

Friends of Casco Bay
Community Engagement Committee – Minutes
Hybrid Meeting: In-person at GMRI and Online via Zoom
Monday, February 13, 5:30-6:30 p.m.

In attendance

Board: Kirsten Piacentini (Committee Chair), Steve Bushey, Ellen Grant, Howard Gray, Bud Higgins, Pat Ianni, Seb Milardo, Joan Samuelson

Staff: Will Everitt, Robby Lewis-Nash

Welcome – Kirsten Piacentini, Committee Chair

Kirsten welcomed the group to the first Community Engagement Committee meeting since the summer. As the new Vice President of the Board, Kirsten will chair these meetings moving forward.

Review of FY23 Major Events – Will Everitt

Will asked the group to recall two of our major events from the year, the film festival and annual meeting. Planning for both events in 2023 has begun, and the group discussed ways to change or improve them.

Will shared that we are planning to partner with Maine Outdoor Film Festival (MOFF) again for the film festival. In 2023 we will be able to use the words “film festival” in the name of the event, unlike last year when there were concerns over branding and we called the event “A Cinematic Celebration.” Will asked board members for ideas to make the event feel more like a festival. Staff have brainstormed gifting tickets to groups we want to build relationships with (like high school environmental clubs or local immigrant organizations), having a screen printing table to print our logo on clothing, and having partner organizations table at the event. Board member’s ideas include:

- Support for having other organizations table, particularly other environmental groups
- Fish prints, like at the Yarmouth Clam Festival, alongside screenprinting
- Having fishermen table and educate attendees about marine foods, especially alternatives to popular fish
- Invite the Bowdoin Pickard Coastal Studies Center to get involved
- Host the event at L.L. Bean; moving to a new space could make it feel more festive
- Host a panel with some of the filmmakers
- Get more young people to attend, especially from marginalized groups
- Giving away complimentary tickets can be tricky, many people will not show up. We should give away more tickets than we have space for to ensure a well attended event

- Add a student rate, making the event more financially accessible
- Bud and Seb wanted more films focused on the environment, like our old film fest with Wild and Scenic. Pat and Kirsten liked the addition of the whimsical films and those with broader subject matter.

Will turned the discussion to the annual meeting, and specifically where to hold it. Will said that we want an outdoor location with ample parking, and ideally, views of the Bay. He suggested that Southern Maine Community College (SMCC) and Portland Yacht Services (PYS) both fit the bill. Will noted that we have not confirmed a date for the annual meeting, but that it may be held on August 2. Board members suggested the following ideas:

- SMCC is a good location with amazing views of the Bay and ocean.
- Wolfe's Neck Center hosts events and they are doing a lot of climate work; it could be good to build a relationship with them.
- We could still look up the watershed somewhere, like Westbrook by the Presumpscot. However, current construction in Westbrook makes travel difficult.
- Tidewater Farm in Falmouth could be a good location, though it may be too small.
- We should find a location that wants to accommodate us, where hosting our annual meeting would be mutually beneficial. This may not be SMCC. The Roux Institute needs good public relations right now and the WEX building has a great rooftop space.

Will said that staff also suggested organizing a photo or poetry contest, where the winners would be announced at the annual meeting. We could have readings and showings of the winning submissions, which would be decided by a panel of judges made up of board members and local artists. Board members were widely supportive of the idea. It was suggested that we involve the Telling Room. Joanie asked if we have considered holding the film festival in the spring and the annual meeting in the fall. Spring is a festive time of year, kids and college students getting out of school.

Members Survey Discussion – Will Everitt

Kirsten briefly reviewed the executive summary of the members survey prepared by staff. She then shared Sandy's thoughts with the group, which he emailed to everyone.

Pat was fascinated by the answers to the diversity, equity, and inclusion question. Many answers suggested involving students of all ages.

Kirsten saw that few people in our membership rely on the Bay for their livelihood. That seems like a promising way to grow our membership. Maybe someone like Dan Devereau or another fisherman or aquaculturist would help us connect with that community.

Will pointed out that one of our biggest takeaways is our members' connection to the Bay and that they care about our work because we are the group working to protect it. We also saw that if we do not communicate about an issue, our members assume we are not working on it. Many of the answers to the question about what members wish we were working on, *are* issues that we work on, but ones that we do not communicate about often.

Seb thinks people are members because they have access to the Bay and live by it. We should continue to pursue those people, in addition to those who are less connected to it. Kirsten agreed that there is still a huge population that lives by the Bay and does not know about our organization, and those people should be the easiest to reach. Bud agrees that we should do more to connect with people right on the Bay. There are so many people we have not yet worked with.

Will said that we have not tried very hard to connect with people who live inland, and that is reflected in our survey results. He clarified that inland means places as close to the Bay as Westbrook, they are just not directly on the water. There is a lot of information in this survey about how we can keep reaching the coastal audience we already have, and there may be other ways that we can connect with people who are close to the water but not on top of it.

Ellen, as a new board member, asked why we want more members. Will said we have a phenomenal 70-80% membership renewal rate. Even with that, we need to continuously do outreach to fill out our membership. In addition to financial support, members give us clout and support our advocacy. Members also give us clout. Part of the reason we can legally challenge the MS4 permit in Windham is because we have members there. Will also thinks that there is a moral imperative, based on our mission, to involve as many people connected to the Bay as we possibly can. Seb agreed, if there were more people who cared about the Bay and the environment we might not have the problems we do today. Joanie said she thinks that members elect to be stewards of the Bay, and that those people spread the good word about our organization.

Pat said she is very committed to educating the people in the watershed. Education helps bring in members. It also encourages people to advocate for the Bay in their own lives, and keeping up that educational effort will maintain the momentum for our work. Pat doubts if there are many more people to reach along the coast, but there are many young people who love the coast but must live further away because they cannot afford it. Pat thinks we should continue soliciting coastal members, and that looking up the watershed has untapped potential.

Kirsten tabled the discussion until the next meeting, and adjourned the meeting at 6:31 p.m.