
AmeriCorps Cape Cod Advisory Board

Meeting Minutes

I. Call to order

Rachel Hutchinson called to order the meeting of the AmeriCorps Cape Cod Advisory Board at 9:05 AM on Friday, May 1st, 2020 *at* the Harborview Room in the Barnstable County Complex.

II. Attendance

Members Present:

Brian Sharp, John Ohman, Heather McElroy, Timothy Famulare, Rachel Hutchinson, Jessica Whritenour, Lauren McKean, Michael Lach, Steve McKenna

Members Absent:

Nina Coleman, Phillip Burt, Hillary Greenberg-Lemos, Ryan Burch, Nancy Church, Ronald Beaty

Staff Present:

Kayla Baier: Program Coordinator

Meredith Ballinger: Program Specialist

Connor O'Brien: Pocasset House and The Ranch House Program Supervisor

Phoebe Plank: Lebac House Program Supervisor

III. Public Comment- NA



IV. Approval of Minutes

- a. Mr. Ohman motioned to approve the September 6th minutes and Ms. McElroy seconded.
- b. Mr. Ohman motioned to approve January 24th minutes and Mr. Famulare seconded.
- c. Ms. McElroy mentioned that the Commission recently remotely swore in 2 members of a committee with Janice O'Connel noting that Ms. McKean can set up with Janice to make that happen so that she can vote on this board. Ms. McKean doesn't think she can be voting on Boards because she works for the National Seashore and it may be a conflict of interest.

V. AmeriCorps Staff Updates

1. Kayla Baier- Program Coordinator Updates:
 - i. Ms. Baier updated the board that the winter retreat was held at Camp Burgess the last week of January. It was a successful retreat with the opportunity for professional development and teambuilding.
 - ii. Ms. Baier gave an update on the programmatic changes as AmeriCorps Cape Cod navigated the pandemic.
 - (1) March 13th: In anticipation of COVID-19 AmeriCorps Cape Cod sent out their first round of policies regarding teleserving in case a partner site shut down its physical location. Members were still allowed to serve in person at the service sites.
 - (2) March 16th: AmeriCorps Cape Cod staff began telecommuting.
 - (3) March 23rd: Governor Baker issued his Stay-At-Home advisory for the state that included closing all non-essential businesses – intending to be lifted April 9th. At this time all AmeriCorps Cape Cod members were tele serving from their respective houses for Individual Placements and group service projects were being scheduled



on a case by case basis due to the uncertainty of what service was considered essential vs nonessential.

- (4) End of March: AmeriCorps Cape Cod received word that a member was displaying symptoms consistent with COVID-19 and all three houses were immediately put into quarantine until April 9th. All service partners in contact with AmeriCorps Cape Cod members were notified. One member in Pocasset tested positive, but the other two houses ended up being fine. Ms. Baier and Ms. Ballinger picked up necessary groceries and prescriptions for the members during this time. Pocasset is still under quarantine until May 4th, under the advisement of medical professionals.
- (5) The Stay-At-Home advisory was extended until May 4th and then May 18th. During this time, the staff has been able to weed through and get some clarity about what service members can safely do.
 - (a) On April 21st a service partner let us know that "Workers who support the operation, maintenance and public safety of parks, forests, reservations, conservation restrictions, wildlife management areas, water supply protection lands, and other critical natural resources and open space for passive recreation." This allows us to help out with more efforts here on the Cape.
- (6) Status of Members: Due to the nature of AmeriCorps Cape Cod's Covid-19 policies some members felt they needed to be with their families during this time. Members had the choice of exiting the program early, telecommuting outside the residence, or riding it out with us until July.
 - (a) The federal government passed CARE's ACT which says members who are currently serving are unable to hit their 1700 hours due to COVID-19 can still receive their entire award. Ms. Baier said this is good news because we foresee many of our members not reaching the full 1700 hours.
 - (b) Five Upper Cape members have left the program residences and teleserving from their own homes.
 - (c) Ms. Baier said there are 15 members still here in program housing on the Cape.



- (7) Another result of the Stay-At-Home order is adjusting how AmeriCorps Cape Cod tracks back end paperwork such as the member's service hours. CNCS is about documenting how the members teleserve.
 - (a) AmeriCorps Cape Cod created a google monthly log for IP service partners to easily sign off on and a Formstack log for the supervisors to sign off on (this replaced their monthly IP Log and reinforced their timesheets).
 - (b) Ms. Baier said we are continuing to receive recommendations from MSA and may need to adjust IP reporting methods accordingly.
- (8) Ms. Baier noted MSA's Program and Fiscal site visit were supposed to be in Mid-March but now has been moved back to an undetermined date.
 - (a) Ms. Baier said that while there is uncertainty regarding the future, the advice we have received from MSA is to continue to recruit as normal because MSA has found it is easier to push back the start date, then scramble to fill spots. All offers made to incoming AmeriCorps members are contingent upon grant funding and COVID-19 recommendations.
- (9) Ms. Baier said that to date 5 members have accepted for the upcoming program year, and a couple more offers out there with 4-5 interviews in the wings.
 - (a) Mr. Sharp asked are any of the members applying from this year's corps. Ms. Baier said no.
 - (b) Ms. Hutchinson noted this year should bring in an interesting batch of applicants
 - (c) Ms. Baier said applicants have been much more responsive this year and we hope to continue to get more local applicants

VI. Meredith Ballinger- Program Specialist Updates

1. Ms. Ballinger updated the board that despite not having an official placement with the Red Cross this year, the 3 members serving with the BCREPC put together a successful Scout Fair for the Red Cross on February 8th.
2. Ms. Ballinger reported that mid-year Individual Placement site visits were completed by herself and Ms. Baier from mid-February to early- March. The visits were very positive



with only a few issues that needed to be addressed. For example-better, the communication needed between the member and the service partner and vice versa tends to be the most common concern heard.

3. Ms. Ballinger informed the board that before the Stay-At-Home order AmeriCorps Cape Cod tried to stay prepared for a seamless transition for teleserving when the time came by creating an IP form that service partners could outline what can be done from home for their member. This also allowed staff to see which members did not have IP work to do from home.
 - i. Ms. Ballinger noted that because we have 5 members serving outside the program residences, it is important to recognize that the ability for them to maintain enough service hours to stay in the program are dependent on their ability to complete Individual Placement projects from their own home. This is largely because they can't participate in group service projects or any type of outdoor service where they are staying.
4. Ms. Ballinger shared examples of what kind of service members are doing at their Individual Placements while teleserving.
 - i. **Kate Witte:** Kate is currently serving with the Town of Chatham Natural Resource Department and the Chatham Conservation Foundation. Kate has been serving with the town and the foundation to assist with property boundary marking to assist with the preservation of open space for the public benefit. Kate has been collaborating with her service partners to use the data points she has collected during her service year to create maps for baseline reporting of the conservation properties she has been surveying over the course of her service year.
 - ii. **Hannah Schmidt:** Hannah is currently serving with the Harwich Conservation Trust and the Town of Harwich Conservation and Cemetery Department. Hannah's service partner at the Town of Harwich Cemetery Department, Robbin Kelly, has expressed that Hannah has been an invaluable resource the past few weeks to help assist getting the



Marceline Arboretum, located at Long Pond cemetery, ready to be a certified arboretum later on this year. Hannah organized a service opportunity for local artists and her fellow corps members to sketch scientific leaf illustrations to be used for tree identification in the Arboretum to compliment the tree descriptions Hannah wrote up for the Arboretum certification process. She also has been creating environmental education materials that will be used by school groups when they visit the Arboretum.

5. Ms. Ballinger shared that about half of the current members signed up to help us review IP proposals for next year. They will be using the same Formstack form the program uses to submit their feedback.

VII. Phoebe Plank: Lebac Program Supervisor:

1. Service Highlights:
 - i. Ms. Plank updated the board that AmeriCorps members participated in 11 Wetfests between January and March, educating hundreds of middle schoolers across the cape on the importance of protecting the aquifer and how to be a “groundwater guardian”.
 - ii. Ms. Plank shared that members from all three houses participated in multiple advanced chainsaw trainings with CCNS and conducted pile burns to create game bird habitat.
2. Pre-COVID-19 highlights
 - i. In March, ACC Lower Cape members participated in pile burns to remove invasive plants, white poplar trees, and dead red cedar trees with Harwich Conservation Trust and the Town of Harwich.
 - ii. ACC Lower Cape members installed miles of symbolic shorebird fencing for the Town of Orleans and MA Audubon Coastal Water Bird Division (March and April 2020).
3. Post COVID-19 highlights



- i. Ms. Plank shared that ACC Lower Cape members removed ½ acre of invasive plants from Marceline Arboretum in Harwich. Members followed safety protocol by wearing masks and keeping the group size under 10 people.
 - ii. ACC Lower Cape members assisted the Wellfleet Shellfish Department in multiple projects such as reorganizing, building propagation gear, and stuffing cultch bags. Some of these projects were done from the safety of the Lehac house.
 - iii. ACC Lower Cape members helped maintain multiple walking trails for the Brewster DNR.
4. Community Involvement:
- i. Ms. Plank shared that ACC Lower Cape and Upper Cape members attended the annual Southeast Mass Land Trust Convocation at Upper Cape Technical School in February.
 - ii. AmeriCorps Cape Cod Lower Cape and Upper Cape members helped set up and facilitate Harwich Conservation Trust’s annual Live Owl Show in March, Pre-COVID.
5. House Updates:
- i. In January and February, the control panel for the heating units in the house was replaced twice due to water damage.
 - ii. Ms. Plank shared that in February, the radiators in the one of the upstairs bedrooms were capped off to reduce the temperature in the room.
 - iii. Ms. Plank said that members worked together while they were serving from the Lehac house to make renovations to the garden. Garden updates included: weeding, new fencing installed, created a new gate out of a wooden pallet.
 - iv. Ms. Plank reported that members made landscape improvements to the property. This included cleaning up the fire pit area and removal of invasive pitch pine saplings on the property previously approved by CCNS.



- v. Members completed multiple indoor house projects including house painting, installation of new door hardware, general organization, and maintenance of household tools and appliances.

VIII. Connor O'Brien -Upper Cape Program Supervisor:

1. Pre COVID-19 Highlights

- i. Mr. O'Brien shared that over 1200 students participated in Wetfest this year.
- ii. Mr. O'Brien said AmeriCorps Cape Cod partnered with the Mashpee Wampanoag Tribal AmeriCorps on a multitude of projects including the Mashpee River Herring Run Cleanup, Mashpee trail maintenance, and shorebird fencing with the Coastal Waterbird division of Mass Audubon.
- iii. The Upper Cape members cleared ½ acre of trees and brush at the Sandwich Talbot's Point trailhead providing more parking for conservation use.
- iv. Mr. O'Brien shared that the Upper Houses cleared ½ acre of invasive sweet gale from the side of the Quashnet River in Mashpee, promoting better river conditions for native Brook Trout.

2. Post COVID-19 Highlights

- i. Upper Cape Members telecommuting to their Individual Placements have been doing projects such as creating art for signage, developing programming, reviewing conservation restrictions for town properties, and developing a call list for seniors to offer services during COVID-19 restrictions.
- ii. Mr. O'Brien said that the Upper Houses have partnered with Falmouth Shellfish to build oyster grow bags and cultch bags at each program residence. Members from each house have only been serving with their respective housemates. Pocasset house members have completed 180 grow bags. Ranch house members have filled over 200 cultch bags.



- iii. Ranch House is back in the field and has been assisting MA Audubon with shorebird fencing and Dennis DNR with herring run maintenance.
 - iv. Mr. O'Brien said the Pocasset House recently partnered with the Friends of the Mashpee Wildlife Refuge to build a trailhead signage kiosk at the house.
3. Community Involvement:
- i. Kelsey Leahy with Dennis DNR and DCLT assisted with expert talks on Mosquitos and Right Whales which other members attended.
 - ii. Sarah Paulson, serving with Falmouth Shellfish developed a senior call list and materials to connect Falmouth seniors with services available in the community and offer support with weekly phone calls
4. House Updates:
- i. Mr. O'Brien shared that significant landscape improvements were made at the Pocasset and Ranch houses:
 - (1) Pocasset house built raised bed gardens and began planting seeds in them.
 - (2) Gardens around the house were lined with decorative stone.
 - ii. Mr. O'Brien shared that we need to consider getting new windows at the Pocasset House.

IX. Board Member Updates:

- 1. Mr. Lach thanked everyone for being adaptable and patient during this first virtual AmeriCorps Cape Cod Board meeting
- 2. Ms. Hutchinson noted that at the last Shellfish Advisory meeting she noticed every town is treating COVID-19 differently. As a result, the Shellfish constables wanted to create a letter or document to create a uniform policy across all the towns. She suggested that AmeriCorps



Cape Cod could do the same thing and get in writing what each town is doing in terms of what each employee can/ can't do in the natural resource field.

3. Mr. Ohman shared that Governor Baker is looking for creative and out of the box thinking solutions for opening up the government and AmeriCorps Cape Cod could provide suggestions for the state advisory board.
4. Mr. Sharpe shared that IFAW has a zoom account so he could set up the meeting if AmeriCorps Cape Cod was not able to have the board meeting set up via Zoom.

X. Upcoming Meetings

1. July 10th, 2020 – AmeriCorps Cape Cod Advisory Board Meeting

XI. Adjournment: Rachel Hutchinson motioned to adjourn at 9:49 am. Ms. McElroy approved and Mr. Sharp seconded the motion.

