

Watershed Agricultural Council

Agriculture ♦ Forestry ♦ Conservation Easements ♦ Economic Viability

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MINUTES OF THE WATERSHED AGRICULTURAL COUNCIL MEETING

January 27, 2026

(*via 'MS Teams')

Director's Present:

Wayland 'Bud' Gladstone, *Chair*

Jennifer Grossman, *Secretary*

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

James Darling

Barbara Hanselman

John Verhoeven

Nancy Wyncoop

Others Present:

Amy Faulkner, *Director of Operations*

Carol Bishop, *Director of Finance*

Tom Pavlesich, *Forestry Program Manager*

Connor Young, *WOH Agricultural Program Manager*

Serena Orleski, *Easement Program Manager*

Kayla Henderson, *Head of Administration*

Heather Magnan, *Communications Manager*

Kristan Morley, *Economic Viability Program Manager*

Rebecca Morgan, *Acquisitions Coordinator*

Sara Storrer, *NYC DEP*

Patrick Palmer, *NYS DOH*

Morgan Zyzik-Tarbell, *NYS DOH*

Lillian Browne, *The Reporter*

Director's Absent:

N/A

I. Meeting called to order at 10:02 a.m.

II. Approval of Minutes

Motion to approve the minutes of the December 16, 2025, meeting as presented.

Motion: Fred Huneke

Second: Jim Darling

Approved

III. Executive Director's Report – Ryan Naatz

A. New Council Member Welcome

Ryan Naatz and Bud Gladstone welcomed Nancy Wyncoop to the Council. Members introduced themselves and provided background information on their respective roles on the Council. Amy Faulkner noted, for Nancy's benefit, that Council meetings are open to the public and include representatives from local newspapers and our stakeholders.

B. Operational / Programmatic Updates

1. 44 West Street Lease Agreement: WAC continues to lease the office space via a month-to-month agreement with Delaware County Soil and Water Conservation District (DCSWCD) and is in the final stages of executing a renewal to the sublease agreement. Acknowledgement was extended to Amy Faulkner and Graydon Dutcher for all their efforts in getting this completed in a timely manner.
2. Columbia/AGMIP: A CCA project management workshop was held early November 2025 regarding a series of meetings coming up to reengage our technical staff. March/April workshop invitations for Council members and farmers will be sent at the end of February. Kytt McManus, Project Director and adjunct expert at Columbia, mentioned some internal Columbia SEED opportunities currently being pursued. One of relevance for WAC will pilot development of easily accessible tools to use drones for high-resolution monitoring of indicators of successful regenerative farming practices such as soil health, crop diversity, water dynamics, carbon sequestration and yields, converting imagery and sensor data into actionable, open-access insights for farmers, policymakers, and researchers.
3. 'The Nature Conservancy (TNC) Climate Resiliency' Grant: Ryan Naatz brought to the Council's attention a funding opportunity for consideration that may be of interest to WAC. This grant is designed to support climate resiliency efforts through fee acquisition and/or conservation easements, as well as through community planning and engagement activities. While WAC is exceptionally well funded and strongly supported by DEP for most of its acquisition efforts, there remain limitations on what costs can be reimbursed through existing funding sources. In that regard, TNC could help fill an important gap. If awarded, funds would be used to support more targeted community outreach and education efforts, including events, advertising/solicitation, and modest costs associated with space accommodation and food. These activities would strengthen engagement with landowners and communities while complementing, rather than duplicating, existing EP work. Because the application process includes a time-sensitive deadline of February 13, 2026, if the Council is agreeable, Ryan would like to request a motion be made to approve the grant submittal for \$10k.

Motion to approve application submittal for the 'TNC Climate Resiliency' grant.

Motion: Tom Hutson

Second: Dwight Bruno

Approved

4. 'Transition' Open Forum Discussion: Ryan Naatz requested Council members provide talking points in preparation for his upcoming meeting with American Farmland Trust (AFT) on February 12, to ensure constructive conversation is had on how WAC can continue to remain a strong presence within the working lands community. Council member perspectives focused on the board itself (*how to better ensure smooth leadership transitions and continuity of institutional knowledge*), leadership, staffing dynamics, agricultural operations, land/forest ownership trends, and any other business items felt of importance for consideration. Ryan additionally requested Council members reflect on the organization and how to purposefully direct future needs for discussion prep at the upcoming February 'Directors Only' meeting. Key talking points such as education, production, and how to better leverage opportunities, for AFT collaboration consideration.

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

A. Committee Assignments

A draft committee assignment list was provided for informational purposes. Bud Gladstone requests Council members reach out to him should with any changes to their assigned duties.

B. Approval of Governance Committee Members

Motion to approve the list of Governance Committee members as recommended.

Motion: Karl Gockel

Second: Dwight Bruno

Approved

C. Approval of Audit Committee Members

Motion to approve the list of Audit Committee members as recommended.

Motion: Fred Huneke

Second: Jason Helmbold

Approved

V. Building Committee – Karl Gockel

Kenneth Gay from Keystone provided the committee details on the most recent updates made to the site scoping process, including septic plans, elevation planning, wood/wood byproduct usage, energy sourcing, and outbuilding drawings. Kayla Henderson will include the most current site drawing plans with the latest committee minutes for comments/feedback purposes.

VI. Finance Committee – Karl Gockel

A. October 31, 2025, Financial Report

Details regarding total assets (*27 vs. 17 from prior year*) and receipt of NYS OAG grant monies received (*\$1.5m*) were provided. NBT is slated to present on annual endowment updates at the February committee meeting. Carol Bishop reviewed contract closeout details; Bud Gladstone and Karl, respectively, thanked Carol and her team for all their efforts in keeping things on track.

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

Motion: Marilyn Wyman

Second: Steve Reed

Approved

VII. Governance Committee – Jason Helmbold

A. Ad-hoc Executive Committee Member Recommendations

Motion to recommend Fred Huneke to continue as an Ad-hoc member of the Executive Committee.

Motion: John Verhoeven

Second: Jennifer Grossman

Recused: Fred Huneke

Approved

Motion to recommend Marilyn Wyman to continue as an Ad-hoc member of the Executive Committee.

Motion: Dwight Bruno

Second: Steve Reed

Recused: Marilyn Wyman

Approved

B. 'Directors Only' Conference Update

The conference will be held Thursday, February 12, 9:30 a.m.-4:00 p.m. (*location to be confirmed*). Jason Helmbold provided a brief review of agenda items slated for discussion, such as a presentation by AFT, review of Ryan Naatz's SWOT analysis results, potential board trainings, and communication expectations. The Council is advised to look for confirmation on conference location details to be sent by the end of the week.

VIII. Agriculture Committee – Steve Reed

At the last meeting held, there were no WFPs to review. Extended discussion was had regarding proposed guideline reviews prior to committee approval. The long-term management plan should be ready for finalization at March's committee meeting.

IX. Economic Viability Committee – Jennifer Grossman

Morgan Hughes is adjusting to her role as executive assistant and is already proving to be an asset on the EV team. EV committee meetings will be held bi-monthly effective this month. The Council is encouraged to review the revised EV handbook prior to approval. Kristan Morley provided some updates regarding EV grants and intends to provide more detailed information at a later date. Pure Catskills memberships have recently launched.

X. Easements Committee – Tom Hutson

Serena Orleski provided updates on the new applicant scoring/ranking system. There will be an Easement Round Table Discussion held March 13 at the Hamden Town Hall, with a light lunch provided, for educational purposes. Stewardship is currently not as busy; however, there has been an uptick with providing new easement landowner education.

XI. Forestry Committee – Marilyn Wyman

Tom Pavlesich provided details on the FY26 budget and introduction of a forestry deliverables handbook.

XII. Ease of Hudson Committee – Fred Huneke

The Nutrient Management program is continuing to make progress through challenges presented; details provided. The EOH program will be participating in an upcoming agricultural conference on ways that well managed land can benefit society and the environment, with a focus on community engagement throughout the process while building community and economy around agricultural/ecological initiatives. Conference program details will become available mid-November. Fred Huneke acknowledged Amy Faulkner's continued commitment in covering managerial oversight for the program during this interim period.

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

A. CREP/CSBI Presentation

Michael Vander Werff provided a personnel update confirming DEP Commissioner Rohit Aggarwala’s intent to depart at the end of the month with Lisa Garcia, prior Environmental Protection Agency Regional Administrator under the Biden administration, announced as his successor by Mayor Zohran Mamdani. Michael’s presentation primarily focused on details relating to outcomes based on a formal evaluation that was conducted by DEP as part of the ‘Filtration Avoidance Determination’ (FAD) pilot program requirement; details discussed at length. Data results determined there is no justification to support continuation of having a dedicated, full-time employee for the program. Michael offered the idea of providing a future presentation for the Council on next steps of the FAD process, noting 2026 as the planning phase for determination expected in 2027.

XIV. NYS DOH, US EPA Reports – Patrick Palmer

Patrick Palmer, DOH representative, welcomes ideas on what we have to offer for the next FAD program, to be issued in 2027. Pat confirmed plans to provide an overview at next month’s Council meeting.

XV. Executive Session

Motion to enter Executive Session at 12:03 p.m.

Motion: Fred Huneke

Second: Steve Reed

Approved

Motion to come out of Executive Session at 12:18 p.m.

Motion: Dwight Bruno

Second: Fred Huneke

Approved

XVII. Adjournment

The meeting was adjourned at 12:19 p.m. by common consent.

The next meeting of the Council is a quarterly, in-person meeting, scheduled for **February 24, 2026**, at 10:00 a.m., at the Walton Office.

Jennifer Grossman

03 / 04 / 2026

Jennifer Grossman, WAC Board Secretary

Date