

## MINUTES

### Friends of BLUE MOUNTAIN - BIRCH COVE LAKES

#### Annual General Meeting

Wednesday, June 4, 2025 - 7 PM

Maskwa Aquatic Club, 91 Saskatoon Dr., Halifax, NS

1. Welcome, Call to Order & Establish Quorum - meeting was called to order at 7:16 pm by [Mary Ann McGrath](#)
2. Acknowledgement of Mi'kma'ki territory - Mary Ann read this
3. Approval of Agenda as presented- Richard Zurawski moved to approve and was 2nded by Melanie Macdonald. Carried.
4. Approval of AGM minutes of June, 2024 was moved by Diana Whalen and Dale Smith. Carried.
5. Chair's Annual Report was given by Mary Ann McGrath. With three elections, governments coast during these periods. There have been no stakeholder meetings since May 2024. We have been kept in the dark on any progress. We have met with many new councillors, MLA's and MP's. We are hopeful for the stakeholder meetings to start again to keep the discussion going and get the public input on this.

Hiking and Stewardship - 15 Hike Leaders trained. Have a new coordinator coming on board. 16 hikes were booked this year with 80 participants. Helped with City Nature Challenge. We clean up garbage, educated other people on the trails.

Communications Committee - sending out newsletters, assisting other groups with events and promotion, Social media presence.

Events and Membership - Speaker Series is continuing. They held our first volunteer appreciation event here at Maskwa, and also eight pop up events. Membership reports over 1500 members.

Planning Committee - Storm Water Management - Mary Ellen Donovan is working on this. Storm water issues cause many problems with the waterways. Mary Ellen made an application for intervenor status and was granted it for Halifax Water hearing. Dale Smith has finalized planning papers relating to Birch Cove. What lands are the most important and highest priorities.

We focus on “conceptual park area” - Parks Canada identified this. We are supposed to have a buffer zone around it. This informs our advocacy.

Efforts for coming year focus on 2 things - pushing for national park and dealing with the Highway 102 boundary.

There has only been one public meeting held by HRM - in 2012 and this conceptual park area was identified there.

We have received a new access point this year, and we are getting 2 more. We need these but it would be nice if we were consulted.

Many reports to read over this summer - Special Planning Area Documents. There is a link to these on our website. We need to decide how to best address these documents. – Mary Ellen Donovan moved to accept this report, Ray Plourde seconded it. Carried.

Questions were invited. Margot Metcalfe, in discussion noted she doesn't feel very connected to the board. She wants to know how she can be used to help. Mary Ann noted that the Highway 102 West report implications are huge. Hopefully there will be an action plan within a month. She noted that she tries not to send out too many emails. We are open to suggestions. Want to keep people informed, and ask for help with critical issues.

6. Treasurer's Report - Carol Ann Roberts is unable to attend so Diana Whalen presented. We are solvent. Have \$13,000.00 in bank. \$800 net income for the year. Donors get a tax receipt through NS Trails Federation. We do the Bay Treasure Chest Toonie Count to make money. Someone asked how much money do we need to do the important work?

Improving outreach, education, brochures, signs, social media, events committee goes to lots of events, need materials to hand out. Benches and boot cleaners on the trails would be great to provide at trail heads. Diana Whalen moved, Richard Zurawski seconded acceptance of the Treasurer's Report as presented. Carried

7. Nominating Committee Report for 2025-26 - Diana Whalen presented this. We would welcome anyone who would like to join the board. Many members are staying (9) – Mary Ann McGrath, Eleanor Humphries, Diana Whalen, Carol Ann Roberts, Wendy McDonald, Todd Beals, Dale Smith, Mary Ellen Donovan, Raymond Plourde. Richard Zurawski, Frank Wormald and Mary Ellen Hamilton let their names stand for Board membership. Richard will chair the Stewardship Committee. There are many ways to help. If would like to help but not join the board, please say. Diana moved, Eleanor Humphries seconded that the Nominating Committee Report including three new board members be accepted as presented. Carried.

**Guest Speaker** – Jillian Ramsay (*Sustainable Cities Coordinator – EAC*) - Also helps to manage HRM Alliance (Friends is a member). Has been working on the Hike the Greenbelt program. With the special planning areas, there will be a lot of work to do. Goals of Hike the Greenbelt - activate the Halifax Green Network Plan. Educate public and inspire community action; run events, expand the demographic. Wants to create more different types of events to bring different types of people together. This year they were able to survey participants after events. In total, ran 14 events last year with over 200 participants altogether. Got great feedback. They led 4 events for BMBCL - 37 participants. Guided Hike, Invasive Species Survey, Hike and Fungi Foray, HWA (invasive insect) Survey.

Qualitative feedback - public experiences.

5 major themes: increased ecological awareness; empowerment in enviro advocacy, deepened personal connection to nature, value of educational recreation, effective leadership.

Areas for improvement: striving for diverse participation

Goals for 2025: Expand - Build the Greenbelt team; increase private hike/event offerings; expand the kinds of events we offer; ramp up public participation in calls to action (write letters or call MLA) for example.

**Guest Speaker** – John Spears of the *Urban Trail Racing (UTR) Team* noted one of their goals is to drive more people into green spaces. Their focus is on the Trail

Running race but give prizes to everyone. Last year they held the Wild Lakes 10k race; E2C Search and Rescue (SAR) event was originally used to for training SAR volunteers. Used to be a 24-hour event. This year it lasted for 8 hours. Over 225 people participated. Results of win/win events - wants to get people into the parks. Friends of BMBCL hike leaders assisted with wayfinding for the race and membership volunteers had a booth to sign people up. People put pics on instagram, etc. and raised awareness of this wilderness area. Raised \$7,700 on May 4 for search and rescue. They are donating \$1,000 to FBMBCL. They mapped out a lot of the park. They shared the maps in PDF form with us.

Ryan O'Neill was invited to give an impromptu presentation of his online mapping app documenting key facets of the BMBCL wilderness area. He is an active volunteer with Canoe/Kayak NS. He started going through the report. Has some suggestions. About a year ago he started thinking about how this could move forward. He created a back country map. He's thinking of a new approach. There may be lands that are currently protected that may not be the "jewels" that we want. His idea - Grand Bargain for the BMBCL. He suggests "trading" other land for what the Province approved for housing - Special Planning area Highway 102 West Corridor lands along and around the Birch Cove Lakes. The goal is to protect the Birch Cove Lakes wilderness. Jillian Ramsay, EAC agreed, it's a good idea.

### Special Volunteer Acknowledgement

James Boyer, Founding member of the Board of Directors.

Catherine McKellar, Communications Coordinator

Pam Graham, Hike Leader

John Moore, Volunteer and strong supporter, especially through Maskwa and Parkview News

Door Prize Draw - Jesse - Margot's grandson (backpack, hat, book and t-shirt).

Closing - 9:02 meeting adjourned.

*We acknowledge that we are meeting in Mi'kma'ki, the ancestral and unceded territory of the Mi'kmaq people.*



# FACT SHEET

## **Friends of BMBCL Mission:**

"To support and promote the creation and development of the Blue Mountain-Birch Cove Lakes Regional Park and to encourage the stewardship and appropriate use of the area."

## **Friends of BMBCL**

The Friends of BMBCL is a not-for-profit Society formed in 2018 to focus on the potential of BMBCL to become one of the largest urban wilderness parks in Canada.

## **Current Protected Area**

The BMBCL park opportunity is set within an approximate 12,000 acre area (5000 hectares) of undeveloped forest and lake country. To date approximately **5439 acres** have been secured for conservation purposes through the complementary efforts of the Halifax Regional Municipality (513 acres), the NS Nature Trust (560 acres), and the Province of Nova Scotia (4,366 acres).

## **Attributes and Features of BMBCL**

- Candidate Site – National Urban Park Project
- 31 kilometer perimeter bordering on subdivisions and commercial districts
- Has 22 lakes providing multiple canoe routes within the urban core of Halifax
- Stretches approximately 13 kilometers from southeast to northwest
- Includes Blue Mountain which is the highest point of elevation in Halifax
- Surrounded by city subdivisions and development pressures
- Within a 20 minute drive of 200,000 people
- Part of the Green Network Plan for Halifax which provides for connectivity
- Often described as a “mini Keji” referring to Kejimikujik National Park in NS