

Watershed Agricultural Council

Agriculture ♦ Forestry ♦ Conservation Easements ♦ Economic Viability

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MINUTES OF THE WATERSHED AGRICULTURAL COUNCIL MEETING

June 27, 2023

I. Meeting called to order at 10:03 a.m.

Directors Present, via Zoom:

Dwight Bruno
Dave Cammer
Jim Darling
Paul Gallay
Wayland 'Bud' Gladstone, *Chair*
Karl Gockel, *Treasurer*
Jennifer Grossman, *Secretary*
Barb Hanselman
Jason Helmbold
Fred Huneke
Tom Hutson, *Vice Chair*
Steve Reed
John Verhoeven
Jeff Wilson
Marilyn Wyman

Directors Absent:

John Vickers, *DEP Representative*

Others Present, via Zoom:

Ryan Naatz, *Executive Director*
Amy Faulkner, *Director of Operations*
Carol Bishop, *Finance Director*
Connor Young, *WOH Agriculture Program Manager*
Tom Pavlesich, *Forestry Program Manager*
Serena Orleski, *Easement Program Manager*
Kayla Atanasoff, *Easement Program Executive Assistant*
Michael Vander Werff, *NYC DEP*
Sara Storrer, *NYC DEP*
Lee Harris, *NYC DOI*
Patrick Palmer, *NYS DOH*
Morgan Tarbell, *NYS DOH*
Bruce Dolph, *DC SWCD Board*
Katie Lynch, *US EPA*
Elizabeth DeFalco, *The Reporter*
Mary Crisafulli, *The Mountain Eagle*
Barbara Paxton, *BoardStrong*

II. Approval of Minutes

Motion to approve the May 23, 2023 minutes, as presented.

Motion: Steve Reed

Second: John Verhoeven

Approved

III. Executive Director's Report – Ryan Naatz

A. FY24 Work Plans – Motion

Ryan began by giving some context to how the Committee work plans come together annually for review and approval. He asked Board members if there were any questions or comments about the included work plans ahead of the motion.

Motion to accept the FY24 Program Committee Work Plans, as presented.

Motion: Fred Huneke

Second: Karl Gockel

Approved

B. WAC Building Demolition (*added*)

Ryan explained that WAC and DEP have been working together to include funds in the FY24 budget for the demolition of the buildings on the former Ploutz property, as well as associated costs. He gave an update on the Requests for Proposals for the demolition itself, as well as environmental monitoring services for mitigation (the former being closed and the latter being open for the remainder of the month). He anticipated that demolition services would be in place by the end of July, and monitoring services in place by the beginning of September.

There were a few subsequent questions and discussions regarding the cost and the process.

C. BoardStrong Survey (*added*)

Ryan explained that following the Directors Only meeting, for which Council met with a representative from *BoardStrong*, Amy sent a survey around to Directors to gauge priorities for action items that have been discussed by the Strategic Vision Working Group over the past two years. The results of the survey were as follows: (1) Committee structure, (2) WAP metric evaluations, (3) reaffirming or adopting a new mission statement, and (4) policy updates.

With that, he turned the floor over to Barbara Paxton, from *BoardStrong*, to discuss her preliminary findings and recommendations.

IV. Chair's Report – Wayland 'Bud' Gladstone

The only thing Bud had to report was that the Executive Committee recently met to conduct Ryan's performance evaluation; he will meet with Tom Hutson soon to review the evaluation and report back to both Executive Committee and Council next month.

V. Finance Committee – Karl Gockel & Carol Bishop

A. April Financials – Motion

Karl highlighted the discussions of June’s Finance Committee meeting and asked for any questions or comments on the April financial statements ahead of the motion.

Motion to accept the April Financials, as presented.

Motion: Tom Hutson

Second: Steve Reed

Approved

B. FY24 Budget – Motion

Karl asked for any questions or comments on the FY24 budget ahead of the motion. Ryan noted that the FY24 budget is the largest annual budget that WAC has had to-date, and considering where the organization was only two years ago, it’s great to see ambitious work plans and support from partners.

Motion to accept the FY24 Annual Budget, as presented.

Motion: Fred Huneke

Second: Jim Darling

Approved

VI. Endowment Committee – Karl Gockel

A. Investment Policy – Motion

Karl explained that the Endowment Committee met on May 9th and 23rd to review the WAC Stewardship Endowment Fund Investment Policy. He asked for any questions or comments on the modifications to the policy ahead of the motion.

Jason added that he will be meeting with Serena soon to work on funding projections and presumed investment returns for the post-acquisition phase of the Easement Program – there will be more to share later.

Motion to approve the modifications to the Investment Policy, as presented.

Motion: Bud Gladstone

Second: Jason Helmbold

Approved

VII. Agricultural Committee – Steve Reed & Connor Young

Steve explained that the Committee met on June 13th, and he presented some highlights outlined in the meeting minutes.

VIII. Easement Committee – Tom Hutson & Serena Orleski

Tom explained that Committee recently reviewed a new easement applicant list, and asked Serena to give a staffing update; Matt Schaefer joined the team last week as a *Stewardship Specialist*, filling Dennis Heinz's previous position.

IX. Economic Viability Committee – Jennifer Grossman & Kristan Morley

Jen explained that Committee did not meet in June, but reported a couple of updates.

First, the agricultural assessment component of the Micro-Grants Program has been eliminated. She explained that the assessment is a property tax incentive program; because the requirement for an assessment was not included in our contract or imposed in our statutes, it was removed because the EV Program was finding that many grant applicants were small start-up operations that did not meet the eligibility requirements of the Agricultural Assessment Program. The hope is that this change will broaden the eligible applicant pool for grant rounds moving forward.

Second, Committee will be discussing a climate-action funding program through PlaNYC at the July meeting, and will have more information to report about this funding opportunity at the July Council meeting. This program will grant money to farms within the NYC Watersheds to expand agricultural production of fruits and vegetables. Unlike the WAC Micro-Grant Program, which is funded through a separate contract, this grant opportunity would be available to East-of-Hudson farms as well. Ryan took a moment to clarify that the monies for this new grant opportunity were incorporated into the WAC FY24 budget.

X. East of Hudson Committee – Fred Huneke & Gibson Durnford

Fred explained that he was not able to attend the last Committee meeting, so encouraged everyone to refer to the meeting minutes for program reporting and project updates.

XI. Forestry Committee – Dave Cammer & Tom Pavlesich

Dave explained that Committee did not meet in June, but he reported that DEP approved the modifications to the Forestry Program Handbook, and the program is still waiting to receive approval for the Forest Service grant. Tom also noted that the program is currently looking for a farmer to participate in a stakeholder's discussion with educators at the 2023 Watershed Forestry Institute for Teachers on August 3rd. He encouraged anyone interested to reach out to him by email.

XII. Human Resources Committee – Marilyn Wyman

Marilyn explained that Committee met on June 6th and approved a Position Creation Request for a *Finance Administrative Assistant* and referred Council members to the meeting minutes for the rationale. In addition, Committee reviewed and discussed WAC's telecommuting policy; she indicated that subsequent discussions are likely to follow at future meetings.

XIII. Governance Committee – John Verhoeven

John explained that Committee did not meet in June, so he had nothing to report.

XIV. NYC DEP Report – John Vickers

John was absent from the meeting so Michael presented the only update. He explained that DEP is looking to put together a facilities tour for WAC Board members, WAC senior staff, and WAP partners. John proposed a tour of the West Delaware Intake Chamber, followed by a tour of the Cannonsville Dam with a presentation on the new hydroelectric project. The tour agenda is still tentative, but the proposed dates are Wednesday, August 9th or Thursday, August 10th.

XV. NYS DOH, US EPA Reports – Patrick Palmer & Katie Lynch

Pat wanted to bring two items to Council’s attention.

First, he reported that the city recently submitted a FAD deliverable for a long-term land acquisition plan for the Land Acquisition Program, which includes WAC’s agricultural and forest conservation easements. That report is available online, along with other FAD deliverables.

Second, he announced that the state will be holding a Drinking Water Quality Council meeting on Wednesday, June 28th. He explained that the group was formed about 5 years ago to evaluate drinking water standards in light of emerging water contaminants. As these meetings are public, he invited anyone interested to attend.

XVI. Other

XVII. Executive Session

Motion to enter Executive Session at 11:01 a.m. to discuss financials.

Motion: Tom Hutson

Second: Steve Reed

Approved

Motion to come out of Executive Session at 11:30 a.m.

Motion: Dave Cammer

Second: Fred Huneke

Approved

XVIII. Adjournment

Motion to adjourn the meeting at 11:30 a.m.

Motion: Dave Cammer

Second: Fred Huneke

Approved

The next meeting will be held on July 25, 2023 at 10:00 a.m.