

Preserving the Point

Common Fence Point Preparedness Committee Newsletter

March 2024

CFP Preparedness Committee

The Common Fence Point Preparedness Committee (CFPPC) is a volunteer group formed in July 2019 with the vision that Common Fence Point would be prepared for and resilient to acute hazards such as flooding from intense storms and extreme tides as well as impacts of long-term climate change, such as sea level rise and the erosion of our coast. The CFPPC's mission is to:

- **Connect** CFP community members and respond to their needs.
- **Share** pertinent information and resources.
- **Promote** activities that enhance preparedness and resilience to hazards threatening the community, including those resulting from long-term climate change.
- **Coordinate** with Town, State, and other stakeholders.

Consider **joining** a CFPPC meeting, which are typically held on the first Wednesday of the month at 6:30 PM. Meetings occur in the CFP Arts Community Wellness Center at 933 Anthony Road, Portsmouth, RI and virtually on Zoom. Contact us to be added to the mailing list.



For more information

Email: cfp-prep@commonfencepoint.org

Website: commonfencepoint.org/prepare

Introduction to the Newsletter

The CFPPC aims to share information with CFP residents that:

- Highlights the CFPPC's past projects and accomplishments.
- Informs residents of the status of current projects and future endeavors that affect the shore and coastal areas, so that they may become involved.
- Provides education and information on best practices to effectively address coastal living.
- Illuminates the history of CFP.

In this edition, you will find:

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Director's/Trustee's Corner

There are 42 acres of land, largely near the coastline, to manage on Common Fence Point. The land is held in trust for the benefit of the community and its residents under the Common Fence Point Association - CFPA - (formally known as the Common Fence Point Improvement Association - CFPIA) deed, which was written in 1926. Five volunteer Directors (formally known as Trustees) have advocated for and protected the land for the community's use and enjoyment since then. Recent efforts include:

- The Directors have begun a project to put up a full-size aerial map in CFP hall showing all the public and CFP Right of Ways, paper roads, etc. for residents to benefit from. A tour of CFP Trust lands will happen late winter or early spring.
- There was one rogue sailboat near Taylor's Point illegally on someone else's mooring. It was removed in January 2024. The Town will apply for a grant from DEM for reimbursement.
- Directors are trying to avoid fines being levied against the CFPA for the actions of individuals. When fines are levied against the CFPA, all residents bear the cost. Directors sent "Cease and Desist" letters to two residents for violating CRMC coastal regulations last year. CFP residents are encouraged to report these issues, including unauthorized cutting and dumping, to the Directors. Directors will notify the CRMC and/or RIDEM, including the name and address of the property owner.

Project Updates

Common Fence Point Pond *Phragmites* (Common reed) Removal

By Barbara Jones

The removal of *Phragmites* (or common reed) from the pond (across from the CFP Wellness Center) has been started several times over the years but has never been successful. Many people in the neighborhood have expressed interest in restoring the pond to its 1950s state, where ice skating and even boating took place.

CFPA started working with Solitude Lake Management in the summer of 2021 with the intent of removing the reeds. The price kept rising and by the end of the summer, the CFPA board decided to table the project. Since then, we have learned that the street runoff issue is a key issue affecting both the water quality of the pond and the surrounding *Phragmites*.

We have been in touch with the Portsmouth Conservation Commission and the RI Infrastructure Bank, with the hope of securing grant money. We plan to meet with the Portsmouth DPW to discuss this project and obtain recommendations for an engineering company to make suggestions on the best way to address the runoff. Once we have that information and an estimated cost, we can apply for grants.



Please do not mow or remove the *Phragmites* yourself – removal requires permits from the RI Coastal Resources Management Council (CRMC).



Phragmites limits the use of CFP Pond (photo by RI Sea Grant).



A narrowed channel in Taylor's Point Saltmarsh limits free water flow, impacting the marsh (photo by RI Sea Grant).

Taylor's Point Saltmarsh Restoration

By Nancy Arruda Nary

In 1990, the Common Fence Point Association began a salt marsh restoration project. The goal was to mitigate flooding, dumping, and fires on the 5.14 acre site at the Taylor's Point saltmarsh. Mil Kinsella (CFPA) was a driving force behind the saltmarsh restoration, along with Federal, State, and local partners. The U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service started the project with a \$10,000.00 seed grant. The final cost of the restoration was \$83,000.00, all of which was raised through grants. There was no cost to the CFPA except for volunteer labor. It was the first saltmarsh restoration completed in the State.

A channel was created to drain Taylor's Point saltmarsh (located at the end of Attleboro Ave. and Rhode Island Blvd. facing the Mt. Hope Bridge), and it is the lifeline of the Taylor's Point saltmarsh. The channel needs to be regularly cleared to maintain its utility and the health of the saltmarsh. All necessary permits have been secured and the target date for the dredging project to begin is March or April 2024. Portsmouth DPW will provide the equipment operator and the State of Rhode Island will provide the grader. Chuck Miksis is the point person, alongside Jeff Prater (Shoreline Education Preservation and Action Committee /SEPAC). Wenley Ferguson (Save the Bay), Brian Woodward (Portsmouth DPW), and Pam Rubinoff (URI Coastal Resources Center and RI Sea Grant) are also involved.

Restoring Common Fence Point's Shoreline, One Plant at a Time

By Wenley Ferguson, Save The Bay

On a sweltry day in the summer of 2020, I had the pleasure of meeting members of the Common Fence Point Preparedness Committee (CFPPC) to discuss strategies to make CFP's shoreline more resilient to climate change and specifically erosion. One of the target areas was the strip of grass between Common Fence Boulevard and an eroding bank along Mount Hope Bay. The members were eager to learn and receive advice on ways to create a buffer of native plants to help make the shoreline less prone to erosion.

That site visit led to Save The Bay collaborating with the CFPPC and URI's Coastal Resources Center on a grant for funding from the state's Coastal and Estuarine Habitat Restoration Trust Fund. With funding secured, Save The Bay developed a planting plan with neighbors Jeff Prater and Kary Miksis. For the first phase in the spring of 2021, we decided to do a pilot project to assess what plants could tolerate the conditions of the dry and windswept site.

On a beautiful late May afternoon, a corps of hardy neighbors with tools in hand dug up the dense sod and planted dozens of small plugs of native grasses and two kinds of salt tolerant shrubs, beach plums and Virginia rose. Within a couple of hours, the lawn had been transformed into a new bed of small but hardy native plants. The care of the plants by neighbors Kary and Chuck Miksis and Jeff and Stacy Prater, as well as a wet summer, allowed the spindly plants to thrive and even produce rose hips and beach plums by the first fall.

With our pilot planting project a success, we continued in September at two sites adjacent to the area we planted in the spring and in a low-lying area further east that floods during intense rain events and coastal storms. Scott Boyd offered his rototiller, the sod was broken up into soil, and the planting took much less effort than in the spring. We chose more salt tolerant plants for the lower area including the salt tolerant seaside goldenrod. The goldenrod blooms in September and October just as monarchs are migrating south. They rely on the late season flower nectar to fuel their remarkable trip to their wintering grounds in Mexico.

In the spring of 2022, another able planting crew assembled and continued the planting toward the west and despite the severe drought conditions that summer, many of the grasses survived.

When visiting the plantings this fall 2023, the switch grass seed heads were in constant movement due to the ever-present wind and provided a perfect backdrop to the blooming goldenrod. The shrubs were inching higher as their roots extended into the soil to help establish the bank.

This planting was a success not just due to the resilient native plants but due to the constant care and dedication of the neighbors who weed, water, and educate the passing dog walker or cyclist about the purpose and the value of the plants. It is a true model for other neighborhoods and other shorelines to highlight the multiple benefits of restoring native plants to the Bay's shore.



Residents plant native species on the shore, increasing habitat and reducing erosion (Photo by RI Sea Grant).

Why We Love the Point / Worth Protecting

By Sue Kennedy, URI Coastal Resources Center

On a sunny day in early spring, Nicole Gotovich takes a walk with several fellow residents of Common Fence Point (CFP), a close-knit coastal neighborhood in Portsmouth, RI, and approaches a cleared field sporting a chain-link backstop for baseball. The group makes its way toward the backstop, which fronts a marshy span bordering the shore, and comments on the increased softness of the ground.

"The closer we get to the edge, the wetter the ground gets," says Gotovich, as gentle pressure from her shoe prompts a small upwelling of water around it. "You can see in the photos how high the water actually comes up."

Some of the photos that Gotovich, a member of the Common Fence Point Preparedness Committee (CFPPC), refers to are part of a growing collection on MyCoastRI, an online platform for the public collection and sharing of visual evidence of shoreline change. Images uploaded from cell phone cameras illustrate the impacts of coastal flooding and erosion. Data can then aid government and communities in best land management practices. Public works, infrastructure, and maintenance discussions can also benefit from the information, especially in the context of adapting coastal life to climate change.

“CFPPC has really been working hard to understand these issues to learn what we can do to help protect our community,” says longtime CFP resident Nancy Arruda Nary. “People are getting involved in these issues because we truly care about protecting this very special place.”

A Coastal Culture Worth Preserving

Prior to the walk to examine the sodden field, the group had met at the neighborhood community center, sharing stories that highlighted residents’ deep connection to the ocean and their resulting willingness to adapt to life on a shifting shoreline. CFP juts into Mount Hope Bay and is mostly surrounded by water; what began as a summer cottage retreat more than 100 years ago is now a year-round community for most residents.

Gotovich, who has emerged as a community leader for resilience building, never initially saw herself serving in such a capacity. Rather, when she moved to CFP from Massachusetts in 1998, she had merely realized a dream come true – “to live at the beach.” And she would honor her dream in myriad ways, from supervising the messaging on the neighborhood’s beloved entrance sign, to, once shoreline change issues arose, taking a primary seat on the neighborhood’s preparedness committee. “It takes work and knowledge to be ready to live here, but for me, it’s worth it.”

Nary admires Gotovich’s commitment to leadership, echoing her desire to protect a special place. “We were in heaven – that’s the only way to describe it,” says Nary, recalling her childhood summers in the neighborhood. Nary’s grandfather introduced his Massachusetts family to the place in 1953.

That pull to live a coastal life, even with the risks, resonates with Maureen Thorpe’s family, too. Several

generations of her family summered here, and Thorpe remembers stories of 1954 when Hurricane Carol swept the family sailboat clear across the bay to Warren. “We never thought about not being here,” says Thorpe, who held out black-and-white framed photos of neighborhood houses, barns, and boats. “You accepted the ocean, with the risks. We loved it, wouldn’t have it any other way.”

Neighbor Pat Camara gives a nod, agreeing that “this place is magical.” Drawn by work made available in the 1930s by the construction of the U.S. Naval base in Newport, Camara’s family would be one of 12 living year-round at CFP, allowing “everyone to know everyone else’s name.” She’ll never leave the community but knows that staying, and saving it for future generations, means coming to terms with rising water, be it from storms or sea level rise. “The main beach has changed so much, and my husband and I are definitely concerned about the erosion,” she says. “You see the creek getting wider, you see the baseball field wet much more now.”

And Mil Kinsella, a longtime environmentalist who took up residence in CFP in 1986, gave a nod to the crucial role that education has always played in the community’s shoreline restoration and protection efforts. “Education is key,” she says. “We cannot ask people to protect and preserve something if they don’t know what it is, how it functions, and why it’s important in relationship to their own lives.”



*King Tide flooding at the CFP ball field, July 2022
(Photo submitted to MyCoast by K. Miksis).*

Education and Action: Community Monitoring and MyCoastRI

For the better half of a decade, CFPPC has taken steps to engage residents in preparation for strong storms, like hurricanes, and to open a dialogue that

encourages people to learn about, and respond to, climate change impacts like flooding and erosion. Besides the creation of the Preparedness Committee upon which Gotovich sits, the community has participated in workshops, planted vegetated buffers that slow and absorb water, and distributed household information kits or “swag bags.” And the work has received partner support over several years. Funds have been provided by the Prince Charitable Trusts and the van Beuren Charitable Foundation. Also, assistance has come from government agencies, including the Rhode Island Department of Environmental Management and the Rhode Island Coastal Resources Management Council, as well as the Rhode Island Infrastructure Bank. In the non-government arena, Save The Bay has played a role, too.

Technical expertise from the University of Rhode Island Coastal Resources Center and Rhode Island Sea Grant (URI CRC/SG) and the Narragansett Bay Research Reserve has bolstered the effort, of community monitoring. Through the program, CFP will be able to take part in learning programs and dialogues designed to support communities as they use science to make wise choices in response to flooding and erosion.

Community members can contribute reports to MyCoastRI with very little instruction or training. Community members can stretch their “scientist” legs by taking pictures of shoreline change, uploading them to the online platform, and sharing their observations with others, including decision-makers, researchers, and government staff working directly on adaptation policy and practice. “The community has demonstrated its commitment to applying the best available science and tools to pressing climate change issues,” says Pam Rubinoff, a coastal resilience specialist at URI CRC/SG and manager of the community monitoring project. “MyCoastRI is a fun, exciting, and useful tool for the toolbox of any coastal community, including CFP.”

For their part, CFPPC and their community colleagues are ready to continue, laying a strong emphasis on the importance of bringing the next generation into the work of protecting the coastal legacy of CFP. “We have many young people and families here now,” says Gotovich. “We’re essentially preparing them for the changes we see happening, and I think that’s very empowering to all of us.”







CFP residents tour the neighborhood, discussing how it has changed. (Photo by RI Sea Grant)

Snap the Shore, Track the Change: MyCoast Data Helps CFP Prepare

MyCoast is a timely tool for our neighborhood to use. You can download the app and use your cell phone to take photos of flooding and erosion that you see.

In light of several significant storm events over the past few years (December 23, 2022, December 19, 2023, January 10, 2024, and others) that caused coastal, road, and storm drain flooding, we are always looking for better ways to prepare and mitigate damage. MyCoast is a way we all can better understand what the changes are, where they are, and the impact they have on our neighborhood and the environment.

Here's how to use MyCoast:

-  Take photos of coastal flooding or erosion
-  Upload the photo and location information
-  See flooding and erosion hotspots over time
-  Data informs adaptation decisions

You can report different events - king tides, or extreme high tides, and storm damage. Weather and tidal data gets added to the photos that are submitted to provide context for the flooding or erosion that is depicted. These photos are available on the website and can be used by you and your Town to advocate for changes in the areas about which you are concerned. This data collection is invaluable for monitoring the effects of rising seas and tides, as well as increased storm intensity.

Common Fence Point residents have submitted more than 300 reports to MyCoast. Here are some of the most interesting and useful pictures.



MyCoast photo by J. Prater, January 2022.



MyCoast photo by C. Charbonneau, December 2023.



MyCoast photo by M. Johnson, January 2024.

Want to learn more?

Visit the MyCoast website at www.mycoast.org/ri to download the app, learn more about the program, access resources, and view additional pictures from across the state.



Check out the MyCoastRI Story Map at: <https://bit.ly/SnaptheShore>

History of the Common Fence Point Preparedness Committee (CFPPC)

By Nicole Gotovich

In September 2018, Conley Zani, President of the Common Fence Point Improvement Association (CFPIA) Board, sent out the weekly e-newsletter with a new addition; she invited CFP residents to join the "Hurricane Tiger Team" (HTT). Inspired by the 80th anniversary of the devastating 1938 Hurricane, the goal of the HTT was to help CFP prepare for hurricanes and other disasters, paying special attention to its location on Mount Hope Bay and the Sakonnet River. Conley had been approached by Jen West of the Narragansett Bay National Estuarine Research Reserve and Pam Rubinoff of the University of Rhode Island (URI) Coastal Resources Center and RI Sea Grant, who wanted to help CFP residents be prepared for natural hazards. This pilot program targeted Aquidneck Island municipalities and their neighborhoods to become resilient to disasters and sea level rise, because "an ounce of prevention is worth a pound of cure." Some neighbors came together in December of 2018, knowing that while RI has not had a strong hurricane in many years, the state has the potential to experience them.

Jen and Pam, alongside The Nature Conservancy's Adam Whelchel, led a "Community Resilience Building Workshop" for the CFP neighborhood in April of 2019. This workshop, the first of its kind in Rhode Island, included as many neighbors as the HTT could find, along with town officials. During these workshops, CFP created a "Matrix" of goals, or future potential actions, for the neighborhood, arranged by priority level. A top priority was to put a third stop sign at the entrance of CFP on Anthony Road, which was installed soon after because of this workshop.

In July 2019, the "Hurricane Tiger Team" became the CFP Preparedness Committee (CFPPC). At this meeting the CFPPC created its vision and mission statements, featuring 4 objectives to *Connect, Share, Promote, and Coordinate* (see on the first page of this newsletter). Having these written out gives the CFPPC more clout to accomplish the "Matrix" goals and build community resilience.



For more information

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