CAPE COD COMMISSION

Barnstable County
FY27 License Plate Grant Application Submission

CommonsKeepers

CONTACT INFORMATION

Organization Name: CommonsKeepers
Location: Wellfleet, MA
Project Manager Name: Jaye Johnson
Project Manager Title: Director
Project Manager Email: info@commonskeepers.org

PROJECT INFORMATION

Name of Project: CommonsKeepers Mentorship Program

Brief Project Description:
Young people are often told that humans only harm the natural world. CommonsKeepers is changing that story. When we tend land and water with skill and care, people are critical to the health of this place. Our Mentorship Program prepares young adults for year-round careers that help Cape Cod adapt to a changing environment and economy. Paid mentees train hands-on with local experts in biochar, salt marsh restoration, herbalism, local food, traditional craft, and filmmaking, while building leadership skills and wellbeing practices. Each mentorship culminates in a public project that strengthens the mentee, our community, and the land.

How does the project advance one or more 2024 Cape Cod CEDS Key Actions?
CommonsKeepers mentors and supports the next generation of land, water, and community stewards on the Outer Cape. We care for the commons, the resources that belong to all of us: Cape Cod Bay, our kettle ponds and salt marshes, the dunes, and our oak and pine woodlands.
Our Mentorship Program directly advances four Key Actions of the 2024 CEDS:
Developing and connecting students and workers to educational and training opportunities: Mentees spend eight weeks in paid, hands-on training with established Cape professionals. They also receive structured instruction in public speaking, project management, and entrepreneurship.

Identifying and supporting growing industries: Mentorships are concentrated in the Cape's emerging climate and restoration economy, including biochar production, salt marsh and habitat restoration, local food systems, herbal medicine, and traditional craft with local materials. A mentorship in media production will ensure that the stories of these industries are well told and shared widely.
Providing spaces for organizations and entrepreneurs to pilot ideas: Mentees will develop their projects on working farms and community gardens, in fabrication shops like Bob Wells's forge and farm, and in the field, with mentors who have built businesses and livelihoods that support and sustain the health of the community, land and water on the Outer Cape.
Supporting year-round community activity and civic engagement: Each mentorship ends in a public-facing project presented to the wider community over the course of the year. This builds on the community gatherings at the heart of our work, including equinox gatherings and ""The Nut Stomp,"" our fall harvest festival that brings together local families, knowledge-keepers and entrepreneurs engaged with land and water tending.

What economic development needs/priorities will this project address?
Cape Cod struggles to keep its young adults. Too few year-round career pathways, high costs of living and housing, and a seasonal economy push early-career people off-Cape just as the region needs them most. Beyond economic uncertainty, young people face even more daunting questions about the future of our planet. Those who grew up here and love this place need to see that a meaningful, viable life here is possible.
For years before founding CommonsKeepers, each of us told the stories of people who show another way forward: entrepreneurs, farmers, organizers, artists, and elders who have built careers stewarding the Outer Cape's shared land, water, and community. We incorporated as a nonprofit in February 2026. Across our programs, young people have told us they want more mentorship, more access to the knowledge held here, and more hands-on learning with people doing meaningful work that sustains them. Our mentors have told us they want their hard-won knowledge passed on. The Mentorship Program answers both.
The region has a growing need for people trained in restoration, resilience, and land stewardship, and who understand how these systems depend on one another. On the Outer Cape, the health of our forests, soils, water, and people is linked. Brush cleared to reduce wildfire risk can become biochar that builds soil and stores carbon. Healthy soils and marshes protect water quality. And the plants that grow in healthy landscapes feed and heal the people who care for them. Every mentee in the cohort will learn these connections firsthand, through talks on forest health and prescribed fire, hands-on work with biochar, study of food and medicinal plants, and community gatherings that bring the cohort and community together.
The Mentorship addresses three priorities:

- building a year-round, locally rooted workforce
- creating on-ramps into the climate resiliency sector

- passing specialized knowledge from an aging generation of practitioners to the next

Much of that knowledge, from biochar and marsh ecology to herbal medicine, local food, and traditional craft, is held by a small number of people who are ready to share it.
Climate work also carries a high rate of burnout, and its emotional toll drives many young people away. The Mentorship includes nature-based wellbeing support so mentees have a community and practices that help them stay in this work for the long term.

What is the anticipated impact of this project on these economic development needs/priorities? How will this project support Cape Cod's economic resiliency?
In its first cycle, the program will pay and train six early-career mentees alongside seven local mentors. Each mentorship will produce a public-facing project. We will track completion, skills gained, projects presented, and where mentees are working six, 12, and 24 months later. We build on a strong first year. We hosted two gatherings, WaterKeepers and FireKeepers, that introduced young women to nine mentors doing innovative local work in water and fire ecology. We took two cohorts of 13 Wellfleet Elementary students into the woods, dunes, and ponds every week to learn local ecology. And we facilitated the training of more than 40 people in wildland and prescribed fire, bringing people who have not traditionally been part of this work into it.
Bob Wells, founder of New England Biochar, shows what this pipeline can do. Working from his Eastham farm, Bob taught himself to make biochar through years of experimentation. He is now one of the world's leading experts, and industries of every size around the world ask him to build biochar production systems. He runs his business with a small team and is preparing to step back from parts of it. He wants to pass on what he knows.
Biochar is one of the most promising climate solutions available. Made by heating wood and brush with little oxygen, it locks carbon into the soil for centuries while improving yields across many crops. It turns wildfire fuel cleared from forests into something useful, and it can be funded through carbon credits.
Bob's business is a vital part of the local economy, with room to grow, but given the pressures of running a small business, he has not had the capacity to create his own mentorship program. CommonsKeepers will support both mentors and mentees so that everyone benefits: knowledge is passed from one generation to the next, important skills like Bob's stay on the Cape, and the Cape takes a leadership role in climate resiliency.
Bob is one example among several. Each of our mentors holds specialized knowledge the Cape cannot afford to lose. This builds economic resiliency in two ways. It diversifies the workforce toward year-round work tied to the Cape's natural assets, and it strengthens our capacity to adapt as climate impacts reshape our region, from restored marshes that buffer storms to healthier soils and forests.

Are there any anticipated challenges to implementing the project within the required timeframe of the grant award?
The main challenge is scheduling. Many mentors and mentees work seasonally, so we will run the cohort in a window that accommodates peak summer demands.
A second challenge is that the full program costs more than $25,000. We are actively raising additional funds and seeking a matching grant, and some mentors will contribute time in kind. Our first year of fundraising has proven that there is support in our community for our programming. License Plate funds will be prioritized for mentee stipends, so the core program can run at full strength regardless of other fundraising.
Recruiting mentees within the award window is manageable. We have an existing network to draw from, including young women from our WaterKeepers and FireKeepers gatherings, participants in our fire trainings, and partner organizations.

Would the funding be used to support a grant program? Yes / No
Yes

Which municipality or municipalities are supportive of this project? (Optional)
The Town of Truro, through Climate Action Coordinator Christopher Palmer, supports this project and has provided a letter of support. The Town of Wellfleet has sponsored CommonsKeepers' Hiking and Foraging Program for four years.

SCOPE OF WORK AND TIMELINE

Task 1

Description: Finalize the curriculum and confirm mentors, setting each mentorship's focus, schedule, and project goals. Plan cohort-wide training in public speaking, project management, entrepreneurship, and nature-based wellbeing.
Deliverable: Signed mentor agreements; written program curriculum and schedule.
Estimated Completion Date: February 15, 2027

Task 2

Description: Recruit early-career applicants through partner organizations, past participants, and community networks. Select mentees and match each with a mentor.
Deliverable: Outreach materials; application form; final roster of mentees with signed participation agreements.
Estimated Completion Date: April 30, 2027

Task 3

Description: Each mentorship consists of eight weekly sessions, scheduled between May and September around the seasonal work of mentors and mentees. Mentorships begin in this phase alongside cohort skills training and wellbeing support. Stipends are paid for this period.
Deliverable: Attendance and session logs; stipend payment records for May and June.
Estimated Completion Date: June 30, 2027

Task 4

Description: Remaining mentorships are completed. Mentees develop their public-facing projects with guidance from their mentors.
Deliverable: Attendance and session logs; stipend payment records for July through September; project drafts.
Estimated Completion Date: September 30, 2027

Task 5: Community Showcase and Final Report

Description: Mentees present their completed projects at a public event. Surveys at the start and end of the program measure skills gained.
Deliverables: Public showcase event with documentation; final report with outcomes and participant feedback.
Estimated Completion Date: November 30, 2027

PROJECT PARTNERS

Project Partner 1:

Name: Bob Wells
Title: Founder, New England Biochar
Email: bob@newenglandbiochar.com
Role/Description: Mentor: Bob Wells is an Eastham organic farmer and founder of New England Biochar, a company he started in 2009 after discovering biochar's ability to restore fertility to Cape Cod's sandy soils. Inspired by the ancient ""terra preta"" soil-building practices of the Amazon, he taught himself through years of experimentation. He is now one of the world's leading biochar experts, building biochar production systems for small and large industries around the world. Biochar captures carbon from waste wood and brush and locks it into the soil instead of releasing it into the atmosphere. Bob has shared his techniques with farmers, schools, and organizations across the region and beyond.
Bob works with a small team and is looking to pass along parts of his business to the next generation. As a mentor, he offers his farm at Redberry Farm for cohort gatherings, his metal

fabrication shop for mentees to create various projects, and the blacksmith shop at the Eastham Historical Museum where mentees can learn forging and other skills.
His work directly supports the CEDS key action to identify and support growing industries. It gives a mentee firsthand experience in a homegrown Cape Cod business built on sustainable agriculture and climate technology, and a real path to a year-round career.

Project Partner 2:

Name: John Portnoy
Title: Friends of Herring River, Board of Directors
Email: jp.wellfleet@gmail.com
Role/Description: Mentor: John W. Portnoy, Ph.D., is a salt marsh ecologist based in Wellfleet. He served as Senior Ecologist at Cape Cod National Seashore from 1970 to 2008, and his research there helped build the scientific case for the Herring River Restoration, one of the largest tidal restoration projects in New England. John has been a key voice in bringing that project to life. He served on the Herring River Technical Committee for more than fifteen years and is a longtime member of the Friends of Herring River Board of Directors. He and his family also run Narrow Land Farm in Wellfleet.
John's expertise covers salt marsh ecology, elemental cycling, habitat restoration, and Cape Cod hydrology: groundwater, ponds, and coastal wetlands. He mentored at CommonsKeepers' inaugural WaterKeepers gathering, where he led participants on a tour of the Herring River Restoration. For the Mentorship, he will lead field walks for the full cohort and work one on one with mentees, giving them a firsthand look at the science and practice of large-scale coastal restoration.
His work supports the CEDS key action on investing in water quality

Project Partner 3:

Name: Elspeth Hay
Email: Elspeth.Hay@gmail.com
Title: Co-Founder and Program Director, CommonsKeepers; Basket Making Mentor
Role/Description: Elspeth Hay is a writer and radio producer whose work explores food, the environment, and the people and places that feed us. She is the author of Feed Us with Trees: Nuts and the Future of Food and the longtime voice of the Local Food Report on CAI, the Cape and Islands NPR station. For more than fifteen years she has learned from ecologists, Indigenous knowledge keepers, farmers, and policymakers about how to live well within a local ecosystem.
As a mentor, Elspeth teaches basket making as practice in the ecology of place. She weaves with willow and sometimes oak, and has studied with basket makers in Ireland and across the United States. To make a basket, you have to know the land: which plants grow where, when to harvest them, and how careful cutting, like coppicing willow, keeps a plant and a landscape healthy. Her

mentee will learn to grow, harvest, prepare, and weave local materials, and will see how traditional craft can root a person in a place and support a livelihood. Elspeth also leads cohort talks on what it takes to create a healthy ecosystem, including the role of prescribed fire in restoring Cape Cod's oak woodlands.
Her work supports the CEDS key actions on developing and connecting students and workers to educational and training opportunities, and on supporting year round community activity and civic engagement.

Partner 4:

Name: Sue "Jaye" Johnson
Title: Co-Founder and Program Director, CommonsKeepers
Email: Jaye@SueJaye.com
Role/Description: Mentorship Program Director and Cohort Mentor in Storytelling, Public Ppeaking, and Health and Wellness. Sue Jaye Johnson is a Peabody Award-winning journalist, filmmaker, and photographer. Her work spans investigative reporting for National Public Radio (NPR) and television (PBS) and documentary film. She is a Creative Capital awardee, and her TED Talk has been viewed more than 3.5 million times. She has spent more than thirty-five years on the Outer Cape, and her work is shaped by embodied practice, ceremony, and a deep relationship with this land.
As Program Director, Jaye leads overall coordination of the Mentorship. She trains mentees in public speaking and storytelling, and with Vanessa Tavernetti she co leads the season-long cohort experience that grounds young people in this place and in one another. Her vision is an Outer Cape where young people know they belong here, as vital to this place as the oaks are to the forest, and where they can build lives of purpose doing the work this place needs.

Project Partner 5:

Name: Sarah Naciri
Title: Wild Blossoms Apothecary/ Sustainable CAPE
Email: sarah@wildblossomsapothecary.com
Role/Description: Mentor. Sarah Naciri is an herbalist, forager, and educator, and the founder of Wild Blossoms Apothecary. She makes small-batch herbal medicines from wildcrafted and organically grown plants and mushrooms. For more than twenty years she has studied and practiced herbalism, wildcrafting, medicine making, organic gardening, and small-scale farming. She has lived in North Truro for the past decade. She sells her products at local farmers markets and offers classes, foraging walks, and consultations.
Sarah is also an educator and program manager with Sustainable CAPE, where she teaches a weekly children's gardening class in the Children's Community Garden at the Truro Library. She has worked with CommonsKeepers since the inception, leading foraging walks and creating a fire ceremony for

our June Gatherings. As a mentor, she will give mentees hands-on training in plant identification, sustainable harvesting, and medicine making. She will also show them the practical side of building a small business rooted in the local landscape.
Her work supports the CEDS key action on providing spaces for organizations and entrepreneurs to pilot ideas. Wild Blossoms Apothecary shows a mentee how a single practitioner can turn deep local knowledge into a viable year-round enterprise. Through her teaching and community programs, Sarah also advances the key action on supporting year-round community activity and civic engagement.

Project Partner 6:

Name: Nicole Cormier, MS, RD, LDN
Title: MS, RD, LDN Delicious Living Nutrition
Email: deliciouslivingwellness@gmail.com
Role/Description: Mentor. Nicole Cormier, MS, RD, LDN, is a registered dietitian, clinical herbalist, local food advocate, and author based on the Outer Cape. She founded Delicious Living Nutrition, a nutrition therapy practice. She is also Program Director of the Delicious Living Nutrition Dietetic Internship, which trains the next generation of dietitians. She works with local chefs, nonprofits, schools, farmers' markets, restaurants, and art centers to create programs, dinners, workshops, retreats, and catering that connect people to the food grown and harvested here.
Nicole holds a master's degree in Clinical Herbalism from Maryland University of Integrative Health. She has cooked for and mentored at CommonsKeepers' June Gatherings. As a mentor, she brings years of experience training early-career professionals. Mentees will learn how local food, herbalism, and nutrition can come together into a sustainable career on the Cape.
Her work directly supports the CEDS key action on developing and connecting students and workers to educational and training opportunities. Her dietetic internship is already a working model of local workforce development. Her partnerships with farms, restaurants, and community organizations also advance the key action on supporting growing industries, strengthening the Cape's local food economy year-round.

Partner 7:

Name: Michael Cestaro
Title: Founder Up Above Creative
Email: mike@upabovecreative.com
Role/Description: Mentor. Michael Cestaro is a filmmaker and the founder of Up Above Creative, a video production company based on Cape Cod. He grew up in Eastham and built his career in commercial photography and video in Los Angeles and New York before returning home. His

documentary work focuses on the people and communities of the Cape, including the short films Clay and White Space.
As a mentor, Michael will train mentees in the craft and business of visual storytelling, from shooting and editing to finding and serving clients. His own path shows what's possible: he gained skills and experience off-Cape, then came home to build a creative business rooted in the place he grew up. His work supports the CEDS key action on providing spaces for organizations and entrepreneurs to pilot ideas. Up Above Creative is a working model of a year-round creative business on the Outer Cape. His documentary work also advances the key action on supporting year-round community activity and civic engagement, by telling the stories of the people who live and work here.

Partner 8:

Name: Vanessa Tavernetti
Title: Ecopsychologist and Educator
Email: vt@earthmagicacademy.com
Role/Description: Mentor Vanessa Tavernetti is an educator and ecopsychologist who has spent more than twenty years helping people deepen their connection to the land. She holds an MA in Ecopsychology from Naropa University, where she has taught in the Contemplative Education, Environmental Studies, and Religious Studies departments. She has trained thousands of educators worldwide, including through the Occidental Arts and Ecology Center's School Garden Teacher Training Program. She worked with Alice Waters and helped establish hundreds of school gardens across the country, and co-founded the School Garden Network of Sonoma County. A recipient of the Jack London Teacher of the Year Award, she holds a BA in Sustainable Development and Water Rights from Trinity College and a permaculture certificate. Vanessa is co-founder of Earth Magic Academy and has recently returned to the Outer Cape with her family.

CommonsKeepers Mentee Selection Criteria

Eligibility
Applicants must:

- Be between 20 and 30 years old or early in their careers, meaning within their first five years of work or study in their field.
- Commit to eight mentorship sessions between May and September 2027, cohort training sessions, and the final public showcase in the fall of 2027.
- Live or work on Cape Cod during the program.

Priority
Priority goes to applicants who:

- Have strong ties to the Outer Cape (Eastham, Wellfleet, Truro, and Provincetown). That includes people who grew up here, live or work here now, or have family roots in the region.
- Come from communities historically left out of climate, conservation, agriculture, and related fields, including young people who could not otherwise afford an unpaid learning opportunity.

Review Criteria
Applications will be reviewed on:

1. **Connection to the Outer Cape:** depth of ties to the region and commitment to building a life and career here.
2. **Fit with a mentor's field:** interest in and readiness for one of the program's mentorships.
3. **Motivation:** a clear sense of why this mentorship matters to the applicant now.
4. **Project vision:** an initial idea for a public-facing project, even an early one.
5. **Career potential:** how the mentorship could lead to year-round work in climate, stewardship, food, the arts, or other fields tied to the Cape's natural and cultural assets.
6. **Access:** the extent to which this opportunity opens a path that has not been readily available to the applicant.

Selection Process

1. Applicants submit a short written or video application.
2. Finalists interview with their prospective mentor and CommonsKeepers staff.
3. Mentees are selected and matched with mentors by May 30, 2027.

FY27 LICENSE PLATE GRANT APPLICATION BUDGET

Please upload this sheet as a PDF as part of your application.

Please fill in all budget categories relevant for your proposed project, including a brief description of the funds requested. The total amount requested should equal the total amount noted in the scope of work. All project expenses are provided on a reimbursement basis.

Category	Amount Requested	Match Amount (optional)	Total Project Cost	Budget Narrative
Personnel/Labor from Staffing Plan)	$3,000	$38,960	$41,960	Two program directors, a program administrator, six mentors, and a cohort experience facilitator, all independent contractors (see staffing plan). Directors contribute 50% of their time in kind ($9,875) and mentors contribute $6,700 of their time in kind. The grant funds part of the administrator's time for outreach, stipend processing, documentation, and grant reporting.
Fringe Benefits (from Staffing Plan)	$0	$0	$0	N/A. All staff are independent contractors (0% fringe).
Travel	$0	$0	$0	N/A
Equipment	$0	$0	$0	N/A
Supplies	$1,200	$1,800	$3,000	Materials for mentee training, cohort outings, and public-facing projects.
Contractual/Consulting	$0	$0	$0	N/A. All labor is included in Personnel/Labor.
Small Grants Program	$20,000	$4,000	$24,000	$4,000 stipends for six mentees selected competitively under the attached criteria, paid in installments tied to participation and completion of the public-facing project. The grant funds five stipends; donor funds support the sixth.
Other	$800	$700	$1,500	Public showcase event where mentees present their completed projects to the community.
Total Direct Cost	**$25,000**	**$45,460**	**$70,460**	
Indirect Costs*	$0	$1,500	$1,500	Insurance and general administration, contributed as match. No indirect costs requested (2.1% of direct costs, under the 15% cap).
Total	**$25,000**	**$46,960**	**$71,960**	Of the $46,960 match, $28,925 is secured: $12,350 raised from individual donors and $16,575 in director and mentor time contributed in kind. CommonsKeepers is actively raising the remaining $18,035. The License Plate grant and funds already secured fully cover mentee stipends and core program costs.

*Maximum of 15% of project direct cost unless the project applicant has a Negotiated Indirect Cost Rate Agreement.

FY27 LICENSE PLATE GRANT APPLICATION STAFFING PLAN

Please upload this sheet as a PDF as part of your application.

For each individual participating in this project, please share their name, title, and associated hourly rate, number of hours. In addition, please list the tasks that each staff member/volunteer will participate in. The staffing plan should be uploaded at the end of the application.

Staff Name and Title	**Hourly Rate**	**Number of Hours**	**Total Project Cost**	**Amount Requested**	**Match Amount**
Example: Jane Doe	$25.00	15	$375.00	$281.25	$93.75
Sue Jaye Johnson, Program Director (50% in kind)	$50	185	$9,250	$0	$9,250
Elspeth Hay, Program Director and Basket Making Mentor (50% in kind)	$50	210	$10,500	$0	$10,500
Olivia Bois, Program Administrator	$27	230	$6,210	$3,000	$3,210
Bob Wells, Mentor, Biochar (80% in kind)	$50	60	$3,000	$0	$3,000
Sarah Naciri, Mentor, Herbalism (30% in kind)	$50	60	$3,000	$0	$3,000
Nicole Cormier, Mentor, Nutrition and Local Food (30% in kind)	$50	60	$3,000	$0	$3,000
Michael Cestaro, Mentor, Filmmaking (30% in kind)	$50	60	$3,000	$0	$3,000
Vanessa Tavernetti, Cohort Experience Facilitator	$50	40	$2,000	$0	$2,000
John Portnoy, Ph.D., Mentor and Field Walk Leader (80% in kind)	$50	40	$2,000	$0	$2,000
Total Personnel		945	$41,960	$3,000	$38,960
Fringe (enter fringe rate as percent):	0%		$0	$0	$0
TOTAL:			**$41,960**	**$3,000**	**$38,960**

Staff Name and Title	Tasks/Responsibilities
Example: Jane Doe	Example: Management

Sue Jaye Johnson, Program Director (50% in kind)	Leads overall program coordination. Co-designs the curriculum and cohort calendar, recruits and orients mentors, and checks in with them throughout the season. Oversees mentee recruitment, reviews applications, and leads interviews and matching. Supervises the program administrator. Co-leads the season-long cohort experience with Vanessa Tavernetti, including outings and ceremonies that build connection to place and to one another. Leads public speaking training. Guides mentees' public-facing projects, leads the final showcase, and writes the final report.
Elspeth Hay, Program Director and Basket Making Mentor (50% in kind)	Co-designs the curriculum with mentors. Mentors a mentee in traditional basket making. Leads cohort talks on building healthy ecosystems, including the role of prescribed fire in land stewardship. Participates in mentee interviews and selection, supports mentees' public-facing projects, co-leads the final showcase, and contributes to the final report.
Olivia Bois, Program Administrator	Manages outreach and the mentee application process. Collects mentor and mentee agreements, waivers, and tax forms. Schedules sessions, outings, and cohort gatherings, and handles logistics. Processes stipend installments and keeps attendance logs, session records, and project documentation for reimbursement. Runs program surveys, manages accounting and grant reporting, handles communications and social media, and coordinates the showcase event.
Bob Wells, Mentor, Biochar (80% in kind)	Mentors a mentee in biochar production and application, farm operations, and fabrication at Redberry Farm and his metal shop. Guides the mentee's public-facing project and participates in the showcase.
Sarah Naciri, Mentor, Herbalism (30% in kind)	Mentors a mentee in plant identification, sustainable wildcrafting, medicine making, and running a small herbal business. Guides the mentee's public-facing project and participates in the showcase.
Nicole Cormier, Mentor, Nutrition and Local Food (30% in kind)	Mentors a mentee in local food systems, nutrition, and herbalism, drawing on her experience training dietetic interns. Guides the mentee's public-facing project and participates in the showcase.
Michael Cestaro, Mentor, Filmmaking (30% in kind)	Mentors a mentee in documentary filmmaking, from shooting and editing to working with clients. Guides the mentee's public-facing project and participates in the showcase.
Vanessa Tavernetti, Cohort Experience Facilitator	Co-leads the season-long cohort experience with Sue Jaye Johnson, including outings and ceremonies that deepen mentees' relationship with place, the elements, and one another.
John Portnoy, Ph.D., Mentor and Field Walk Leader (80% in kind)	Leads cohort field walks on salt marsh ecology, Cape Cod hydrology, and the Herring River Restoration. Provides mentorship to mentees interested in ecology and habitat restoration.

Note: All staff are independent contractors; no fringe benefits apply. Mentees (6) are program participants, not staff; they receive $4,000 stipends through the Small Grants Program line of the budget, awarded under the attached selection criteria.

TOWN OF TRURO

P.O. Box 2030, Truro, MA 02666
Tel: 508-349-7004, Extension: 110 or 124 Fax: 508-349-5505

Re: Letter of support for CommonsKeepers Mentorship Program

Dear Committee,

I write in support of CommonsKeepers' application for The Mentorship Program which pairs young people on the Outer Cape with local practitioners who tend our land, water, and community.

I have served as Truro's Climate Action Coordinator since January 2025. Much of my work is bringing a climate lens to decisions that aren't labeled "climate," like housing, water, and the local economy. Our climate goals depend on the people who live here, and who can make a living caring for it. On the Outer Cape, we are losing young people who could be vital contributors to our economy and to our climate solutions because they can't see a way to stay.

The Mentorship Program addresses this issue by ensuring the transfer of skills from professionals and elders in our community to the next generation. As federal support for climate work becomes less certain, local capacity like this matters more.

CommonsKeepers is a promising new partner in land, water and community stewardship. I'm confident they will carry out this program with care and that its benefits will reach beyond Truro to the wider Outer Cape.

I encourage you to fund this proposal.
Sincerely,

Chris Palmer
Climate Action Coordinator, Town of Truro

Re: Letter of support for CommonsKeepers, FY27 Cape Cod License Plate Grant

Dear Cape Cod Commission Grant Review Committee,

I am writing to support CommonsKeepers' application to the FY27 Cape Cod License Plate Grant for the CommonsKeepers Mentorship Program.

I am an organic farmer in Eastham and the founder of New England Biochar. I served as a mentor during the CommonsKeepers' June Firekeepers Retreat.

Mentoring and hands-on teaching are among my favorite things to do. Over the years I've taught students in biochar making and application, blacksmithing, vegetable growing and marketing, metal shop and welding, and mechanical design, among other things. I'm working toward more of a retirement phase in my life now, where I can do less business and more of what I love: working with others in creative ways, for mutual benefit, without a capitalist mindset running the show. A program like this is exactly the kind of work I want more of.

I'm glad to put the farm itself into this endeavor. We have space for gatherings, workshops, and experiments that goes well beyond the biochar demonstrations we've done together, including room for the kind of large outdoor fires we've built in the field. I can also offer our metal fabrication shop on Holmes Road and the blacksmith shop at the Eastham Historical Museum.

Young people rarely get to see this kind of work up close, let alone try it with their own hands. The young people on the Outer Cape need to know what kinds of opportunities are available to them. I look forward to sharing what I know.

I would be happy to answer any questions.

Sincerely,

Bob Wells

Bob Wells
Founder, New England Biochar; Owner, Redberry Farm, Eastham
bob@newenglandbiochar.com

bob@newenglandbiochar.com

John W. Portnoy, Ph.D.
Narrowland Farm, Wellfleet, MA
September 25, 2026

Dear Cape Cod Commission Grant Review Committee,

I am writing to support CommonsKeepers' application to the FY27 Cape Cod License Plate Grant for the CommonsKeepers Mentorship Program.

I am a retired salt-marsh ecologist with a career of 30 years at Cape Cod National Seashore. For the past 18 years, I have volunteered on the Wellfleet Conservation Commission and the Science Advisory Group of Friends of Herring River. My work has centered on salt marsh ecology, elemental cycling and habitat restoration, and Cape Cod's hydrology, including its groundwater, ponds, and coastal wetlands.

This work speaks directly to the CEDS goal to advance climate change resiliency, which names salt-marsh restoration as a model for the nature-based solutions the region needs. Passing this knowledge to a younger generation, so that it continues after those of us who did this work are no longer able to, is exactly the kind of workforce and training that our community needs.

I am glad to take part in this program, including leading walks for the cohort, and I support CommonsKeepers' application for this grant.

Sincerely,

John W. Portnoy, Ph.D.
Wellfleet, MA

Dear License Plate Grant Review Committee,

I am writing to support CommonsKeepers' application to the FY27 Cape Cod License Plate Grant for its Mentorship Program.

I am a filmmaker and photographer who grew up in Eastham. After working in commercial photography and video in Los Angeles and New York, I returned to the Cape, my creative center and home, where my documentary work has focused on the people and communities who live here, including the short films *Clay*, *White Space, Signs from the Mainland* and my feature documentary *Everything Moves*.

As someone who grew up on the Outer Cape, I know how important it is for young people to have pathways to viable, meaningful, place-based work. I've enjoyed the mentoring I've done, and I look forward to working with aspiring filmmakers and photographers through the CommonsKeepers Mentorship Program, helping young people become vital contributors to this place and this community, alongside the other mentors working to build a greater sense of belonging here on the Outer Cape.

I am glad to support this work and would be happy to answer any questions.

Sincerely,



Michael Cestaro

Delicious Living Nutrition

Dear Committee,

I am writing to support CommonsKeepers' application to the FY27 Cape Cod License Plate Grant for its Mentorship Program.

I am a registered dietitian and clinical herbalist, and the founder of Delicious Living Nutrition and its Dietetic Internship. I have been involved with CommonsKeepers from the start as a chef for both of CommonsKeepers' June Retreats, and as a resource for young people interested in herbalism, foraging and nutrition. I run a foraging program at the Truro Elementary School, which often collaborates with the CommonsKeepers Hiking and Foraging Program at the Wellfleet Elementary School.

Local food, and the practice of foraging is central to how these programs connect participants to the place they are learning about. I have seen first-hand how learning about local plants creates a deep sense of belonging and joy. Through my own clinical practice, I have mentored dieticians in the early stages of their careers and I know how important it is to learn from experienced and local practitioners.

I am excited to continue working with CommonsKeepers and to help them build this very important mentorship program. Young people on the Outer Cape need to see role models who are engaged with their work and their community and they need to know that it is possible to have a meaningful career doing what they love in this place that they love.

I recommend CommonsKeepers wholeheartedly and look forward to all that is to come with their workforce development programs.

Sincerely,



Nicole Cormier, RD, LDN
Founder and Program Director, Delicious Living Nutrition

Sarah Naciri
Founder, Wild Blossoms Apothecary
sarah@wildblossomsapothecary.com

9/23/26

Cape Cod Commission

Re: Letter of support for CommonsKeepers, FY27 Cape Cod License Plate Grant

I am writing to support CommonsKeepers' application to the FY27 Cape Cod License Plate Grant for its Mentorship Program.

I am an herbalist, educator, and forager based in North Truro, where for more than a decade I've built a practice around the plants and mushrooms that grow wild along this coastline. I have worked with CommonsKeepers on multiple occasions: leading foraging walks, and creating and holding a fire ceremony for their June Gatherings. I've also led gatherings for the wider community that introduce people to the edible and medicinal plants growing in their own landscape, and to the practice of harvesting them with care, so that what is taken is also tended.

What I want to offer a young mentee is not just plant knowledge, but a way of paying attention: how to read a landscape, know what it can give, and know what it needs back. It is a skill I have cultivated over many years and I am excited to pass this knowledge on to young people at the beginning of their careers.

I offer my enthusiastic support for this mentorship program, and I look forward to sharing what I know with the young adults who are looking to establish themselves here on the Outer Cape and who are seeking pathways for meaningful work stewarding our land, water, and community.

Sincerely,

Sarah Naciri
Herbalist, Educator, and Founder, Wild Blossoms Apothecary

Vanessa Tavernetti
Ecopsychologist and Educator

September 22, 2026

Dear Cape Cod Commission,

I am writing in strong support of CommonsKeepers' application for their new mentorship program for young adults on the Outer Cape.

I am an ecopsychologist and educator with more than twenty years of experience helping people build lasting relationships with the land. I hold an MA in Ecopsychology from Naropa University, where I have taught in the Contemplative Education and Environmental Studies departments. I have trained thousands of educators through the Occidental Arts and Ecology Center and helped establish hundreds of school gardens across the country.

Over the course of the program, Jaye Johnson of CommonsKeepers and I will work with the full cohort of mentees to deepen their relationship with this place and its elements, and with one another.

Young people interested in careers in environmental work need extra support so they don't become discouraged. Alongside the practical skills the mentees will be learning, we will bring the group on outings and create ceremonies and experiences that strengthen their connection to this place and to one another, so they can build resilient lives here on the Outer Cape.

I have recently returned to the Cape after years away, and I am excited to bring my offerings to CommonsKeepers to support the next generation of stewards. I urge your support for this program.

Sincerely,

Vanessa Tavernetti
Ecopsychologist and Educator
Co-Founder, Earth Magic Academy