

# Watershed Agricultural Council

Agriculture ♦ Forestry ♦ Conservation Easements ♦ Economic Viability

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## MINUTES OF THE WATERSHED AGRICULTURAL COUNCIL MEETING

February 24, 2026

(\*In Person and via MS 'Teams')

### Director's Present:

Wayland 'Bud' Gladstone, *Chair*  
Jennifer Grossman, *Secretary, via Teams*  
Karl Gockel, *Treasurer*  
Fred Huneke  
Steve Reed  
Marilyn Wyman  
Michael Vander Werff, *NYC DEP*  
Jason Helmbold  
Dwight Bruno  
Tom Hutson, *Vice Chair*  
Paul Gallay  
Kyle Clark, *via Teams*  
James Darling  
Barbara Hanselman, *via Teams*  
John Verhoeven  
Nancy Wyncoop, *via Teams*

### Director's Absent:

N/A

### Others Present:

Ryan Naatz, *Executive Director*  
Carol Bishop, *Director of Finance*  
Amy Faulkner, *Director of Operations*  
Connor Young, *WOH Agricultural Program Manager*  
Serena Orleski, *Easement Program Manager*  
Kristan Morley, *Economic Viability Program Manager*  
Nate Townsend, *Whole Farm Planning Coordinator*  
Chelsea Ingram, *Procurement and Contracts Coordinator*  
Cindy McCarthy, *NM and PFM Coordinator*  
Brian LaTourette, *Operations Coordinator*  
Bruce Dolph, *DCSWCD, via Teams*  
Graydon Dutcher, *DCSWCD*  
Sara Storrer, *NYC DEP, via Teams*  
Shilo Williams, *NYC DEP*  
Patrick Palmer, *NYS DOH*  
Morgan Zyzik-Tarbell, *NYS DOH*  
Pauline Wanjugi, *NYS DOH*  
Todd Heyn, *New York Farm Bureau*  
Lillian Browne, *The Reporter*

I. **Meeting called to order at 10:04 a.m.**

II. **Approval of Minutes**

**Motion to approve the minutes of the January 27, 2026, meeting as presented.**

Motion: Fred Huneke

Second: Tom Hutson

***Approved***

### III. Executive Director's Report – Ryan Naatz

#### A. Operational and Program Updates

- Ryan Naatz reported that the lease for 44 West Street has been executed and is in place for the next five years. He thanked Amy Faulkner and Graydon Dutcher for accomplishing this.
- Ryan introduced Todd Hyne of the New York Farm Bureau. Todd was invited to the meeting today to discuss what Farm Bureau (FB) does and how to try to overlap opportunities and current initiatives to encourage dialogue and consider how WAC and Farm Bureau can collaborate in the future. Barb Hanselman is president of Delaware County Farm Bureau. Both Todd and Barb spoke about their current initiative focusing on farm safety through a share the road campaign to inform all residents, part time and full time, to be aware of farmers on the road, and what to do when you come upon a tractor or farm implement on the highway. The campaign is to raise awareness because farmers need to travel further to access their land which results in them being on the road more. In addition to that, Farm Bureau serves as a voice for farmers on many other issues that have a potential impact on agriculture in the region. Brochures were shared with the group; Farm Bureau is a membership organization and all were encouraged to join. WAC has committed to help spread the word on the farm safety initiative through newsletters and social media posts – board members should look to Farm Bureau as a resource. Barb expressed her appreciation for the opportunity to share about the work FB does as she feels it is important that all supporters of agriculture stick together; the bottom line being that agriculture needs to be supported. She added that Delaware County Farm Bureau will be holding a farmer's night out on April 25 at the American Legion in Delhi, a place for farmers and farm families to visit and network. She encouraged everyone to attend. Ryan encouraged all board members to share more on the other boards and initiatives that they are working on outside of WAC as representatives in the agriculture community.
- Marilyn Wyman encouraged the group to consider the Master Farmers Owners program; this service is available to farmers and farms that have forests on their property, which most do.
- Fred Huneke suggested a forum by invitation to discuss common interests between agricultural focused organizations. Barb and Ryan agreed that this would be a worthwhile exercise, as it is important that everyone works together.
- Serena Orleski took the opportunity to share information regarding the Conservation Easement Round Table to be held March 13<sup>th</sup> at 12 noon. In lieu of more traditional solicitation efforts to date, Rebecca Morgan and Serena are trying out a community event to encourage people interested in learning more about easements to come and ask questions. She shared that members of the community who are interested generally in learning more about easements should attend. Ryan encouraged members to reach out to friends and acquaintances of theirs to attend the round table.
- Serena added that the Easement Program did apply for the TNC grant that was approved at the Board meeting last month. If awarded, this would support additional outreach events in the Windham/Hunter area. In addition, she is working with AFT on the potential for WAC to apply for a regional navigator grant. Michael Vander Werff offered a letter of support from NYC DEP if that is helpful.

## **B. Quarterly Program Reports:**

- Ryan provided the opportunity for questions, comments, feedback on the reports that were shared in the meeting packets. Paul asked for more information on the OAG grant. Connor Young, as the lead of the effort, reported that there has been a lot of positive outreach, more than a dozen applications with at least a dozen additional applications expected. Farmers are very excited about the opportunities these grants provide and the opportunity to think creatively. The deadline for proposals is Friday, February 27.
- Jason Helmbold added that he finds the manager memos to be one of the best changes made within the quarterly manager reports. Jim Darling thinks these reports are better than the verbal reports that used to be given because these documents can be saved, referenced, etc.
- Spotlight Presentation – DRAFT Long Term Management Plan: Connor Young, WOH Agricultural Program Manager, presented on the work completed to date regarding the Long-Term Management Plan. The plan is a requirement of the contract, as written: *NYC DEP and WAC will collaboratively develop a Long-Term Management Plan for the WAP as outlined in the FAD.* This plan is intended to serve as a guiding framework for program delivery specific to the public-private partnership within the NYC watershed. Work to date has been a collaborative effort between Agricultural Program staff, the committee, and DEP staff, Sara Storrer and Michael Vander Werff. Connor provided time for directors to pose questions. Michael commented that the idea of having participant readiness be added to part of the ranking is important. The program staff have historically considered this internally, but this modification will include it more formally into the ranking system. Next steps, contract deliverable for this recommendation report is March 31. WAC will make best efforts to hit that; this took a significant amount of time to validate, and it is incredibly important that whatever is collectively recommended makes sense and will work. The original intent was to have AgMip and Columbia provide feedback on some of the NASEM recommendations, as required by the report, as it seems unlikely that AgMip will deliver on our expectations in a timely manner. Connor concluded that if any or all these recommendations are accepted, the Committee will have a lot of work to do to develop and update guidelines and procedures.

## **IV. Chair's Report – Wayland “Bud” Gladstone**

### **A. Directors Only**

Bud thanked everyone for coming to the Directors Only meeting; many expressed that this was the most productive DO meeting that has occurred in years.

### **B. Other**

Bud shared the recently released news story about a Pennsylvania farmer that recently turned down a \$15 million dollar offer for his farm to be sold to a data center and instead sold the development rights on his farm to the Lancaster Farmland Trust. The group discussed the importance of conserving agricultural land as working landscapes. Dwight Bruno added that he sees the biggest challenge being education in order to get the word out and get people to understand the value of conserving working lands.

**V. Building Committee – Karl Gockel**

- Karl reported that the committee has been presented with elevations, plans and interior mockups for a new WAC facility. The contract for site scoping and design expires at the end of March so the staff, subcontractors and committee are finishing up the remaining tasks to ensure that work is completed. The most recent meeting included a presentation by Collin Miller, a passionate advocate for wood use in the region. The committee considered the possibility of utilizing wood pellets or chips for wood heating purposes for all or a portion of the building. The committee would like to have a component of wood heat utilized in our building, feasible. There may also be grants available for the inclusion of wood heating systems in the building.

**VI. Finance Committee – Karl Gockel**

- A.** Karl Gockel reported that the expired DEP/WAC contracts have been closed out, while recognizing Carol Bishop, Michael Vander Werff, and their respective staff for their efforts.

**B. December 31, 2025, Financial Report**

Financials were in the packet; Karl asked the committee if there were any questions.

**Motion to approve the December 31, 2025, Financial Report as presented.**

Motion: Paul Gallay

Second: James Darling

***Approved***

**VII. Governance Committee – Jason Helmbold**

**A. 2025 Recap**

Jason reported that he felt that Directors Only was a success. The committee continues to work along in accordance with the approved work plan and has a meeting scheduled for later today to focus on the review of the by-laws. He requested ideas from the council on potential training topics for the upcoming year. Directors are encouraged to notify Jason or Ryan with any ideas. To enhance council member understanding of all programs, directors are encouraged to join committee meetings, in addition to those they are already voting members on. To facilitate this, Kayla Henderson will provide a calendar for all committee meetings to the Board and all Board members will be added to all committee Teams calendar invite. Steve Reed responded that the recent DO meeting was one of the best that the group has ever had. Ryan added that the power point, action items, and notes from the discussion will be available to the Directors within the Teams platform for review. Board members will be notified when those documents are available.

**XIII. NYC DEP Report – Michael Vander Werff, NYC DEP**

In the interest of time, there was nothing of importance to report at this time.

**XIV. NYS DOH, US EPA Reports – Patrick Palmer**

Report will be given in Executive Session

**XV. Executive Session**

**Motion to enter Executive Session at 11:45 a.m.**

Motion: Michael Vander Werff

Second: Steve Reed

***Approved***

**Motion to come out of Executive Session at 12:35 p.m.**

Motion: Paul Gallay

Second: Steve Reed

**Approved**

**Motion to approve the modification request to the job description and salary of the Executive Director position, as outlined in the justification memo and Position Modification Form dated February 17, 2026.**

Motion: Karl Gockel

Second: James Darling

**Approved**

**XVII. Adjournment**

The meeting was adjourned at 12:36 p.m. by common consent.

The next meeting of the Council is scheduled for **March 24, 2026**, at 10:00 a.m., via Teams.

*Jennifer Grossman*

03 / 27 / 2026

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Jennifer Grossman, WAC Board Secretary

Date