

Upper Delaware Council
OPERATIONS COMMITTEE MEETING MINUTES
August 22, 2023

Committee Members Present: Larry Richardson, Harold Roeder, Dennis Bernitt, Al Henry, Aaron Robinson, Fred Peckham (Zoom), Ginny Dudko, Jeff Dexter (Zoom)

Committee Members Absent: Andy Boyar

Staff: Laurie Ramie, Stephanie Driscoll

NPS Partner: Lindsey Kurnath

Guests: Bill Dudko

The UDC's Operations Committee held its monthly meeting at the UDC office in Narrowsburg, NY on August 22, 2023. Robinson called the meeting to order at 7:20pm.

Approval of the July 25, 2023 Meeting Minutes: A motion by Roeder seconded by G. Dudko to approve the meeting minutes carried.

Executive Director's Monthly Report: Ramie started with the Fiscal Year 2023 funding. Federal funds need to be zeroed out by end of September. Our bookkeeper Mike Poska did a report showing that with routine spending we would be \$15,780 surplus. That number does not include the GIS course tuition that had been approved of \$3,021. We met with our landscaper today, as our garden is getting unruly and he is willing to come do the maintenance and landscaping for \$500. There are a couple conferences coming up with expenses for about \$700. The award programs will need to be printed and will cost about \$500. An additional underdetermined expense is the potential purchase of the tablets (Henry is testing it out at this meeting) with the base price of \$240 per unit. We would need to conduct a survey on the tablets to see how many people are interested in getting one for UDC useage. After this meeting, Ramie will have a list of recommendations of how to spend down the remaining amount at the full council meeting on September 7th. Ramie would also like to get quotes for carpet cleaning and for pressure washing the building. She suggests ordering fuel in advance as well. Poska included the last payroll period that will be credited toward this year and we always need office supplies. She mentioned a stain on the conference room ceiling she had noticed, wondering if it was a water leak. She asked if anyone else had noticed it. Robinson said he had noticed it, and he and Henry would check in the attic after the meeting. She also will add the expense for Tom Shepstone to review the Camp FIMFO reports on the list for expenses. Henry asked if the Town of Deerpark had done a fall river cleanup. G. Dudko said they do it three times a year. Ramie said that September 20th is the deadline for river and shoreline clean up grants. She chooses this date since the Town of Deerpark usually has their last river and clean up after Labor Day so she has to wait until they submit to see if their estimated cost is exceeded. Kurnath suggested an expansion microphone for our camera. When she had attended last month's meeting via Zoom it was hard to hear people farther away from the camera. The NPS had ordered one when they bought a similar camera for virtual meetings. Ramie said anything to improve the audio would be worthwhile. If anyone has any other ideas, please let her know.

Ramie mentioned the status of the Awards Banquet coming up in three weeks on September 10th. She compiled the nominations after the August 18th deadline. The subcommittee consisting of the three chairs of our standing committees; Robinson, Richardson and G. Dudko, approved the slate as recommended. We received an impressive number of nominations this year and ultimately came up with 12 awards. She didn't want to announce the honorees, since they had all not been notified yet. September

1st is the reservation deadline. A copy of the invitation/reservation was included in the handouts. Ramie commented that once the honorees are announced we get more reservations and interest from people to pay tribute to them. Roeder had suggested years ago to put the presentations into written form, so guests could have a souvenir to take with them. It's time consuming to read the full text during the ceremony otherwise but now she is on deadline to write 12 profiles of the award winners by August 31st to get the booklet from the printer. She asked everyone to please promote the Awards Banquet. All of the activities that need to take place leading up to September 10th were listed in the handout.

There were 5 news releases issued this month. The list is included in the packet. We have confirmed our presentation for the September 7th meeting on Aquatic Hitchhikers. The UDC had been invited to participate in the Damascus Township Park ribbon cutting on August 14th because of the UDC contribution to that project through the PA DCED Grant back in 2021. Photos from the event were posted on our Facebook page, and several people asked to use them which we're happy to share. The August 1st RailRiders promotion had gone well, and on page 2 the finances involved with that event are included in the packet. It was not meant to be a money maker, but it was great for increasing awareness for the UDC. The summer issue of the newsletter arrived early on August 2nd. The next step is to get a quote for the FY 2024 printing and mailing services since the summer newsletter was the last one of the current contract.

Ramie wanted to mention that Kittatinny Canoes under the new owner Northgate Resorts, will continue sponsoring the 32nd annual "On and Under the Delaware River" cleanup. The original date was in July but after being postponed due to bad weather it's rescheduled it for September 10th at 8am. This would be in advance of the UDC's 3pm awards banquet. They will be meeting in Barryville and anyone who is participating qualifies for free camping if they're not local. They provide breakfast, boats, lifejackets, trash bags and shuttle transportation. They need advance registration, which you could do through the Kittatinny website if interested.

Photos from the Day on the Delaware event on August 2nd at the Highland Access were posted on Facebook.

New Business

Payment Approval for Town of Tusten TAG 2023-01 Completion, \$8,622.50: A motion by Henry, seconded by G. Dudko to approve the Town of Tusten TAG payment of \$8,622.50 carried.

Early-bird Registration for 11th Annual Delaware River Watershed Forum by 8/25: A handout is included from Engelhardt proposing to attend this on the UDC's behalf on September 28th – 29th. It's sponsored by the CDRW (Coalition for the Delaware River Watershed). They move the forum around the watershed and this year it's taking place in Wilmington, DE. There is an early registration fee until August 25th of \$200 for the multi-day program. The forum will feature 24 engaging sessions including meals and field trips. Lodging is available. Engelhardt reported that this was an event she had found worthwhile last year. The 2023 theme is "Small Wonder, Big Impact Across the Delaware River Watershed". A motion by Robinson, seconded by Henry to move the registration for the 11th Annual Delaware River Watershed Forum carried. Richardson commented that he would like to see how the forum benefits the UDC. G. Dudko suggested that Engelhardt could report at the UDC meeting on the program. Ramie said she had asked Engelhardt to do a newsletter article on it from the last forum to gather what she learned from it. She plans on asking her again for the winter issue.

Sponsorship of 10/24-25 Annual Water, Water Everywhere Conference and Fees: Ramie reported that this conference has an early-bird registration also. In the past the council has offered to pay the registration fee for it. There had been 3 or 4 people and the staff who usually participate. You can go in person in Hancock, NY or attend by Zoom. Early-bird registration fee is \$30 for the two-day conference, \$40 after October 14th and \$45 for a Tuesday catered lunch from the Circle E diner. Ramie said the UDC has also been a sponsor of this event. That comes with a live link and sponsors' logo listed on all of the conference materials. This only costs \$50, which she thinks is very reasonable. The UDC is invited to be a

presenter at the program on October 24th in conjunction with Kurnath from the NPS and Tim Leonard from the National Parks Conservation Association. We will jointly give a program on “View From the Upper Delaware River”. Ramie commented that she feels it’s worth sponsoring since FUDR with a staff of 6 puts this valuable conference on and we don’t. Some of the topics on this year’s agenda are: the Trout Unlimited Stream Restoration Program; the Neversink Watershed Management Plan; Youth Programs to promote Upper Delaware Conservation and Angling; Federal and State Conservation funding to protect the watershed; improving the Clean Water Act; engaging underserved communities; the importance of land protection and protecting the fish hatchery; the latest on the 2024 NYC Aqueduct shutdown; protecting the sensitive headwaters of Delaware River tributaries; our program to meet the new NPS Superintendent and UDC leaders to learn more about this unique federal/local partnership; learn the results of the 3 year New York/Pennsylvania joint fisheries study and how this sets the stage for a new wild trout management plan. Cornell; and studying macroinvertebrates on the river as well. Ramie will send out a memo if the committee agrees with the UDC paying for registration. The conference is Tuesday is from 10am – 4pm and Wednesday from 9am – 12pm. A motion by Richardson, seconded by Henry to sponsor the event and pay registration fees for UDC representatives and staff carried. Ramie will send out a memo with the registration offer and the deadline tied to our FY 23 expenses.

Summary of Pending Bills 8/22/2023: Motion by B. Dudko seconded by Henry to approve the bills and pay them in the normal fashion carried.

Financial Statement Report 8/31/2023: Robinson stated that the financial statement report is offered for individual review. Henry mentioned that the Vanguard account has earned \$118 in interest.

Other- Richardson asked if the NPS would be going to the Delaware River Watershed Forum. Kurnath said Don Hamilton would like to send his staff, however the NPS has a lot of requirements for approval to attend conferences. There has to be a compelling reason. Richardson said that in years past, UDC representatives have gotten rides with the NPS. Kurnath isn’t sure, but knows that Hamilton hadn’t gone through the approval process yet. She thinks for next year, we could try to get something on the agenda to raise the profile on the UDC and NPS Upper Delaware. Kurnath mentioned she isn’t familiar with the CDRW to which Ramie told her that the Day on the Delaware event was put on by them.

Old Business

State and Federal Funding Discussion, Referred from 8/3 UDC: Robinson said that at the August 3rd full committee meeting he introduced the possibility of pursuing legal action for getting funded. Robinson said his theory is that Congress created the UDC; Congress obligated the UDC, and there are no provisions in legislation to do away with the UDC. He thinks that we should have a judge look over the legislation to find out whether Congress has not fulfilled its responsibilities, and equally with the states. The question is: can we take it to one court federally? Or does each partner have to be taken to its respective federal court? Robinson said the fiscal plan consultant gave a timeline and inflation is accelerating the timeline rapidly. We’ve managed inflation as a council well, but it’s going to come to a point that it’s not manageable with fixed overheads. He thinks it’s time to engage our attorney to look at the cost and what the likelihood of success in a case like this to see whether it’s money well spent. He said we should also know if the federal government would assist in funding us. Because of the flaw in the way we’re funding, we’re in a competition with the National Park Service’s budget. The NPS hasn’t been willing or able to entertain cost of living increases and that has been the case since 1988. He believes we are at a disadvantage being a volunteer organization without the ability to hire someone to keep on top of elected officials or a lobbyist. Robinson’s opinion is to talk to our solicitor Jason Ohliger to get his sense on the scope of a case like this.

Kurnath said she isn't sure how the NPS would join. She could add that last month, Rep. Cartwright's staff, Senator Fetterman's staff and Senator Casey's staff were working together to figure out how the money the UDC gets from NPS could be separated. She said she just sent out another email stating she is standing by ready to provide any information needed. The NPS national budget department has it currently and Kurnath will try to see if she can get any info on what's happening. She was interested to hear from their professional team that they were agreeing with the cost-of-living adjustment and separating funding legally. Robinson asked if there was a way to inquire to the NPS department about the process. Richardson asked if the UDC should write a follow-up letter to the people working on this since we did not know that a meeting has happened. Kurnath said she wants to make sure the meeting has happened first. She knows there is something in motion, but it's hard with summer schedules. Richardson said we could send a letter presuming that the meeting had happened. Ramie said the last conversation we had with officials was on July 25th that went to 7 different staff people in the offices of Casey, Fetterman and Cartwright. In this email she provided the Pennsylvania fact sheets and the federal funding flaws that Robinson had written where he suggested taking the UDC out of the Upper Delaware budget. That was the last interaction we had with them. Robinson agreed with Richardson on sending out a letter. Henry urges Kurnath to get in touch with Regional Director Gay Vietzke to find out where they are with it. He said we need to say in the letter that the UDC needs to be kept in the loop. Kurnath as our liaison and Ramie need to be notified of and included in the meetings. Robinson said that in the letter we could state that any meetings that remedy the issue must include all parties; the UDC and local NPS. G. Dudko said how did we get PA moving and not NY? Robinson said that brings up his point of requiring a suit in PA and in NY separately. Robinson is in favor of a letter stating "it is our understanding a meeting took place to move along the issue of the UDC's insufficient funding and we since we are a party of this issue, we hope to be invited to the next one." Richardson said in the NPS defense, on the political side of it, they need to run through the mechanics of it. The UDC isn't a part of that and we don't need to be a part of that, just get it done and tell us where you are. Henry said if we excuse ourselves, we may never see them again. If they decline and say we don't need to be a part of it, that's arbitration. G. Dudko agrees that we should contact our solicitor and that we don't need to wait. Henry said in the RMP the NPS funding provides federal assistance for issues that affect the UDC. Kurnath asked for Henry to send where that is in the RMP. Richardson agrees that we should start with legal action, and that we need to find out what it would cost to even look it over to see if it's worth pursuing. Roeder said that he appreciates the action by Cartwright, Fetterman and Casey. Robinson asked Ramie to send April Niver from Cartwright's office an email to find out if there's been any progress made. Kurnath said she will check on NPS side as well. Ramie will contact Ohliger to review the funding issue and whether he can attend the full council meeting on September 7th. Richardson said with the Telecommunications Subcommittee meeting at 6pm on 9/7, it would make for a long night. Robinson said he would forego the subcommittee meeting to meeting with Ohliger. Ramie asked if it was enough time for Ohliger to have a qualified opinion by then. Robinson said he thinks he will generate his questions to be able to ask on September 7th and it would save him time to interact with us. He said that the fact sheet that Ramie prepared 5 years ago was structured as a legal brief. Ramie asked if we are inviting Ohliger on September 7th at 6pm in lieu of the telecommunications meeting to which Robinson answered yes. If he isn't available, we will have the Telecommunications Subcommittee meeting at that time.

Outcome of 35th Annual UDC Family Raft Trip and Directory, 1988-2023: Driscoll reported that the event turned out great. She thinks it was helpful that we had reached out to Kittatinny in advance to have a table set up, making day-of go smoothly. Ramie said in years past, guests would check in with the UDC and then still have to go to Kittatinny to sign their forms. To streamline registration, we had the UDC set up right next to Kittatinny staff. Driscoll said that the registration process went fairly quick with guests going just as quick as they came. Ramie said in terms of revenue we collected \$2,856.46 and the bill from

Kittatinny was on tonight's abstract with many discounts. We also included the raft trip directory dating back to 1988 to show there is no rhyme or reason to the attendance. In the early days, there was also a picnic. It ended up being a bit of a nightmare with the timing of each guest's river trip, so eventually it became just a raft trip. The directory shows that even with rain, the raft trip has never been cancelled. Robinson said that they are thankful it was successful. G. Dudko thanked Driscoll for everything she's doing for the UDC.

Trial Run with Microsoft Surface Go Tablet Purchase: Henry said his concern is buying the tablets for members, and having people not show up to meetings. Should we hand them out when people get here or have people take them home? He thinks there is a lot of risk. Ramie said there would be a set of policies developed, and that it would be voluntary to use them, with paper packets remaining available if preferred. Henry said the benefit would be being able to keep the tablet, but the problem is if you don't participate and you use the tablet for non UDC functions, it's a concern. He thinks there needs to be some kind of policy, and he's not sure it's worth it and there's no major rush. Staff will create a survey to include in the next meeting agenda packet.

Other: None.

Adjournment: A motion by Roeder seconded by Henry to adjourn the meeting at 8:25 p.m. carried.