

South Bethany Canal Water Quality Committee
Meetings are conducted in person and on Zoom
June 16, 2025

Committee Members Present: Chris Vanuga, Chair, John Beauregard, Town Council Liaison, Bob Biciocchi, John Roberts, Pete Trelenberg, Dave Wilson
Excused: Chris Carlyle

The meeting was called to order at 10:01 am.

Minutes from the May 20, 2025, meeting were approved.

Mr. Biciocchi gave his Town Council Liaison update. The next Town Council meeting has been rescheduled for June 27th at 9 a.m. There are no updates yet on the final approved Town Budget. Mr. Biciocchi held his regular update meeting with the town manager, discussing recurring maintenance and other matters.

The Town is still on the waitlist for additional algae harvesting by DNREC under their contract with Solitude. We only need to inquire about this if we notice more algae blooms or other significant buildup. Mr. Biciocchi will confirm this understanding with the Town Manager.

For the ongoing routine cleaning of the canals, the town manager is in discussions with Envirotech about a revised contract period from August through November. This would address late-season and fall demands primarily caused by organic debris such as leaves and pine needles; however, trash collection would continue as well. The committee remains concerned that the cleaning method previously used by this contractor is ineffective. We plan to discuss this further with the town manager to ensure the new contract provides clear guidance on improving the approach and overall effectiveness. The committee also wants to confirm that, during the interim period when the canals are not covered, the town's public works department will be able to remove trash and other significant organic buildup as needed. Committee members are available to volunteer their time to support these efforts in any way.

The SAV program will attempt another seed collection effort on Wednesday, June 18th, at 9:30 a.m. While they focus on key areas related to the history and current growth of widgeon grasses, residents are also welcome to collect seeds from other parts of the canal. A meeting with representatives of the three sponsoring organizations for the SAV program also took place on Thursday, May 22nd, at a highway canal end on Bayshore. Various topics were discussed, but overall, they aligned with concerns that the committee has observed and expressed over the near-term regarding the challenges with the canal system design and factors affecting our water quality, such as stormwater drainage. We were encouraged to pursue the next round of DNREC water quality grants in late summer for fall submission.

On June 2nd, a Zoom call was held with Solitude, our town manager, and representatives from this committee to continue the exploratory discussions on the potential use of new water treatment options for our canals. A key next step is for Solitude, along with the manufacturer of these treatment options, Oase, to meet with DNREC to determine how to get their approval for using these products in Delaware. The idea of a small, focused, and controlled pilot study in our canals was discussed again. Committee members expressed ongoing concerns about pursuing pilot studies of water treatment approaches, especially new ones that have not yet been tested in brackish water environments like ours and the surrounding Inland Bays. A cost-benefit analysis of these types of treatments versus vacuum dredging is also recognized as a key next step. We are awaiting follow-up and updates from Solitude.

Since the Town's budget has not been approved, we still lack an update on what will be included for the repairs and maintenance of the Route 1 rain gardens. Mr. Biciocchi will follow up with the town manager to obtain any further updates. The committee also raised the issue of missing codes and enforcement guidance in the Town Charter for controlling canal pollution of all types. Mr. Vanuga reminded the committee that we have resubmitted our suggested new codes for these and related matters to the new Chairman of the Code and Charter committee, Mr. Giler. We will follow up with him to get an update on when this might be discussed further.

Regarding support for hydrodynamic modeling, we are still waiting for a draft proposal from the professor and program leader at Rowan University, who previously worked at the University of Delaware and developed coastal models, including those for Lower Sussex and South Bethany, for the Delaware Department of Transportation. An essential part of the plan must include examples demonstrating where the model(s) have been effectively used in other similar canal or lagoon systems comparable to South Bethany.

Discussion of a few upcoming grant opportunities. For the DNREC water quality grant, we will wait for the new posting in late summer. Mr. Wilson shared a summary and potential framework for the Delmarva Power Sustainable Communities grant proposal. Mr. Beauregard committed to preparing the initial draft of the application and will circulate it to the committee for review. We can then decide whether to pursue it, and if so, we will need approval from the Town Council.

Mr. Wilson provided a summary of the latest water quality testing efforts. Overall, DO levels stay good for this time of year because of the weather pattern with fewer solar days and rain. This likely also helps keep algae levels and other organic growth minimal.

Public Comment: Mr. Ray Saunders addressed the committee with the following: 1) thanked the committee and its members for their efforts, 2) shared a recent stingray observed in canals, 3) noted that the algae cleaning was ineffective due to the technique used, 4) mentioned that he is collecting algae on his own around his property, and questioned whether this is something the town staff could do as well. Mr. Biciocchi will discuss it at his next meeting with the town manager.

The meeting was adjourned at 11:25 a.m.