***Bedford Farmers Club***

***Minutes from the Meeting of April 27, 2022***

***Billion Oyster Project, at Bedford Historical Hall***

At an unusual evening meeting, we were fortunate to have refreshments including wine, cheeses and sweets prior to the business meeting. A rare treat was a raw oyster bar, provided by Pete Malinowski, co-founder of the Billion Oyster Project. His family’s oyster farm on Fisher’s Island graciously provided the oysters he expertly shucked for everyone’s pleasure. Not an oyster fan myself, I understand from those who partook that they were delicious.

Executive Director of the Bedford Historical Society, **Lynn Ryan**, welcomed everyone to Historic Hall. Reminding everyone that this is a joint meeting hosted by the BHS and the BFC, she referred to a document the BHS holds on the founding of the Bedford Farmers Club.

Lynn introduced BFC President **Mary Farley**, who welcomed everyone to the meeting. Mary stated that this meeting is significant in that it begins the Club’s 170th year. The BFC had its first meeting on February, 27, 1852, so we have proudly maintained the traditions and legacy of the Club for a very long time.

Chair of the nominating committee, **Roger Vincent**, presented the slate of officers for 2022 for a vote. The slate is:

President Mary Farley

Vice President Robin Ashley

Secretary Sheila Crespi

Treasurer Roger Vincent

Historian John Stockbridge

Hospitality Julie Henken

Timely Tips Ellen Best

Nominating Chair Roger Vincent

The slate of officers was proposed, seconded and received a positive vote.

As treasurer **Roger Vincent** reported on the Club’s solvent state and circulated a clipboard for attendance and collection of annual membership dues of $10 a person.

Vice president, **Robin Ashley** filled in as secretary, reading the minutes from the October 20, 2021 on growing hops. Members unanimously adopted the minutes.

Historian **John Stockbridge** found several mentions of the serving of scalloped oysters at past BFC meetings held on November 23, 1887, October 31, 1923, and January 31, 1925. They seemed to have been very greatly enjoyed.

**Ellen Best** was unable to attend so we had to, sadly, forgo Timely Tips.

As it was a joint meeting with the Bedford Historical Society, there were many guests who were not individually recognized. However, two attendees, Christian Daviron and Janet Harckham, were fulfilling their required second meeting for membership. Both were unanimously voted in as members.

Mary then introduced featured speaker **Murray Fisher**, co-founder of the Billion Oyster Project and Bedford resident.

Murray began his odyssey while in college, when he interned with the Hudson Riverkeeper under Robert Kennedy, Jr. He became fascinated with the Hudson River and its history. Reading two books were formative, and he recommends them to everyone: “Riverkeepers” by Robert Kennedy Jr. and John Cronin, and “The Big Oyster” by Mark Kurlansky. Those two books set him on his path.

He and Pete Malinowski met at the New York Harbor School in 2003, which replaced a Bushwick public school with a dismal graduation rate. Harbor School infused the standard New York State Education Department Regents-based curriculum with high-interest, water-related topics and then brought those topics to life by exposing students to local water bodies, including New York Harbor, the Hudson River, the East River, and the Gowanus Canal.  By 2010, Harbor School had improved the local graduation rate of 24% by more than 200 percent. The Harbor School moved from Bushwick to a new campus on Governor’s Island in 2010, giving them access to the harbor in a completely new way.

By 2014, Murray and Pete realized the benefit of hands-on projects to engage the students at Harbor School and wanted to expand that idea – hence, the Billion Oyster Project, with the goal of restoring one billion oysters to New York Harbor by 2035. New York Harbor once held 220,000 acres of oyster beds, making it the oyster capital of the world (although other cities made the same claim). By 1849, the City was dumping raw sewage into the harbor destroying the oyster population. Not until 2000 was the harbor clean enough to sustain oysters or much other marine life.

Oysters provide not only food, but storm protection via their beds and they filter water at the amazing rate of up to 50 gallons per day. Oysters, in quantity, can jump-start the cleaning of the harbor. Unfortunately, the oysters planted in the harbor are not edible. Since they are absorbing all the filth in the water, while the water is cleaner, they are dirtier.

In order to create reefs to sustain the oysters, the BOP collects used oyster and scallop shells from NYC restaurants. They are cleaned and dried on Governor’s Island and then deployed to the harbor.

10,000 volunteers, more than 6000 students from 100 schools in the five borough, and 75 participating restaurants have partnered with the BOP to aid in reaching its goal of one billion oysters replaced in New York harbor by 2035.

Pete and Murray fielded questions in a vigorous question and answer session following the talk.

*Respectfully submitted,*

*Mary Farley*

*Secretary pro tem*