

**Upper Delaware Council**  
**OPERATIONS COMMITTEE MEETING MINUTES**  
**October 24, 2023**

Committee Members Present: Aaron Robinson, Harold Roeder, Dennis Bernitt, Al Henry, Fred Peckham (Zoom), Ginny Dudko, Larry Richardson  
Committee Members Absent: Andy Boyar, Jeff Dexter  
Staff: Laurie Ramie, Kerry Engelhardt, Stephanie Driscoll  
NPS Partner: Lindsey Kurnath, Don Hamilton (Zoom)  
Guests: Bill Dudko

The UDC's Operations Committee held its monthly meeting at the UDC office in Narrowsburg, N.Y. on Tuesday, October 24, 2023. Robinson called the meeting to order at 7:11 pm.

**Approval of the September 26, 2023 Meeting Minutes:** A motion by Henry seconded by G. Dudko to approve the September 26<sup>th</sup> meeting minutes, carried, with Richardson abstaining.

**Executive Director's Monthly Report:** Ramie withdrew funds for the October abstract of bills leaving a balance of \$131,083.04 for Fiscal Year 2024. The next step is to file the annual reports for Fiscal Year 2023. Our bookkeeper has started working on the Federal Financial Report and Ramie will be doing the Performance Progress Report which is a summary of the year that our annual reporting to NPS requires.

There were four news releases in the past month on: river and shoreline cleanups; state funding appeals from Solicitor Ohliger's letter; Technical Assistance Grant Awards; and the presentation by the Delaware Highlands Conservancy coming up at the full council meeting on November 2<sup>nd</sup>. All of those press releases are posted on our website as well as our social media pages with photos. If she is not in the office, Ramie schedules Facebook posts in advance to keep content up to date. Engelhardt had consented to an interview with WJFF Catskill Radio on the "Chatskill" program October 4<sup>th</sup> to promote the presentation by Jennifer Garigliano from NYC DEP on the Delaware Aqueduct Shutdown at our October 5<sup>th</sup> full council meeting. Ramie appreciated Engelhardt doing the interview and commented she did a great job.

We were contacted by the Public Relations staff from the Scranton/Wilkes-Barre RailRiders about sponsoring a game in 2024, as we did for our 35<sup>th</sup> Anniversary this year. Ramie recommends not doing it for at least a year. It involved an extra work-load on UDC staff to sell and promote tickets since we had to sell a certain amount. It ended up costing the UDC some money for our transportation to Scranton. In her opinion, it isn't something the UDC needs to do every year, although she appreciates their staff reaching out to include the UDC.

UDC hosted the Sullivan County Chamber of Commerce Foundation's Leadership Sullivan Class of 2024 in the UDC conference room on October 17<sup>th</sup>. We teamed up with Trey Talley from Delaware Highlands Conservancy to do two presentations for about an hour. Driscoll put together presentation folders for the students to take away literature on the UDC. Ramie commented that they seemed interested. We posted a photo of the class during the presentation on our Facebook page, and they were thankful for the promotion. We now get asked to do a presentation every year. This year started at the Delaware Valley Opera at the former Nutshell Gallery in Lake Huntington, followed by a stop at the Delaware Valley Arts Alliance, a media roundtable, and ending at the UDC on their first day of touring Sullivan County.

Ramie said today was the first day of the “Water, Water Everywhere” conference put on by Friends of the Upper Delaware River (FUDR). The UDC is a sponsor of this event. Peckham, Engelhardt, Damascus Township Supervisor Steve Adams and she attended either in person and virtually representing the UDC. Ramie gave a presentation in conjunction with Kurnath from NPS and Tim Leonard from the National Parks Conservation Association about how the National Park System works in the Upper Delaware and what each of those three entities do. That was the last presentation of the first day. There is a half day tomorrow morning and we will give a report on the conference at the WU/RM Committee meeting on November 21<sup>st</sup>. Ramie commented FUDR does a great job putting this hybrid event on. Engelhardt said that the conference was good, similar to last year’s programs.

Work will start soon on the fall/winter issue of “The Upper Delaware” newsletter that is due to the printer by November 27<sup>th</sup> and publishes on December 11<sup>th</sup>.

Richardson commented that Cat Scott is running for the 2024 County Legislature. Scott reached out to him to ask if he could put time aside for her after the election to learn more about the UDC. He sent her a copy of the Visitors Statistics Report and Economic Impact. He told her these topics may come up during her campaign and this information is good to have. Ramie said that it is a competitive race since every legislator is up for election in Sullivan County, and there could be a lot of turnovers in UDC member towns.

Roeder asked if Ramie would be including anything about former Town of Fremont UDC representative Jack Niflot in the fall/winter newsletter. Ramie said she absolutely could. Roeder appreciated Ramie sending out the Basket Historical Society newsletter that featured Niflot upon the 10<sup>th</sup> anniversary of his passing. He commented it was a great piece honoring his accomplishments and that Niflot served the UDC well for many years.

### New Business

**Response to UDC Funding Letters to NY and PA Governors:** Robinson asked if we got any responses. Ramie said we heard back from Senator Skoufis from the 42<sup>nd</sup> Senate District. He personally wrote to us after receiving our letter. He wrote: “Hello Laurie, thank you for sending this information along. My office will hold onto the UDC’s funding request to revisit it as budget planning begins.” Congressman Matt Cartwright’s Economic Development Director, Dr. April Niver, wrote back on October 12<sup>th</sup> to say thank you for sending the letter and it was very helpful. After Ohliger sent the letter by certified mail, Ramie sent customized messages to Federal officials as well as a different message to State officials. A news release was also issued about the letter. Meg McGuire from the *Delaware Currents* published an editorial about the UDC funding crisis and the letter. McGuire was at the “Water, Water Everywhere” conference, where Ramie thanked her personally for publishing such an articulate piece. She said she had some people approach her after the presentation she gave today that included slides about the UDC funding crisis, surprised that we are in this predicament. Ramie pointed them to the UDC website to learn more and to get information about how they can help. Roeder said he felt good that there were other responses from the letter outside the UDC. He was thankful for McGuire’s article supporting the UDC. Ramie sent the UDC members’ positive comments to McGuire to which she appreciated. Ramie said we are waiting a reasonable amount of time to get a response from the letter on state funding but she did get contact information from Jeff Skelding with FUDR for an individual from the Consulting Sustainability in Public Affairs Group that he recommends. The committee has been talking about reaching out to someone in that sort of field, without knowing where to start, so that gives us some information. There was also discussion on reaching out the New York State Association of Towns and similar organization in Pennsylvania, to see if they had any recommendations. G. Dudko said she would like to see FUDR get

more involved with the UDC. If the planning that the UDC is heavily involved in wasn't watched over, it could have big impacts on the Delaware River and the valley.

**Housing Solutions in the Upper Delaware Region Advisory Group:** Ramie attended this newly formed advisory group's initial meeting on October 17<sup>th</sup> at the Narrowsburg Union. The group was initiated by Buck Moorhead, who is an architect passionate about passive homes. Moorhead was the facilitator at the UDC 5-year plan workshop, and we have a great regard for him. Ramie said he has aligned with several groups in the Town of Tusten so far that have been getting together to talk about various problems of the day. He found some likeminded people concerned about the lack of affordable housing in our area. In some cases, there is high-end housing and low-end housing with very little in between. The UDC was invited because they want to take an Upper Delaware River regional approach, and they know the UDC has the scope of the 5 counties and 15 municipalities. We could be helpful by providing contact information and connections. Anticipating a question on how this relates to our organization, Ramie quoted goal number 2 from the RMP: "Maintain and enhance the corridor's social and economic vitality and its diversity, consistent with efforts to protect the recognized values of the river corridor." Ramie believes this would be a monthly meeting. We could see how it goes and discuss later if the committee thinks there's value in the UDC's participation. At this first meeting there were organizations involved from the Hudson Valley Pattern for Progress, RUPCO, Director of Regional and Economic Development for Hancock and Assemblywoman Gunther, among others. The next meeting is scheduled for November 15<sup>th</sup>, where they will hone in on what can be done, is there support for continuing, and other topics.

Robinson said that a lot of these issues come back to town zoning. A lot of the costs are embedded in regulations. He's not sure how the UDC can help if you're looking at housing affordability or feasibility. Henry asked how often they meet. Ramie said they have only met one time so far but the next one is set for November 15<sup>th</sup>. Henry doesn't personally see the council's benefit in being part of this group. Richardson asked if they have minutes. Ramie replied by the next meeting they said there should be minutes put together. Kurnath said she could see a tie-in with the UDC. The NPS (service-wide) continues having difficulties housing staff during the height of the summer season. Kurnath said NPS is working on an updated Housing Needs Assessment (HNA) to inform Housing Management Plans for park units. Upper Delaware Scenic & Recreational River was included in the HNA pilot as a park unit currently without a housing program. Preliminarily, the results indicate Upper Delaware needs at least several beds to support the today's operation. Kurnath should have a tool soon to support future decisions. G. Dudko said the issue is, who is going to hold onto housing for a couple months out of the year? Kurnath said there is no affordable housing available. This kind of issue is a connection to the Housing Solutions in the Upper Delaware Region Advisory Group. Ramie said during the meeting she brought up how every season the NPS sends out a desperate plea for housing in our area for seasonal staff. She suggested at the meeting they need to approach municipalities to include housing in their Comprehensive Plans, so each community can address the issue.

Ramie said when she gets the minutes, she will send them to the committee. G. Dudko asked if they could use the Cowen Farm House that NPS owns as summer staff housing. Kurnath said that it's been talked about; it would need to be renovated to make livable. Robinson asked when NPS needs housing. Kurnath said the season is from April – October. Henry said you won't be able to compete with AirBnB's. People are buying cheap property, renovating them, and charging a lot of money to rent them out. He suggested looking at the Boy Scout camps for housing. Kurnath said the point is that it's a corridor wide issue that could be tied back to the RMP. Engelhardt said she would be interested to attend the advisory group's meetings.

**Computer Upgrade for Bookkeeper:** Ramie said that our bookkeeper, Mike Poska, was legitimately complaining about his computer's slow speeds. He asked our IT specialist, Chris Marshall, to remotely

look into it. Marshall said that Poska's computer only has 4 GB of RAM, so the computer is overwhelmed. That computer has all the UDC's financial data, etc. When we last upgraded staff computers with 8 GB, Poska's was not updated. Marshall said he could do an upgrade of the RAM, with Poska's hard drive being one of the earliest versions they make, or Marshall has several used PCs available. The cost to upgrade would be \$329, doubling the RAM in Poska's current PC. The cost of a new PC with the same processor and 8 GB of RAM would be \$449. Ramie asked Poska what he would be satisfied with and he said the upgrade. She recommends the upgrade for \$329. Henry asked, even if we do the upgrade, are there other components on that PC that will slow it down? Ramie wasn't sure, she could ask Marshall. Robinson asked if his software is available remotely? Ramie said some things can be done at his office in Honesdale but QuickBooks is on the computer in the UDC office. Robinson said if he thinks an upgrade is sufficient than that should be fine. Henry asked if it would be more cost effective to upgrade now for \$329 and then need to get a new PC in a few years, or just get a new PC now. G. Dudko made a motion to authorize Ramie to decide on approving either option, depending on what Marshall recommends, seconded by Henry, and carried.

**Summary of Pending Bills 10/23/2023:**

Motion by Henry seconded by Roeder to approve the bills and pay them in the normal fashion carried. Ramie said some of the items were September expenses that Poska separated for Fiscal Year 2023. Richardson asked if the bill from W Design was a one-time charge? Ramie said that was for the website training that Driscoll had that Dorene Warner had forgotten to bill until now.

**Financial Statement 10/31/23:**

Robinson stated that the financial statement report is offered for individual review. Henry provided the Vangaurd interest of \$1,885.

**Other:** None.

Old Business

**Updated on Tablets:** Driscoll asked the committee how it was going with the new Microsoft Surface Go tablets. Henry said he was having some trouble with his email. She encouraged anyone having issues to let her know and she would help them one-on-one.

**Other:** None.

**There was no Public Comment.**

**Adjournment:** A motion by Bernitt seconded by Roeder to adjourn the meeting at 8:03 p.m. carried.