

Upper Delaware Council
OPERATIONS COMMITTEE MEETING MINUTES
April 28, 2020

Committee Members Present: Larry Richardson, Harold Roder Jr., Aaron Robinson, Al Henry, Fred Peckham, Jeff Dexter, Jim Greier, David Dean

Committee Members Absent: None

Staff : Laurie Ramie, Ashley Hall-Bagdonas

NPS Partner: Acting Superintendent Jessica Weinman, Jennifer Cluster

Guests: Roger Saumure (Shohola alternate)

The UDC's Operations Committee held its monthly meeting on Tuesday, April 28th, 2020 via teleconference. Chairperson Richardson called the meeting to order at 8:02 p.m. There was no public comment on the agenda.

Approval of March 24th Meeting Minutes: A motion by Greier seconded Robinson to approve the March 24th, 2020 Meeting Minutes was carried. There was no public comment on the agenda.

Executive Director's Report and Monthly Calendar:

Financial Status:

FY 2020 Federal Funding: Ramie shared that NPS Acting Superintendent Weinman invited the UDC to participate in a 4/10 teleconference, "COVID-19 Guidance and Resources for Partners" coordinated by NPS Interior Region 1, North Atlantic-Appalachian. There were over 100 participants on the call. She said partners mean groups like us who share Cooperative Agreements with the NPS or receive some sort of Federal financial assistance for employees, facilities, and programs. Ramie said fortunately, UDC is in a good position because we already received our funding for this fiscal year. A lot of these organizations haven't and are now understandably concerned. Ramie said some quotes she jotted down during that meeting regarding COVID-19 were that "There is no roadmap for this"; "It is causing a hardship for all of our partners"; and "We are in this with you and trying to find ways to help." They reported that NPS deployed an Incident Management Team on 3/15 which is meeting seven days a week. It includes representatives from the Department of the Interior and the US Public Health Service, and they have been rotating people out who serve on this committee. The objective is to compile the information into guidance. Their number one priority as an agency is to do whatever it takes to slow down the spread of this virus; that's the focus of all the decision-making. They mentioned unlike a government shut down when they know that NPS personnel will eventually get paid, there is no guarantee in this situation for the concessionaires. They have a webpage with resources that include loans and grants that are available through the CARES Act and guidance from the Office of Management and Budget. They are trying to be as flexible as they can about deadlines and fees. They suggested if you look at this like a large-scale wildfire, you have to focus on the initial response where some communities are still under threat but others are starting to recover. That's the way to approach this. They discussed how NPS is all about doing activities that physically bring people together such as nature centers, bookstores, interpretive education, etc. The question is how do you maintain social distancing and still put on these programs. They said it's the local guidance that is determining an operational response. As the curve flattens on this virus, there will be a push to get the economy going again. This team is working simultaneously on the impact of these closures as well as the recovery phase. They suggested that partners use this time as an opportunity to ramp up the digital capacity and what you can offer as virtual programs. Examples are to set up webcams to train on birds, do at-home lectures, and conduct virtual tours. Ramie said it was interesting to participate for that 90 minutes and to hear how they are coping with this crisis throughout the Northeast Region. Weinman said she agrees that it's fortunate that the UDC is not in that situation of concern over its funding. Plenty of parks heavily rely on partners operating their visitor centers and being involved in other programs.

Mike Preis Inc. supplied NPS with a renewed UDC liability insurance policy certificate as requested on 4/15. On 4/27, Ramie applied to withdraw \$16,065.91 to cover April's bills. The Federal ASAP account has a balance of \$153,324.51 through 9/30. The next deadline Ramie has is 4/30 to submit the UDC's Fiscal Year 2020 2nd Quarter Financial and Progress Report for January-March.

Bank Balance: The UDC had \$237,715.37 in its Jeff Bank accounts as of 4/27, including the new \$100,000 dedicated PA Grant account, minus encumbered funds and prior to the reimbursement for the April expenditures.

New Grants Management: The Department of the Interior announced on 4/3 that due to the COVID-19 pandemic, the deployment date for the new GrantSolutions management system has been revised for NPS recipients to 10/13/2020. Ramie asked NPS Administrative Officer Michelle Blockberger on 4/6 if this would affect the 7/1 deadline for the UDC's Five-Year Plan and FY 2021 package. Her response: "This will not affect the 7/1 deadline for the UDC's Five-Year Plan. As for the FY package, the first step of submitting the request for approval of funding for FY 2021-2025 to DOI was completed on 1/8/2020. I do not anticipate getting approval until later in summer as they are reviewing FY20 request and then FY21. I have not yet had formal training for the GrantSolutions program and from what I understand, GrantSolutions is a program which is utilized by NPS Recipients to manage grants and cooperative agreements through the entire award life cycle including pre-award, award, post-award and closeout. I believe what will take place is instead of you emailing me request packets for funding, quarterly reports, etc., you will go into the GrantSolutions system to do submissions in which I will then go in and review and a Grants Management Specialist will then go in to review and process the award. Since GrantSolutions will not be available until 10/13/2020 this will affect the submission packet request for your FY 2021 funding to be on or after date. If I receive any information or any type of changes as to being able to submit request for reimbursement for FY21 funds 10/1/2020 through 10/12/2020 I will let you know."

Administration:

Council & Staffing: New York State UDC Alternate Mike Flaherty retired from the Department of Environmental Conservation on 4/15 after 30 years with Region 3. Bill Rudge is coordinating the appointment of a new alternate. NPS Upper Delaware Scenic and Recreational River Superintendent Kris Heister announced on 4/17 that she has accepted the Deputy Superintendent position at Gettysburg effective on 6/7. Ramie recommends we prepare a Resolution of Commendation for the next full council meeting. A Motion by Henry seconded by Robinson to draft a Resolution of Commendation carried. Ramie noted that Weinman's detail will end on 5/30. A Motion by Henry seconded by Richardson to draft a letter to the NPS Regional Director with copies to the UDC's Federal representatives advocating for an extension of Acting UPDE Superintendent Jessica Weinman's detail beyond 5/30 and her permanent appointment to the position for action by the full Council at the 5/7 UDC meeting carried. Weinman thanked everyone for that support. She added that she lives here and would love to stay in the Upper Delaware.

Computers: Chorba Consulting was contacted on 4/13 to arrange for the Windows 10 upgrades of the UDC's four desktop computers and ordering of the three laptop computers under the PA Grant program. Pickup of the towers was arranged on 4/14 and returned on 4/17. They will each cost about \$70 more than the original quote. Given that we are paying for them out of the PA Grant that is still a good deal. Chorba informed Ramie that the manufacturer was on a two-week delay due to people relying heavily on technology now. Next will be the data transfer set-up of the new laptop computers when they are delivered. Ramie said then Hall-Bagdonas and she will be able to work remotely much more efficiently.

"The Upper Delaware": Original due dates for the Spring 2020 issue were 3/25 for the UDC's turnover and 4/6 for Courier Printing delivery. We finalized and submitted the newsletter on 3/22 to beat the UDC office closure. Ramie proofed the blueline electronically on 3/23. Dorene Warner posted it on the UDC website on 3/31. Ramie met the Courier van driver on 4/1 at the Callicoon Post office for delivery of the bulk mailing and pickup of the UDC's extra copies. She publicized it availability on 4/2. The index of articles, archives, and distributed copies was updated on 4/7. The Summer 2020 issue is due by 7/22 for publication on 8/3.

Public Relations:

Publicity: Four news releases were issued: "Upper Delaware Litter Sweep Postponed; Individual Cleanups Encouraged Safely", 4/1; "The Upper Delaware Spring 2020 Newsletter Available On-line and by Mail", 4/2; "UDC Seeks Municipal Proposals for River and Shoreline Cleanup", 4/14; and "UDC Reschedules Awards Banquet", 4/16.

Calendar: A copy of the May Calendar was provided in the packet. Ramie noted that on 4/29 she has a Zoom meeting for the coalition of partners that had been working on the Entering the Delaware River Watershed signage

project. The signs were installed without notice and they were hoping to do publicity around it with an unveiling. They are grateful that the DOT put up the 14 signs. They are meeting to discuss holding a virtual tele-press conference. They will be inviting Congressman Delgado, Senator Metzger, and Assemblywoman Gunther to participate. It is targeted for either 5/6 or 5/7, to be determined based on their availability. 4/30 is the deadline for the NPS 2nd Quarter Report. Ramie also has a call with National Parks Conservation Association (NPCA) at 1 p.m. that day. Currently, the PA Stay at Home Order expires on 5/8 and NY's is expiring on 5/15. Ramie will be updating the calendar further for the 5/7 meeting. Richardson relayed that the Sullivan County Sneak Peek on 5/16-17 has been cancelled for this year.

Old Business

UDC 5/30/2020 Strategic Plan Retreat Discussion: Ramie said the Strategic Plan Retreat is scheduled for 5/30 at the Damascus Manor Community Center but it seems very unlikely. She said we still have the 7/1 deadline and we were working backwards from that date to have time to compile this document. As you know, we did select Buck Moorhead of Callicoon as our facilitator and he has agreed to perform those services but how do we approach it in this climate? Fortunately, Weinman relayed that NPS would allow us to submit an interim Five-Year Plan, then proceed with the retreat when we're able to and submit an updated version. Ramie said that may be what we have to do. Richardson said that should be the plan because he doesn't think we're going to see any type of gatherings by the end of May. Dexter said as a point of information, that venue does have an outside pavilion with power if we were dealing with 10 people. Henry said he agrees to put it on hold.

PA DCED Grant Update: Ramie submitted UDC's invoice for the PA DCED grant on 2/28 and the \$100,000 was directly deposited on 4/6. Since then, she spoke with our DCED contact to ask about the next steps concerning payment procedures. She said that UDC is in charge of dispersing it and keeping records as this project will be audited. Ramie is planning on coming up with her own invoice system and then she will be contacting the townships. Richardson said he supports the voucher system; you can number them and track them. He said: "I think we're all very pleased with what Pennsylvania has been able to do for us with that program."

Other: None.

New Business

Upper Delaware Council 32nd Annual Award Recipients: Ramie said we are on our third postponement of the Awards Banquet. She has notified all of the award recipients. A list of UDC's slate of 2020 honorees was provided in the meeting packet and a press release will follow. She has told all of the recipients that 8/30 is our optimistic date but we will make a determination by mid-July whether we are able to proceed. If not, her proposal would be to publish individual tributes to each of the honorees. We have 13 award recipients and like the awards booklet we provide, she would prepare a comprehensive write up on each honoree with a photo and cover it in our newsletter. She said it would be very sad to not have the banquet at all but that is truly the last day for the rest of the year that both the venue and the keynote speaker are available.

UDC Seeks Municipal Proposals for River & Shoreline Clean-ups: The deadline to submit municipal proposals for River and Shoreline Clean-up Grants is 5/22. Ramie has received one from the Town of Deerpark to do three cleanups at Hawk's Nest around major holidays. We initially started out with a very limited pool of funding of about \$2,300 but now we are saving money and she feels that we will be in good shape to provide the same level of program we traditionally have.

Summary of Pending Bills 4-28-2020: A motion by Robinson, seconded by Henry to approve the bills was carried.

Financial Statement 4-30-2020: Richardson said the financial statement is offered for individual review.

Other: Henry asked NPS for an update on summer, seasonal, and permanent staffing. Weinman said right now NPS Seasonal onboarding can't start until 5/24. That's when most seasonal and interns will come on. They will be down about 5 seasonal or intern position due to housing conditions, shared housing, and the regulations that have come down on that. They are in the process of doing adaptive recovery or a phasing back to normal operations. They will

have one seasonal law enforcement position. They are following State and local guidance. They do know that summer operations will not look like they have in the past and an example of that is the Zane Grey Museum. They are trying to adapt with the constrictions on the amount of people that can gather and social distancing while also providing a positive visitor experience. They are trying to sort out river operations. She knows it's a hard time for all of the local communities and businesses. Depending on what PA and NY are going to restrict or allow, that will impact what the river is going to look like. Weinman confirmed that all of the public river accesses are still open and they are staying in contact with PA & NY about them as they are in co-management agreements. There was some confusion last week with NY when they said they were closed, but they weren't. She said right now they have been instructed they are not supposed to be ticketing out of state plates. In our area that would be particularly hard to do since we live on a NY/PA border. They are patrolling the accesses and making sure there aren't any deliberate violations.

Henry asked what the status was of the National Canoe Safety Patrol (NCSP). Weinman said they've been in contact with NCSP. Their training sessions have all been postponed and pushed back. NPS is working with them for when restrictions are lifted because they rely on them heavily for river patrol and training.

Dexter reported that Governor Wolf opened up private fishing guides and privately owned campgrounds starting Friday. Weinman said she thinks it's that kind of guidance that will keep progressing for this summer.

Richardson said he had heard that the NPS was looking into how to control or eradicate Japanese Knotweed. Weinman said there are some projects in the works that are hinging on how things play out with COVID-19. A grant was received through Friends of the Upper Delaware River (FUDR) and if everything progresses they will be doing different tests plots. There are different sites throughout the corridor and one of them is at Skinners Falls. Richardson said he mentioned it because in Cohecton they have access site near the river and by mid-summer it's a jungle to get through the knotweed. He said any recommendations or findings from the research would be appreciated. Peckham said he has knotweed on his property on the river and there are areas where it abruptly stops. He wondered if anyone studied the different soils?

Henry said there have been three bald eagle deaths since March in the vicinity of Routes 652 and 6. WNEP has a post on their website or you can go to the PA Game Commission website to find out more.

Public Comment: None.

Adjournment: A motion by Greier seconded by Peckham to adjourn the meeting at 8:52 p.m. was carried.