

South Bethany Canal Water Quality Committee
Meeting Conducted In-person and on Zoom
September 18, 2023

Committee Members present: Chris Vanuga, John Beauregard, Chris Carlyle, Bob Fisher, Gary Lessing, Joan Marini, Pete Trelenberg, Dave Wilson, John Roberts
Absent: Tim Shaw, Town Council Liaison
Town Council: Bob Biciocchi

1. The meeting was called to order at 10:04 am.
2. Minutes from the August 21, 2023, meeting were approved after minor adjustments.
3. Town Council Update (Chris V. provided update with support from Councilman Biciocchi)
 - a. Recommendations of CWQC to TC on approval for the canal maintenance contract with Envirotech were discussed. 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.
 - b. Bob Biciocchi said Council considers it a large amount of money and wants to consider the pilot project further regarding ending this effort (version 1.0) and/or moving toward Wetlands 2.0. The question was raised if the project could be done in house, with Town of South Bethany assets. Will be discussed below in Wetlands subcommittee report.
4. Canal Maintenance
 - a. Chris V. asked that the subcommittee start looking into the details of dredging. It was last done in 2008 and took a while for approvals and costs about \$300,000 and was "spot" dredging not comprehensive, so most like will cost more now due to larger scope and inflation.
 - b. Chris C. talked to Fenwick folks - Bill Rhymer will use their experience to help plan our endeavors. They have contacts established with 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 overlap. Association of Coastal Towns may also be a good group to help coordinating efforts.
 - c. Regarding costs of maintenance – Bill suggested working with the University of Del - GAP, Jenna Mayhew to help with grant writing to find some funding for maintenance. Chris V. and Tim will reach out to them.
 - d. Chris V. emphasized need to continue to investigate buy vs outsource for equipment and manpower for ongoing maintenance.
 - e. The subcommittee will be responsible oversight of Envirotech work and ultimate signoff before paying. Maureen and Town maintenance will determine the timing of the cleanup. We will continue to ask Town Council to increase efforts to enforce code to help with overhang of vegetation and other contributors to organic matter in Canals.
5. Code review & Education / Communications
 - a. Discussed addressing grandfathering of code with respect to vegetation overhanging and bulk-head breach, and ramp up inspection and enforcement of violations.

- b. Also continue Communication aspects of getting the word out to property owners to maintain vegetation and reduce pollutants to the canals (e.g., downspouts, fertilization).
6. Floating wetlands
- a. Gary provided an update on continued discussions of Floating wetlands 1.0 to 2.0 and whether to pull all, pull some, maintain some proceed 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.
 - b. There was a discussion in the meeting to clarify the facts about the wetlands.
 - i. Likely there is no direct effect of wetlands to increase oxygenation of the canal water. Indirect effects aren't clear.
 - ii. The wetlands are aesthetically beneficial to the town and provide a natural habitat for wildlife.
 - iii. There is evidence that they remove Nitrogen and Phosphorus that are contributing causes of Algae blooms, but the amounts are nominal relative to having a demonstrable impact to canal water quality.
 - c. Resolved to organize a comprehensive inventory of the number, location, and state of all floating wetlands in the 1.0 project this week. That will give us information to provide Council an updated recommendation this week on how to proceed, including providing their requested option of full removal costs. Gary will coordinate the establishment of this database with help from volunteers to do the surveying, and Chris V. will update the Town Council recommendation for review and consideration at next Town Council meeting on October 13th.
7. Grant funding
- a. Still awaiting final word on our HMGP grant no change but will move to Resilience committee.
 - b. GAP follow-up with UD GAP Program as previously mentioned.
 - c. 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. They want specific projects with specific goals and without risks of underfunding and risk of failing to complete projects.
8. Water quality & analysis
- a. 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. Dave measured DO2 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. The problem is also poor circulation, and we still need to address that somehow. We continue to search for solutions to improve this. Bubblers have been tried in Petherton without any improvement. Joan asked about fountains or other modalities. Dave says fountains only improve oxygenation near them. We need to look for and review any studies related oxygenators and find means to improve circulation.
9. Other Committee Business

- a. On Aug 24th 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. We need to interact with them more and reengage to improve coordination of efforts and in discussions with State and local government agencies.

10. Public Comment –

- a. Ray Saunders raised a number of questions for the committee to look into, which we will and will address in subsequent communications:
 - i. Are there records of wetlands removal with Town maintenance?
 - ii. Are the bulkheads being inspected annually? There are areas he sees in which their integrity is failing.
 - iii. Is there such thing as “porous” cement. Does code need to be updated to address rapid run off both in type and % impervious?
 - iv. The roads being drained into canals needs to be addressed by the Town long term.
 - v. Should the town purchase equipment that residents can sign out to help clean up their yard near the canal?
 - vi. How does a resident address concerns with downspouts or other drainage/canal issues? Reply by Chris is - to call Town Hall and Joe Hinks or also can call South Bethany police or DNREC if serious issue of spill or discharge into canal.
 - vii. Regarding inquiries about changing Code to stop some grandfathered issues, most grandfathered issues cannot be changed legally per Solicitor; however, we are still following up.

11. The next meeting will be on October 23rd at 10:00am as a hybrid – in-person and Zoom. Members of the public are welcome. The meeting was adjourned at 11:55 am.