

Village of Ocean Beach Environmental Commission (VOBEC)
Annual Report to the Board of Trustees
31 January, 2024

As required by the by-laws of the Village of Ocean Beach, this Commission is submitting an annual report for the year 2023. This supplements our minutes, which have been forwarded to the Board of Trustees, Mayor Jim Mallot, and Joe DiFrancisco on a regular basis.

The Commission

Commission Members: Mayor Mallott made the following appointments to the commission in July 2023:

Camille Guigliano (Co-Chair)
Beth Jacobwitz (Secretary)
David Lieber (Co-Chair)
David Lipsky
Lisa Lowe
Judy Steinman
Emily Wicks

Number of meetings held in 2023: 16

Dates of meetings: 23 Jan, 21 Feb, 21 Mar, 19 Apr, 16 May, 23 May, 31 May, 14 June, 26 June, 9 July, 23 July, 06 Aug, 06 Sept, 27 Sept, 28 Oct, 14 Nov

Minutes of these meetings are filed in the Village Office.

Accomplishments

Renewing VOBEC's Ongoing Commitment to the Village

David Lieber and Camille Guigliano met with the Village Clerk, Joe DiFrancisco, early in the season to discuss various topics. Out of these meetings, and with the Mayor's approval, it was agreed that he would act as VOBEC's liaison with the Mayor and Board.

Communication

In our effort to educate and communicate with the public, we sent out seven newsletters on various topics to our mailing list:

- VOBEC Review,
- Migratory Paths around Fire Island,
- 2023 Environmental Awareness Day,
- Announcing a NYSERDA Webinar,
- Distributing a recording of the Shark EAD presentation,
- Dune Day 2023,
- Draft Tree Legislation.

We have also maintained and updated our website.

We also respond, as needed, when members of the community send us emails with ideas, questions, or issues.

On the Ocean Beach Bulletin Board, VOBEC maintains a “Fauna and Flora” page, whereby members of the community can crowd source the identification of various fauna and flora observed in Fire Island.

Oyster Shell Recovery

After a pilot in 2022, whereby VOBEC engaged one restaurant to collect oyster shells, the program was expanded to enlisting seven restaurants to collect oyster shells daily, store them, and deliver them weekly via ferry to the mainland, where they would be picked up by Half Shells for Habitat. This group then processes these shells and returns them to Long Island's estuarine waters through oyster restoration and other habitat improvement projects. Jennifer Moritz was essential in coordinating with the restaurants in Ocean Beach.

Collaboration with the Youth Group

In the spring, the Ocean Beach Youth Group reached out to us to collaborate on a composting project. VOBEC was involved in all aspects of the project: brainstorming to create lesson plans for each week, assisting the YG in choosing and constructing the composting bins, working with the campers to learn about different composting materials, creating games to facilitate learning, and demonstrating to campers three different composting styles.

Seventeenth Annual Environmental Awareness Day

In response to increased shark sightings off our coast, VOBEC arranged for Dr. Merry Camhi to discuss sharks in our waters. She is the Director of a joint program of the Wildlife Conservation Society's (WCS) New York Aquarium and the Global Marine Program that seeks to raise public awareness and drive action to conserve threatened sharks and other marine life in the New York region. She discussed misconceptions about sharks and addressed their conservation needs to ensure that our waters remain healthy and safe for sharks and humans alike. Jill Weinstein was invaluable in introducing Dr. Camhi to VOBEC.

Beach Management: Beach Clean-up

We attempted to participate in the annual Ocean Conservancy International Coastal Clean-up on September 16th. Unfortunately, due to inclement weather, both that original date and the rescheduled date the following weekend needed to be canceled.

Beach Management: Dune Day

We planned and executed our second annual volunteer dune planting event on 04 November. Over 30 volunteers worked tirelessly during the day to plant 5,120 plants on the dunes one block east and west of Bungalow Walk. The professional assistance of Neptune Nurseries was invaluable.

Tree Legislation

In response to vocal community feedback, VOBEC was able to generate legislation to minimize trees being arbitrarily cut down. This was achieved by retaining the pro-bono legal services of John Armantano from Ferrell Fritz law firm. Through his efforts, VOBEC was able to submit Local Law 6, commonly known as the “Tree Legislation” to the Board, which was approved and added to the code on 16 December.

Goals for 2024

We plan to:

- Strengthen our relationship with the Village administration, FINS, other Fire Island communities, the OB lifeguards, the Ocean Beach carter, and various community groups.
- Continue and expand our ongoing projects:
 - 18th Annual Environmental Awareness Day
 - 38th International Beach Clean-up, currently planned for September 2024
 - 3rd Annual Dune Day currently planned for November 2024
 - Oyster Shell Recovery
- Begin new projects:
 - Develop a Natural Resources Inventory Map.
 - Research the feasibility of bringing composting to residents of Ocean Beach.
 - Develop a comprehensive beach management plan.
 - Work with the Chamber of Commerce to place recycling bins next to every trash bin in the Village.
 - Plan and execute a tree planting event for the community, tentatively scheduled to coincide with Arbor Day, Earth Day, or Mothers’ Day.
 - Assisting in the submission of a grant from the DEC for a Recycling Coordinator.
- Support the Mayor, Board, our liaison, and the community as needed.

Respectfully submitted,

Camille Guigliano
Co-chair of VOBEC