

Friends of Casco Bay Community Engagement Committee
Minutes for Tuesday, January 2, 5:30-6:30 p.m.
In person at GMRI Conference Room and via online Zoom

Attendees:

Board: Kirsten Piacentini, Seb Milardo, Sandy Marsters, Pat Ianni, Stephen Bushey, Ellen Grant

Staff: Will Everitt, Sarah Lyman, Sara Freshley

1. Welcome and check-in question (5 minutes)

What is a favorite bird that you have seen?

2. Update on Water Reporter, Sara Freshley and Will Everitt

We have signed a contract with The Commons, a team of nonprofit developers, to build a new Water Reporter platform. The timeline is 5 months, so we should have a new app up and running by the end of May. The Water Reporter app as it exists now goes away at the end of March. We will have a two-month gap between apps.

The five month timeline is because they are building it in stages. They work for two weeks and then we have a week to review it and give it back to them. The stage of work is the type of data that we will be collecting. Part of the staff's work is to review their work every three weeks. The cost is going to be \$7,000 to develop the app and then about \$1,000/year for software subscriptions used for the app. As part of due diligence we talked to friends who are app developers. After looking at the Scope of Work, one said they would have charged us \$20,000 for this work. This work aligns with The Commons's nonprofit mission which is a reason they can provide it at a lower cost. As part of this work, they will be transferring all of our current Water Reporter data to the new platform. The next steps for staff are to plan a timeline for roll out and decide how we want folks to submit photos during the gap without any app, which will likely be by email Sara photos and information. We have received a \$12,000 grant from Morton Kelly Charitable Trust to fund this transition, we are seeking additional support to cover the staff time and other transition costs. Volunteers will be able to test and have input around our soft launch. The new app will be built to be flexible, allowing Friends of Casco Bay staff to change layout and some other changes. We won't need to go to the developer if we want to change small things. The Commons is shutting down the original Water Reporter app because they do not have the capacity to keep it updated to meet the requirements of the Apple and Android App Store while also meeting all of the competing needs of the various organizations who were using it. This new app is going to be based on the user's mobile device's primary browser (Safari, Chrome, etc.) but you will be able to have an icon on your home screen. It won't be reliant on the Apple App store or Google Play store.

3. Update on updating our website, Sarah Lyman

We are also under contract for updating our website. We are working with Fisher Green

Creative (a Cape Elizabeth-based company). It is exciting because need new tech and a facelift as our website is becoming incompatible with the new version of the platform our website is built on. The update will be in two phases. First they will be redesigning the home page and the menu. The second phase is moving our stories and other content from the current website to the new design. We should have a template homepage to look at in January and or February. Our website is hosted by Maine Hosting. This will stay the same.

Could this revamp boost our website visits? Right now we are in the low thousands of hits per month. We did not contract out to get search engine optimization but as a result of this work it will be easier for us to implement similar tools to that moving forward. Having an easier to navigate website will help with this. We know that we drive a lot of our website traffic through emails and events. We should wrap up the announcement of the website into our 35th anniversary!

4. How are we celebrating our 35th anniversary? A brainstorm. . . Friends of Casco Bay turns 35 in 2024. What we've done for previous anniversary years: we have updated our logo in some way to let folks know that it is our anniversary. We also have made it a theme of most of our events for the year, including Annual Meeting, Donor Appreciation Event, and House Party. We have done some special messaging thematically as part of our emails. For the 30th we put a special timeline on our website that we continue to update.

Board Members had a generative/brainstorming discussion on ideas to celebrate this auspicious year.

- A clarifying question was asked: in the past you had no separate party? It seemed more efficient to tack it onto existing events because we already have these events carved out.
- Let's wait until the 50th anniversary to do a big party focused on it!
- One idea is to have an event on Casco Bay Lines and do a big cruise. Ellen has been to a party on CBL and it was great. Having Annual Meeting on a boat may draw more people.
- We could have the 35 most impressive things the group has done this year, 35 species in Casco Bay. 35 people who have had an impact. We could make a lot of "35" lists.
- Could we use this occasion to get the word out in different ways about Friends of Casco Bay? Casco Bay Lines promotions? Fourth of July Fireworks dedicated to Casco Bay?
- What is the low hanging fruit of large groups of people already gathered and looking out at the Bay. Has Friends of Casco Bay ever been the beneficiary of Beach to Beacon? No, it is usually focused on children. A PSO event at Fort Williams that could be dedicated to us? Or even just a shout out.

- Maine Audubon has done a couple of parties at Kip Moore's place (son and wife own it now that Kip has passed), the old coastguard station on Little Diamond. The ferry lands right there. Seb pointed out that it is dangerous, there is no fencing around the dock, its open and it can be scary. Also a concern about how many people you could host there. Sandy pointed out that doing things on islands can present an inclusivity problem and may not be consistent with our values.
- Someone during the strategic planning process suggested "35 years of Protecting Casco Bay and counting" magnetic bumper stickers and we never did it! We could explore this again in regards to the anniversary.
- It could be an opportunity to fundraise. In years past we have asked donors to bump up their giving in honor of the anniversary. Ask folks to give \$35 gift memberships to people that love the Bay? Something around \$35 and gift memberships. for \$35 donation to attend the Annual Meeting.
- We could do a gathering of original members and board before we lose too many of them, it might be nice to have a discussion on how and why they started this group. Would some kind of panel discussion of our history be of any interest? We could have Don Perkins, Joe Payne, Nini, Joanie, Mary Cerullo, etc. At SMCC Spring Point or Bug Light? We could certainly get some folks to this but we may be able to get more people (lots more) if we offer a boat ride. The panel does not need to be instead of the boat.

As folks have ideas let Will, Sarah, or Sandy know! We have a whole year to celebrate this.

5. Hosting our Film Fest for Casco Bay at L.L.Bean this year?

Kirsten shared that a few weeks ago Sarah and Will came to L.L.Bean HQ to check out the Leon Gorman Conference room to scope it for Film Fest 2024. It's big enough and parking is free! There may not be a cost, except for a cleaning cost potentially. There is a cost at USM which covers the rental, the bar, clean up which adds up to over \$3,000. Kirsten has submitted a request to L.L.Bean and we have not heard back yet. We gave them two dates and we meet their criteria. If YES, what do we think about shifting Film Fest to LL Bean? Comments included:

- I love tradition and the Abromson Center but the parking issue is really compelling.
- Do we know where Film Fest goes live? It would be valuable to know if they are primarily from Portland. We don't have the exact answer but we do get folks from a variety of locations including outside of the Casco Bay watershed but concentrated among the coast. We dont think its primarily Portland residents.
- Curiosity about L.L.Bean would likely be an attraction. Not overly concerned about leaving USM.
- Is that space going to be used regularly by lots of groups? It was built with that idea in mind. L.L.Bean is consistent with our mission and it's a great company.
- Geographically, it is more central within Casco Bay.

Overall consensus seemed to be that there are no particular concerns about using L.L.Bean.

6. Donor Appreciation Event debrief

What worked well about our first donor appreciation event since 2019? Should we do this event in 2024? What should we do differently? Debrief comments included:

- It was great, and Board Members made connections with new folks. Staff did a great job. Can't think of a way to improve.
- Liked how they came out with trays of wine because it was efficient.
- A friend left even more committed to the organization than she was before. It was great to have the guest list in advance.
- It was a great opportunity to say thank you personally to folks.
- People were so passionate and had little stories about why they cared about the Bay and why they were members.
- Some struggled to get a beer, the tray system did not work for everyone.
- There may be some logistics to improve upon but overall it went great.
- The staff presentation was excellent.

7. Mark your calendar: 2024 Events (so far!)

House party to benefit Friends of Casco Bay, hosted by Liz and Tim Williams, 19 Sturdivant Road, Cumberland Foreside, **July 16, 2024, 5:30 to 7:30 p.m.**

Friends of Casco Bay Members Annual Meeting: **July 25, 2024, 5:30 to 7:30 p.m., place: TBD**