporters to our Baykeeping priorities.
- Hosting events with a focus on the 50th anniversary of the Clean Water Act. These events will include our Casco Bay Matters Events, and other events we host such as house parties or meet-ups.
- Organizing a Nitrogen Nab event this summer. Our previous Nitrogen Nab in 2017 around Portland Harbor was a success. Repeating this event will provide an opportunity to engage our members and the public in water quality data collection, and help us to

bring more volunteers into our community. This event is also a great way to celebrate the Clean Water Act.

- Working on our environmental justice, diversity, equity, and inclusion criteria in coordination with Waterkeeper standards and with what makes sense in our community. We will work to connect with more diverse people and audiences in our community.

Kirsten asked if we have demographic data on Water Reporters and specifically if we know if Water Reporters have boats, are fishermen, or work on the water. Sarah said we have limited demographic data, and agreed with Kirsten that recruiting Water Reporters with boats and who work on the water would benefit the program. David said he would connect Sarah with a group of young lobstermen in Freeport who would be interested in Water Reporter.

Pat asked if Sarah has promoted Water Reporter at schools and among students. Sarah said that she has communicated with a few teachers about the program, and knows that some Water Reporters are students, but that she has not made a specific effort to include schools. Pat and Deb agreed that this could be a good group to engage.

Communications in FY23 – Robby Lewis-Nash

Robby focused the overview of our communications in FY23 on a central value of our communications work: fostering a storytelling culture. Fostering a storytelling culture means:

- Our stories provide the Who, What, Where, When, and perhaps most importantly, the Why for any issue. In practice, this means our communications provide the context necessary to understand key information such as our Continuous Monitoring data, or our MS4 permit advocacy.
- Our stories accommodate a broad audience. Providing context for our data or advocacy issues is a part of this. Another key part is writing at a reading level that is appropriate for most people. For example, the New York Times aims for most of its articles to meet a 10th grade reading level. Following a similar standard in our communications helps to broaden our audience, and is an important aspect of practicing inclusion in our work.
- Our stories engage, inform, and resonate with readers. They provide meaningful information alongside a sense or feeling of why that information and what we do at *Friends* matters. Following this logic, Robby keeps a note on his story template: A topic does not equal a story; a topic *and* a feeling *does equal* a story.

Robby then reviewed the top communications priorities for FY23:

- **Baykeeping and Clean Water Act 50th Anniversary:** much of our major Baykeeping work utilizes the Clean Water Act. Our Baykeeping stories in FY23 will reflect and celebrate this connection (for example, our ongoing MS4 and stormwater communications).

- **Boater communications; Healthy Habits, Pumpout Program, and regional communications strategy:** we will relaunch our [Habits for a Healthy Bay](#) communications, announce and promote the return of the Pumpout Program, and coordinate a healthy boater practices communications campaign with regional partners.
- **Nitrogen Nab:** this will be a major event and our communications will support event participation and turnout, and celebrate its accomplishments.
- **Continuous Monitoring Data:** FY23 will be the first year where we have a year of data from all three Continuous Monitoring Stations. We will tell stories about these data and what they mean for Casco Bay.
- **Water Reporter:** we will continue our Water Reporter Posts of the Month, promoting the program and helping current and prospective volunteers to understand the program.
- **New Executive Director:** we will announce the hiring of our new director and introduce them to our community.

Robby ended the overview by sharing that we had 36 media mentions in FY22 (which is an increase from FY21). In FY23, Robby wants more of our media mentions to feature and focus on our work. Robby also shared that he will be learning to operate a drone and has received his Federal Aviation Administration drone pilot certification. Use of a drone has much potential for our work, and will aid Baykeeping by allowing us to monitor algal blooms and pollution, and aid our communications by allowing us to capture aerial footage for video projects.

David expressed his long standing interest in pursuing a media partnership. He strongly believes this would be an invaluable project, as it would dramatically increase our media mentions and integrate our communications into the regional media environment. Will replied that discussing this idea is in the operating plan.

Howard asked how we identify and decide who our communications audience is. Robby and Will replied that most of our stories are written to engage our entire audience. We often make small tweaks to create multiple versions of a story that are tailored to subgroups such as Water Reporters, boaters, or donors.

Development in FY23 – Will Everitt

Will reviewed our development plans for FY23, sharing that we will:

- Continue to grow and deepen our giving from individuals.
- Advance the Anchor Society, which recognizes donors who make planned gifts.
- Continue to pursue support from foundations, corporations, and the government.
- Take advantage of and create visibility and branding opportunities as they arise.
- Focus on new member mailings and annual fund outreach to overlooked communities and communities further inland, which serves to strengthen our financial standing and

promote diversity and inclusion in our work. To this end, we will also relaunch our gift membership program with a focus on diversity and inclusion.

David asked about the number of households we send out every year. Will replied that the quantity of people we contact changes from year to year, and depends on factors like whether we are working on a capital campaign or have identified a specific group of people (such as boaters) that we would like to contact for support. We generally mail to 10,000 to 20,000 households a year.

Final Questions and Comments

Bud applauded the integration of our program work and the ways that staff continue to find more opportunities for collaboration.

Will ended the meeting at 7:00 p.m.