

History of the Bottle Shed

“Groups” refer to Cape Elizabeth-based non-profit service clubs and organizations benefiting the youth of Cape Elizabeth.

The bottle shed was first opened in December 1992 and for many years administered by its’ visionary Rosemary Reid before turning it over to the town. Ms. Reid’s idea for a returnable bottle shed was a way in which to help financially support the non-profit, Cape Elizabeth groups benefiting youth. A garden shed from Ms. Reid’s yard was used until the success of the program required additional space and in 1996 a garage was built.

Groups were assigned the bottle shed for one month. Volunteers would sort and package the bottles and cans preparing them for pick up by a redemption company. A \$50.00 rental fee was charged and groups received all of the proceeds for the month.

For many years there were more groups than available months. The program became popular and groups depended on this fundraising effort. In the early years the monthly proceeds started at an average of \$700 and increased to \$2000. Since its inception in 1992 – August 30, 1998 a total of \$100,000 was raised. At the height of the fundraising the monthly average increased to approximately \$3000.

Groups began having problems recruiting volunteers which left the task of sorting bottles to a few, and resulting in fewer applications for the bottle shed. Volunteers not showing up when scheduled created a backlog of bottles and placed a burden on the town to deal with the overflow. Staff began to question whether the model was sustainable long-term.

Factors which contributed to fewer groups applying:

- 1) Initially students were to be involved in working the shed however over time it became parents who took on the responsibility. With busy schedules fewer volunteers were available.
- 2) Groups created their own bottle return program through CLYNK which became an easier fundraising option.
- 3) Some groups provided an option of charging a fee in lieu of working the bottle shed reducing the volunteer pool even more.
- 4) Most groups wanted to be scheduled certain months e.g. within the sport or extracurricular season, during the school year, or larger volume months. Scheduling became problematic as some months remained open.

In one last effort to retain the model, in March 2013 the town announced groups would be assigned months by a new lottery system; applications were drawn randomly. The first lottery on May 1st was advertised for the months of August 2013 – December 2014 however not enough groups applied to fill the season. A second lottery was held on April 30, 2014 for the months of June 2014 – May 2015 with the same results.

With dwindling interest and the long-time provider of the redemption service retiring, the town reviewed options.

- 1) Close the bottle shed.
- 2) Continue with the current model leaving several months open.
- 3) Provide a CLYNK type of service.
- 4) Provide bins for single sort with proceeds retained by the town and distributed to qualified groups.

On 12/8/2014 the town council approved a new model with the town partnering with a new redemption company moving to single sort. Groups would no longer have to work the bottle shed. A three-member committee was established to propose the annual allocation of net proceeds.

Note: Through December 2015, a total of \$600,000 had been collected through the bottle shed program.

The bottle shed committee was organized with a representative from the town and school. Officer David Galvan was appointed staff to the committee with Adrienne Murphy, 32 Philip Road and Melanie Thomas, 6 Starboard Drive serving as members.

The committee set guidelines for the annual allotment of funds, establishing a deadline to submit applications in October with checks being distributed in December. Recommendations from the bottle shed committee were referred to the town clerk to ensure beneficiaries qualified and provided appropriate documentation.

In March 2018 the town partnered with South Portland Redemption Center after receiving notice that the previous redemption company, Boots Bounty, would no longer be able to serve the town. The town was well-served by South Portland Redemption Center with pickups twice per week. The earlier concerns of overflowing bins and an unkempt building were no longer a problem.

Due to COVID-19 the bottle shed was closed in March 2020. At the same time, the town was notified by South Portland Redemption they would no longer be able to service the bottle shed.

Jay Reynolds, Director of Public Works reviewed new options for the bottle shed to avoid closing. The town is now working with CLYNK. With safety in mind, the bottle shed reopened in October 2020. The new arrangement requires more town labor and the added expense of purchasing bags and stickers. The town sets up the bags, replaces them when they are full, stickers and prepares them for CLYNK pick up. Proceeds will be paid to the town quarterly.

Allocation of funds as recommended by the Bottle Shed Committee:

4/2016 \$21,000
10/2016 \$14,200
12/2017 \$17,000
12/2018 \$16,150
12/2019 \$17,000

Currently there is \$8300 in the bottle shed account. Finance Director John Quartararo is recommending the council establish a special revenue fund, rather than the current practice of budgeting the revenue. Currently if budget isn't met, the shortfall is paid by the general fund. The use of a special revenue fund will allow funds not to lapse and payments be allocated based on actual proceeds.

