



Town of South Bethany

Committee Report from September 18, 2023

The Canal Water Quality Committee met on September 18th at 10:00am at the Town Hall and online Zoom. All members present.

Town Council (TC) Liaison Tim Shaw was absent.

Minutes were approved and adopted for the 8/21/23 meeting.

TC Updates: Chris V. provided update in absence of Tim. TC did review and discuss our recommendations on moving forward with the canal maintenance contract with Envirotech. Part 1 routine cleaning and maintenance were approved; however, part 2 for the floating wetlands pruning and maintenance was tabled with request for additional information including cost option for full removal sent back to this Committee. Bob Biciocchi provided some additional insights, and said Council considers it a large amount of money and wants to consider wrapping up this initial pilot program (1.0) and will continue to be open to discussions around a new version 2.0. The committee will resubmit the updated floating wetland options of maintaining all, fully remove or a hybrid approach, in advance of next TC meeting for TC decision.

Canal Maintenance: Chris V. asked that the subcommittee start looking into the details of dredging and present a plan to TC as soon as possible. It was last done in 2008 and took a while for all the required approvals. Discussion about the costs, and while too preliminary we know they will be more than was previously spent due to larger scope and inflation.

Chris C. also reached out and talked to Fenwick representatives including Bill Rhymer and we will leverage their current efforts to help plan our endeavors. They have contacts established with the Army Corps of Engineers, DNREC and DelDOT planners regarding Rt 1 long term plan. We will be integrating with the new Resilience Committee to coordinate efforts that may overlap. Association of Coastal Towns (ACT) may also be a good group to help coordinating efforts. Request TC to bring this up with ACT and DelDOT in their upcoming meetings, as well as connecting with Fenwick too.

Regarding the costs of maintenance, Fenwick also suggested working with the University of Delaware's Grant Assistance Program (GAP) and Jenna Mayhew to help with identifying and writing grants to secure additional funding for maintenance. Chris V. and Tim will reach out to them.

For our overall planning, Chris V. emphasized need to continue to investigate buy vs outsource for equipment and manpower for ongoing maintenance. We need to discuss it again with the TC. Chris V. will work with Tim on this.

For this season's canal clean-up, we confirmed that this subcommittee will be responsible for the oversight of Envirotech work and ultimate signoff on contractual requirements before deeming the work completed and paying. We will defer to the Town Manager to determine the timing of the cleanup. We are asking once again for the TC to increase efforts to enforce code and enforcement to help with overhang of vegetation and other contributors to organic matter in Canals.

Code/Communications: Discussed again addressing grandfathering of code with respect to vegetation overhanging and bulkhead breaches and to ramp up inspection and enforcement of violations. Asking TC to reconsider this, including more public communications. We will continue our communication efforts in getting the word out to property owners to maintain vegetation and reduce pollutants to the canals (e.g., downspouts, fertilization). Bob is working to get the meeting with SPBOA to further coordinate our efforts beyond the newsletter articles.

Floating Wetlands (FW): Gary provided an update on continued discussions of Floating wetlands 1.0 (current pilot program) and a 2.0 (replacement program) and whether to pull all, pull some, maintain some before proceeding to plan 2.0. There is a need to collect data. Long discussion including input from Council via Bob Biciocchi regarding the need to provide data for decision making. There was agreement in the meeting to clarify the facts about the wetlands. Likely there is no direct effect of wetlands to increase oxygenation of the canal water and indirect effects aren't clear. However, there is general agreement that the wetlands are aesthetically beneficial to the town and provide a natural habitat for wildlife. There is further lab test confirmed evidence that they remove Nitrogen and Phosphorus that are a contributing cause of Algae blooms, but the amounts are nominal relative to having a demonstrable impact to canal water quality.

The committee agreed to organize a comprehensive inventory of the number, location, and state of all floating wetlands in this pilot program project this week. That will give us information to provide TC an updated recommendation this week on how to proceed, including providing their requested additional option of full removal costs. Gary will coordinate the establishment of this database with help from volunteers to do the surveying.

Chris V. will update the TC recommendation document with the 3 options of prune all, remove all or hybrid (remove some/prune remainder) for review and consideration at the next Town Council meeting on October 13th.

Grants: Still awaiting final word on our HMGP grant, but the Committee understands this will move to Resilience committee. We are going to work with UD GAP Program as previously mentioned, for assistance with Grants across all areas of focus. John R. reported successes getting funding for several outside projects including Ft. Miles and is learning there is a lot of

federal money available for the asking. His takeaway and advice for us is that they want specific projects with specific goals and without risks of underfunding and risk of failing to complete projects.

Water Quality: Fish kill on Sept 2 on West 8th street off Jefferson Creek canal. Hundreds of menhaden were killed. The canal ends always have the worst water quality. We continue to suffer poor quality at the canal ends. The volunteer measurement team measured dissolved oxygen (DO) and it was well below 4.0 and almost 0 or anoxic, so the assumption is that it was likely the cause. It was reported to DNREC and UD and we understand they will investigate. Not sure what the outcome of this was. Regarding more ongoing and continuous measurements overall, Dave spoke with Ed Whereat from UD and he is going to provide some options for future consideration.

Discussed once again that the problem is also a factor of the poor circulation and lack of tidal flow, and we still need to address that somehow. The efforts to pursue Dredging that are now underway will help, but we continue to search for other solutions to improve this. We reviewed that Bubblers have been tried in Petherton without any improvement, as well as other techniques such as fountains like in ponds. Dave says fountains only improve oxygenation near them. We need to look for and review any studies related to oxygenators and find means to improve circulation. Committee reminded of the Tidal Pump option and all the work and studies performed. We will relook at this again, along with continuing to explore other options and report back.

Other Committee Business: On Aug 24th the Delaware Center for inland Bays had a Citizen Action committee meeting that Chris V. attended. Active participation of community and relevant groups involved in this. Chris V. has an introductory meeting scheduled with the new Executive Director Christophe Tulou and Community Program lead Lisa Swanger on October 5th at 2:30. John Beauregard will attend as well. The committee acknowledged that we need to interact with them more and reengage to improve coordination of efforts and in discussions with State and local government agencies.

Public Comment: Ray Saunders was in-person and raised a number of questions for the committee to look into, which we will and will address in subsequent communications:

- Are there records of wetlands removal with Town maintenance?
- Are the bulkheads being inspected annually? There are areas he sees in which their integrity is failing.
- Is there such thing as “porous” cement. Does code need to be updated to address rapid run off both in type and % impervious?
- The roads being drained into canals need to be addressed by the Town long term.
- Should the town purchase equipment that residents can sign out to help clean up their yard near the canal?
- How does a resident address concerns with downspouts or other drainage/canal issues? Chris V. reminded all to call Town Hall and Joe Hinks to report, or also can call South

Bethany police or DNREC if a more serious issue of spill or discharge into canal is observed.

The next meeting will be on October 23rd at 10:00am as a hybrid – in-person and Zoom. Members of the public are welcome. Reported by Chris Vanuga – Chairman