

2023 Annual Report to the Board of Directors
Environment & Natural Assets Advisory Committee (ENA)

Section 1. Committee Member and Status of Terms:

<u>Name</u>	<u>Status</u>	<u>Comments</u>
Sharon Santacroce	2 nd term expires 10/16/23	Chair; retiring
Karen Baldwin	1 st term expires 12/17/25	
Patricia Benner	1 st term expires 3/18/25	
Karen Krun Detter	2 nd term expires 11/20/23	To renew
Patricia Gamby	1 st term expires 7/27/25	
Patricia Garcia	1 st term expires 9/24/25	
John Maziuk	1 st term expires 2/18/25	
Anne O'Connell	2 nd term expires 11/20/23	To renew
Timothy Peck	1 st term expires 10/15/25	Proposed Chair

Section 2. Section of Major Activities during Reporting Period 2023:

- Green Street articles were prepared and submitted for quarterly Ocean Pines (OP) newsletters.
- We continued to raise awareness on ghost gear left at South Gate Pond after fishing events.
- Two committee members as volunteers participated in Bay Day held by Maryland Coastal Bays (MCB) on May 17th. Assistance was also provided to Protectors of the St. Martin River during this event. Not officially representing the ENA Committee, Sharon & Anne had a table where they provided information on geese. Patricia Garcia staffed a station for MCBP. Other members volunteered on occasion.
- Committee members attended the Teach a Kid to Fish Day on June 17th, which was successful to discuss the importance of clearing fishing gear to protect the environment. At this event, training was provided by the National Center for Coastal Service for phytoplankton identification using microscopes. Such identification techniques can be used to assess pond water quality in OP.
- Concerning general concerns that ENA had on Ocean Pines conditions, ENA sent several e-mails to info@oceanpines.org on various subjects: trees cut down on the east side of South Pond essentially evicting turtles from their landing with a request that a log be placed in the water in the same area to restore this habitat; our recommendations to help control swale flooding issues since the Board removed from the 2023-2024 budget a truck that collects leaves; the process to manage homeowner disposal of leaves at the Public Works facility helps to encourage leaf removal from properties and swales; clearing debris and overgrowth from the outfall channel that drains South Gate Pond to Manklin Creek, which tends to block natural fish spawning in the pond; based on a survey of the Rt.90 pond trail, we made site observations on what needs to be repaired by Public Works. For example, on the foot bridge across a stream some boards are loose and rotted, and a tree is falling down across the trail.
- Canada goose egg addling was recommended to OPA to be performed in spring 2023. This action if followed will greatly cut back on the growing goose population. It appears that OPA did not follow up with this action, which will result in increasing goose population.

- After considerable research concerning proposed buffer zones at South Gate Pond to prevent erosion and mitigate resident geese nesting, a local company was identified to plant indigenous plants and vegetation to serve as buffers around the pond. Ongoing erosion especially on the east shoreline of the pond is significant and getting close to Ocean Parkway. Placement of large stone along this shoreline does not mitigate the erosion, but wave action around the rocks tends to accelerate erosion. Extensive research was completed on shoreline remediation methods. A representative from SOLITUDE Lake Management gave a presentation to the committee that reviewed their proprietary technique to stabilize pond or lake shorelines using a bioengineered, soil filled fabric method called SOX Erosion Solutions.
- A representative from Tributaries gave a presentation to the committee that reviewed his expertise on native habitat planting and shoreline stabilization and the work this company is currently performing for The Parke community on a regular basis. Geese tend to avoid such native plantings. This company gave a presentation on ecological restoration projects around ponds in the local area. This work includes methods to mitigate geese gathering around ponds and to manage bank erosion problems. They described how typical tree rooting systems do not provide effective erosion protection and with their shading tend to limit more dense undergrowth on the shoreline. It is the dense grasses and shrubs that provide more effective bank stabilization. Geese tend to gather toward and wear down short grass borders and avoid tall grasses due to their natural instincts to avoid predators. Therefore, creating a riparian buffer with taller grasses offers multiple benefits to pond shorelines. They noted that such riparian buffers could be modified to allow access for pond fishing. Planning for native plant installation around the South Gate pond will need to consider access for the frequent fishing in the pond. Therefore, plantings cannot be continuous, but must include access lanes for fishing patrons.
- In September 2023, a grant was approved by MCB for a planning and design study for the shoreline protection project. Final approval must now proceed to the U.S. EPA to obtain federal funding.
- Concerning control of geese and duck movement across roads adjacent to the South Pond, the committee completed extensive research on use of mobile “sandwich” signs as effective and safe devices to use as warnings to drivers on the roads. This research included contacting Maryland DOT and Worcester County Public Works on allowing such signs adjacent to the roads. The committee worked with OP Public Works to have signs manufactured and installed around the pond.
- Concerning maintenance of the duck signs, a plan needs to be developed to make certain these signs stay upright and in correct locations when they may be knocked down or misplaced. The committee concluded that keeping the signs year-round around the pond would be cost-effective and practical to avoid time and costs to move and store the signs each year. The alternative is to store the signs during the winter months when geese populations are very low.
- The committee surveyed sediment and erosion controls for the construction of the new Royal Farms gas station on Racetrack Road and potential runoff impacts to the South Gate pond. The survey indicated that the controls were complete with no issues of concern.
- The committee researched current options to widen Rt.90 through Ocean Pines. We reviewed these options to assess potential impacts to the OP properties. One observation was that added runoff from the widening of the roadway will need structures to ensure it does not impact flooding inside of OP.
- The ENA committee consulted on installing a bee house adjacent to the OP Gardening Area at the request by OP management to discuss if the type of bees such as Masons pose a threat to humans. We were in agreement that they are harmless and will be very beneficial to the gardens for pollination. It is noted that the bee house was not installed due to objections by a resident over the location of a playground located farther away where children play.
- The committee researched the overall tree cutting permit process in Ocean Pines and County regulations that concerned tree cutting adjacent to waterways, as required under the state Critical Areas law. A report was completed that summarized the current process, which was followed by another committee statement

emphasizing directly observed practices of clear cutting on new home lots. The committee found that there appeared to be some lack of control of tree cutting as intended by established Ocean Pines guidelines where new building lots in all areas of Ocean Pines were commonly clear cut of trees and tree cutting around existing homes seemed to be increasing at a rate much higher than several years ago. Worcester County regulations essentially only cover lots within 100 feet of a waterway, but not inland lots. The Ocean Pines tree removal guidelines were designed to control tree removal operations in all lots in a strict manner beyond County requirements to preserve a highly significant feature of our community. ARC guidelines include statements that specifically address this issue. The new tree cutting permit fee is set at \$113, but has not resulted in a decrease in permit applications as noted by Public Works. The fee can cover a single tree removal and is not dependent on number of trees cut.

- Modifying the tree cutting practice from practices followed several years ago is a significant change to the legacy of Ocean Pines and long-term vision of our community that was established over 50 years ago. The excessive cutting of trees destroys existing habitats significantly contributes to conditions of flooding in OP, and degrades runoff into OP canals. Considering that current patterns of rainfall include increasing high rainfall storm events, the removal of trees and increasing paved areas will exponentially increase flooding in OP. The long-term impacts of this problem will translate to very high infrastructure costs due to flooding damage and mitigation efforts. In addition, water quality in the canals will decline.
- Related to preservation of trees, the ENA Committee submitted a request to OP to plant new trees within White Horse Park to replace the numerous trees that have been and will be cut down in this park.
- The committee contacted the OP Marine Committee to coordinate oyster farming by canal property owners in OP.
- The committee developed a plan to install educational nature signs around the Rt.90 pond to inform users of the walking paths on the natural habitat of Ocean Pines and preservation of wildlife. We obtained a boundary survey of the pond to assess possible sign locations within the OP property.
- The committee discussed a fishing line disposal tube, a prototype manufactured by a committee member, which could be installed at certain points around the South and North gate ponds to allow anglers to dispose of discarded gear. The tubes could be emptied at the end of the season for proper disposal. The committee submitted a request for approval to install tubes at the ponds. At the Teach a Kid to Fish Day, anglers at the ponds were impressed with the monofilament container and recommended two be installed at the South Pond. We passed this recommendation to the Board. We are trying to raise the level of awareness at these events to teach kids to “Clear Your Gear” and thus, save our wildlife from becoming entangled. Monofilament collected should be burned or cut into 6-inch strips and disposed in the trash.
- The committee discussed installation of turtle sanctuaries in the ponds. Several residents made recommendations to ENA, and those were shared and discussed, which typically are small platforms set up in the ponds. This is an ongoing issue that the committee will research to develop a plan to implement.
- The committee discussed the use of plastic bags from area stores and potential impacts to the environment. The committee has a list of a few MD counties that charge for plastic bags that (in time) will most likely be banned entirely. It was discussed that in Delaware, stores give out paper bags or ask for recycled bags to be used for groceries.
- The committee has observed the dumping of grass clippings and cigarette butts into canals and how that is causing algae blooms and contributing to contamination of our waterways. The committee previously wrote a Green Street article several newsletters ago addressing this issue and voicing our concerns. Our committee is trying to continue public communications that tossing yard waste into the canals is harmful to OP waterways.

Section 3. Problems Encountered and Assistance Required:

Our expectations are that assistance will be rendered as needed on our future endeavors and to address documented ongoing concerns over OP natural assets. We found use of info@oceanpines.org an effective method to communicate issues to the OP Association. However, improvement is needed in feedback from the OPA back to the committee on our submitted issues of concern. Several recommendations communicated during the year received no response from OPA other than confirmation the communications were received. Communications must be improved if ENA can have any impact to improving OP natural resources.

Section 4. Request for items to be included in the next OPA budget:

- Costs for the continuation of our wildlife management projects including the buffer zone plans and planting of native vegetation. As discussed above, such plantings will mitigate geese gathering around the ponds.
- Costs for turtle sanctuary platforms.
- Costs to complete educational signs to be placed around the Route 90 pond trail.
- Costs to implement the shoreline protection methods on eroding shorelines of South Gate Pond.
- Costs to plant native trees within the common areas of OP.

Section 5. Recommendations for Board Action:

We look forward to the Board's support as we continue working cooperatively with Public Works and Parks & Recreation OP personnel to help us complete several projects. If Public Works plans to take actions around the OP ponds where native habitat will be disturbed especially in and around ponds, we request that they contact the ENA Committee for consultation. Such consultation may help to reduce long-term costs to restore or enhance these assets. Other more direct communications with ENA on issues of concern will expedite recommendations.

Section 6. Recommendations for committee work in 2023 - 2024:

- Continue support of the annual Bay Days organized by Maryland Coastal Bays.
- Continue work to enhance our environmental assets such as the Route 90 pond and South Gate Pond.
- Develop a program of environmental education for the residents of OP.
- Continue our projects surrounding the humane management of wildlife including buffer zones around the South Pond that will also help stop erosion issues and mitigate geese gathering. ENA will continue to recommend egg adding to control goose population.
- Continue our efforts on saving the shad and keeping their migration route clear to the St. Martin River. This issue includes clearing of drainage culverts.
- Potentially pursue clam propagation and seeding in local waterways. The good news is that the Isle of Wight Bay clams are at a historic high because dredging is currently not being conducted.
- Continue efforts to help stop the decline in water quality of our waterways with emphasis on the St. Martin River.
- Participate in annual fishing events at OP by sharing educational materials on the importance of clearing fishing gear (hooks, monofilament lines, bobbers, et al) from the pond area.
- Continue our relationships with the Assateague Coastal Trust, the Maryland Coastal Bays Program, and National Center for Coastal Service.
- The ENA Committee found that there was some overlap of responsibility on the natural assets of OP including the Marine Activities, Architectural Review, and Recreation and Parks committees. Examples include improvements to walking trails, improvement of water quality in the canals, and process to approve tree cutting permits. It would be beneficial if there was periodic communication between these committees and the Board to help address common issues of concern.