

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

In attendance

Board: Kirsten Piacentini (Committee Chair), Sandy Marsters (Board President), Ellen Grant, Bud Higgins, Pat Ianni, David Kaufman, Joanie Samuelson
Staff: Will Everitt, Robby Lewis-Nash

Welcome – Kirsten Piacentini, Committee Chair

Kirsten shared an inspirational quote about sustainability and asked everyone to share a sustainability action they have taken in their life.

“Pick a thing. You don’t have to do the thing that’s going to solve everything. Pick a thing. Are you going to be the recycling person? Are you going to be the water person? Are you going to defend the beavers? Any of the available choices is fine. You just need to pick a thing. Part of picking your thing is trusting that your fellow human beings, your neighbors on this planet, are also going to pick a thing, and together we’ll pick enough things to start to move the needle.” - Dr. Ayana Elizabeth Johnson

Continuing Our Members Survey Discussion and Next Steps – Kirsten Piacentini

Robby summarized the minutes from the last meeting on this topic. Will reiterated that we have a 70-80% membership renewal rate, so we need to continuously bring in new members. He reminded the group that the intention of the survey was to connect with our members and learn what they think about our work. Will comes from a community organizing background, and a major goal of Will’s is to deepen the engagement that our members have with our work.

Will said we also conducted the survey for operational purposes. In terms of communications and outreach, it is much easier to get people to engage when you talk about issues and ideas that people identify with and find important. We also wanted to know if our members think there are ways we can improve our work. The board asked staff to include a fill-in-the-blank question about why members value our work, thinking that the answers could inform the strategic plan. Will found it encouraging that there were many responses to the fill-in-the-blank questions like this. He clarified that the questions asking for members to “check the boxes” presented options in a randomized order, suggesting that high frequency answers were organically sought out by survey respondents.

Board members had a detailed conversation about the merits of reaching people inland vs. just continuing to reach people along the coast. Will clarified that from an operational standpoint at this time in our work, “up the watershed” does not mean reaching out to people in Bethel. It means moving a town or two inland, such as Westbrook and Windham. It will be easier to address pollution if we have more members there.

The survey suggests that to get new people in the door, we need to get better at talking about the Bay with a passion, in the way that most people talk about the Bay, and less with the scientific or technical approach that has historically been the focus of our communications. Bud agreed and hopes we can connect with local groups in inland communities to collaborate.

Staff shared that we are going to send an email soon that thanks everyone for taking the survey and sharing some of our takeaways. Staff have connected with the 70 people who wanted to touch base with us about the survey. Staff will continue to analyze the survey results and think about how to operationalize it. Staff will also consider some of the ideas that were suggested in the survey.

Will said we should consider if we are going to do another survey. For example, the board has been interested in demographic information about our membership. There are some limitations on what kinds of questions we can ask, but there is information we can collect.

Pat shared her thoughts that people all over the state love Casco Bay. She thinks of how people in New Jersey travel from all over the state to go to the Jersey Shore. Pat has never lived near the Bay, but it has always been the most important geographic factor in her life. One of the ways to impress the importance of our work for everyone’s life is by focusing on Sebago Lake. So many people drink all of their water from Sebago Lake, but who have no idea where it is and have never visited it. Will agreed. He asked a similar question about how many people who live inland or in the region take visiting family to places on the Bay like Fort Williams.

Brainstorming: renaming our *Casco Bay Matters* series – Will Everitt

Will said that we launched an educational event series in 2018 called *Casco Bay Matters*. The events educated people about issues we are working on and set them up to be advocates. One of the first topics we covered was ocean acidification, which prepared attendees to submit public comments on the issue and donate to our monitoring. We moved the events online during the pandemic.

In 2020, George Floyd was murdered and the Black Lives Matter movement took off again. Today, to some of our members, “Casco Bay Matters” sounds like it is appropriating “Black Lives Matter.” Staff consistently get questions from members about this issue, with our members

worried, concerned, or angry that we are trying to steal Black Lives Matter's messaging and branding, or worse, that we think that Casco Bay is more important than Black lives.

Will said because we support Black Lives Matter, because of public confusion, and because the Casco Bay Matters branding is distracting both our intentions and the attention of Black Lives Matter, staff are recommending that we ditch the name. It is not helping us.

What is a great new name we could use to brand our educational and advocacy-related events?

Kirsten asked for more information about the kinds of events we are talking about. Will clarified that they are public information sessions that can be about anything we are working on, such as our science, findings from the field season, or what happened in the legislative session. There is always a Q&A aspect to it.

Names brainstormed by the Board included:

- Casco Bay Academy
- Casco Bay Classes
- Bayside Chats
- Casco Bay Forum
- Casco Bay Stories
- Casco Bay Conversations
- Casco Bay Culture
- Casco Bay Connections
- Casco Bay Conveyances.
- Casco Bay Spotlight.
- Casco Bay Counts

Staff will consider these names and continue to solicit ideas.

Will updated the group that our Members Annual Meeting will be held on Wednesday, August 2, at Southern Maine Community College's Spring Point Field.

Kirsten adjourned the meeting at 6:31 p.m.