Upper Delaware Council
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UPPER DELAWARE COUNCIL MEETING MINUTES
November 5, 2026

The Upper Delaware Council held its monthly meeting on Thursday, November 5, 2026. Chairperson Dexter called the meeting to order at 6:30 p.m. Roll call followed reciting the Pledge of Allegiance.

Attendees:
Damascus Township- Jeff Dexter, Town of Fremont- Jim Rodgers, Town of Hancock- Jim Serio, Town of Delaware- Harold Roeder, Town of Tutsan- Cathleen Breen, Town of Lumberland- Nadia Rajsz, Town of Deerpark- Ginny Dudko and Bill Dudko, Lackawaxen Township- Doug Case, Shohola Township- Aaron Robinson, Westfall Township- Tammy Zajac, National Park Service- Lindsey Kurnath, New York State- Ryan Coulter (Zoom), Delaware River Basin Commission- Beth Brown (Zoom), Commonwealth of Pennsylvania- Tim Dugan (Zoom)

Absent:
Town of Cochecton- Larry Richardson, Berlin Township- Alan Henry

Staff:
Executive Director- Laurie Ramie, Resources and Land Use Specialist- Julie Pais, Administrative Assistant- Sara-Jo Fegley

Media:
River Reporter- Sonia Ahmed (Zoom), Tri-County Independent- Peter Becker (Zoom)

Guests*:*
Archtop Fiber Chief Construction Officer- Kevin DeLouise, Archtop Fiber Project Manager- Madison Ahouse, Sullivan County Commissioner of Information Services- Lorne Green

Public:
Andrew Carmona (Zoom), Peter DeAngelis, Wayne Martin (Zoom), Ryan Stohr (Zoom)

Presentation – "Archtop/Sullivan County Municipal Infrastructure Program Overview and Project Construction Update"
The Council received an overview and construction update concerning the Sullivan County Municipal Infrastructure Program from Sullivan County Information Technology Services leadership and representatives of Archtop Fiber. DeLouise, Chief Construction Officer, presented in place of Shawn Beqaj, an Archtop founder and Chief Development Officer, who was unable to attend.

DeLouise described Archtop as a builder and operator of fiber-optic networks based primarily in New York's Hudson Valley. The project is intended to expand broadband access in unserved and underserved communities. The planned network covers approximately 253.4 route miles and 22,480 Broadband Serviceable Locations across 19 municipalities. It is anchored by 11 county-owned cellular towers and one leased tower.

The planned service mix includes approximately 11,497 locations served by fiber-to-the-home and approximately 10,983 locations served through fixed wireless technology using radios and antennas on county towers. Fiber service would connect from the street to the premises; fixed wireless would serve eligible addresses without a direct fiber

drop to the home. Approximately 230 miles of underground construction and approximately 20 miles of aerial construction were planned, with aerial segments used where underground installation is impractical.

As of November 5th, approximately 220 miles of conduit has been installed, leaving roughly 10 miles of planned underground work. Fiber has been installed in areas shown as completed on the presentation map. Approximately 22 customers in the Liberty area were actively receiving service, and additional customers being connected in the Wurtsboro area as sections became ready. The presenters expect most underground construction to be completed during 2026, with aerial work, fiber installation, customer activation, and remaining connections continuing into 2027. Overall or substantial project completion is anticipated around June 2027.

Within the Upper Delaware region, the planned network route includes communities and areas such as Roscoe, Callicoon, Bethel, White Lake, and Tusten, extending toward the river corridor. Approximately 4,000 residents were identified as expected to have access to fiber-to-the-home service, with another approximately 3,500 expected to have access through fixed wireless.

Service activation is proceeding on an as-ready basis rather than in a simple geographic sequence. Sections become active as construction is completed and the necessary permits and connections to supporting infrastructure and towers are in place. Timing depends in part on permits from utilities, telecommunications companies, and the New York State Department of Transportation. Green explained that a December 31, 2026 date displayed on the ConnectSullivan website reflected the original grant deadline; address-specific information was expected to be updated as construction advanced and more precise timing became available.

Residential service was described as having tiered pricing based on bandwidth and service type. Telephone service was mentioned at $19.99 per month. Residents were directed to shop.archtopfiber.com to check address eligibility, review project information, and place orders.

Public Comments and Questions: Peter DeAngelis raised concern about orange conduit or service-drop components protruding from the ground near a resident's property and reported significant cracking near a driveway culvert following construction activity. He asked whether the County or Archtop would be responsible for addressing damage and whether the exposed components would remain in place until June. DeLouise requested the resident's contact information after the meeting and offered to investigate the condition directly. He explained that protruding conduit may indicate that a crew has not completed a section or that remediation remains necessary, and that it should not remain protruding as a permanent condition. Rock, connection difficulties, or the end of a workday may require crews to return to complete burial and restoration.

Ahouse acknowledged the concern, explained that crews had been working under a strict construction schedule, and encouraged residents to report property impacts. Green offered to coordinate with Archtop, noting that a remediation plan or resolution is typically developed promptly after a concern is reported. The project team reiterated its commitment to minimizing impacts and addressing damage claims.

Additional questions addressed the order in which towns would receive service, the accuracy of posted completion dates, the composition and safety of orange conduit, wireless-service performance and line-of-sight requirements, utility right-of-way permissions, coverage along the Delaware River, and the possibility of additional providers using the network. The presenters identified the conduit as high-density polyethylene (HDPE), described it as an industry-standard material subject to applicable permitting and oversight, and explained that fixed wireless service requires line of sight.

Green and DeLouise stated that the current grant-funded phase primarily follows county roads and rights-of-way and is intended as a foundation for future expansion. Additional grant opportunities may support extensions beyond the initial build. In response to a question about other providers, DeLouise described an initial exclusive period of approximately three years for Archtop, after which fiber capacity could be made available to other providers. Green described the project as a first phase intended to provide a foundation for future expansion within the River Corridor that potentially would provide service along the river that impacts recreation.

Approval of October 1, 2026 Minutes: A motion by Robinson seconded by G. Dudko to approve the October 1, 2026 meeting minutes carried.

Public Comment on the Agenda: None.

Committee Reports: There were no questions regarding previously distributed minutes for Water Use/Resource Management 10/20, Operations 10/27, or Project Review 10/27.

Status Reports:

Delaware River Basin Commission: Brown provided a hydrologic conditions update for the Delaware River Basin. The basin had experienced a dry week, with precipitation expected in the following days. Combined storage in the New York City reservoirs within the basin was approximately 192.1 billion gallons, or 71 percent of combined capacity, slightly below the previous week's level. Usable storage in lower-basin reservoirs was reported at approximately 76 percent at Blue Marsh and 100 percent at Beltsville. Streamflow throughout the basin and on the main stem Delaware River was below normal. The seven-day average position of the salt front was reported at river mile 75.4, approximately three miles farther upstream than the prior week. Brown referenced the November 2026 hydrologic conditions report included in the meeting materials and directed members to the DRBC's online hydrologic information resources for updated conditions.

Brown provided an update on Commission activities including a proposed rule intended to improve understanding of recent water-use trends. Brown explained that, after decades of declining public water-supply withdrawals, DRBC scientists had observed a multi-year increase beginning in 2021. The Commission was seeking to understand which customer categories were driving the increase and whether the additional withdrawals were consumptive (not returned to basin waters) or non-consumptive (returned to basin waters). The proposed rule was described as a data-gathering measure intended to support the Commission's responsibility to ensure sustainable water use over the long term, while avoiding substantial burdens on water purveyors and their customers. A frequently asked questions resource was available on the DRBC website. Written comments on the proposal were being accepted through Friday, December 4; Brown noted that verbal comments had been heard at a public hearing the preceding day.

Brown announced upcoming advisory committee meetings: the Subcommittee on Source Water Protection on November 18 at 10:00 a.m.; the Monitoring, Advisory, and Coordination Committee on December 7 at 10:00 a.m.; the Regulated Flow Advisory Committee on December 9 at 10:00 a.m.; and the Advisory Committee on Climate Change on December 14 at 9:30 a.m. The meetings were to be held virtually, with registration information posted or forthcoming on the DRBC website.

Brown also reported recent outreach and conference activity, including participation in the Upper Delaware River Rendezvous and the upcoming American Water Resources Association national conference in Philadelphia. More than half of DRBC staff were expected to attend and present at the conference. The Commission's water-resources resilience planning outreach was continuing through listening sessions into 2027. A public survey had closed after receiving nearly 1,000 submissions.

NYS Dept. of Environmental Conservation: Coulter provided updates concerning fisheries surveys, recreational access and facilities, and seasonal activities. Items discussed included work at Willowemoc Creek parking areas, the Mongaup WMA parking lot, pheasant stocking, and deer management plans. Members were reminded of the upcoming Southern Zone firearms season beginning November 21. Coulter also discussed a brook trout survey and public-access involving Crystal Lake. Coulter was congratulated on receiving a Community Partnership Award associated with the Upper Delaware River Rendezvous. He credited the UDC's support and collaboration for helping make the award possible.

Pennsylvania Dept. of Conservation and National Resources: Dugan reported that Pennsylvania was in the main fall hunting seasons, including archery and early muzzleloader seasons, and that weather conditions had generally been favorable. He reported a significant acorn crop in Pike and Monroe Counties and said local foresters had collected more than 20 bushels of red oak acorns for the state nursery because other parts of Pennsylvania had experienced a shortage. Upcoming seasons included bear firearms season and regular rifle firearms season; participants were encouraged to consult current Game Commission publications because regulations had changed, including expanded Sunday hunting opportunities in many areas.

Dugan reported more than ten wildfires in the region during the preceding week, most of which remained small, although one brush fire resulted in the loss of a residence. He welcomed recent precipitation, higher humidity, and cooler temperatures and hoped for more regular precipitation heading into winter. He also advised that DCNR grant-

writing season was underway, with virtual workshops available and Bureau of Recreation and Conservation grant applications due in April.

In response to a question about blaze-orange requirements for hikers, Dugan clarified that the new Game Commission requirement applies to non-hunters on State Game Lands during hunting seasons. He distinguished those lands from DCNR State Forest lands, where blaze orange is strongly recommended but is not the same requirement. Robinson asked about PA funding inquiry for the UDC discussed at a prior meeting in Harrisburg, Dugan said he had requested an update three times without receiving a response and would follow up again.

National Park Service: Kurnath thanked veterans in attendance in light of upcoming Veterans Day and noted that the agency was preparing and submitting grant and internship applications to support summer operations. A 12-month Community Volunteer Ambassador position for 2027 had been approved and was posted, with applications closing January 8. Seasonal positions other than seasonal law-enforcement positions were expected to be posted on USAJOBS beginning November 16; applicants were encouraged to apply early because postings could close once application limits were reached.

Her written report referenced shad sampling conducted with Pennsylvania Fish and Boat Commission staff at Milford Beach and positive participation at the Upper Delaware River Rendezvous. The Park Service had combined its post-season Commercial Use Authorization (CUA) meeting for fishing guides and liveries. One outcome was an agreement to distribute the monthly Park Service report to CUA holders after it is received by the Council, with the possibility of adjusting the information based on feedback. The Park Service also planned to add a hunting page to its website and provide more proactive information about waterfowl hunting in the river corridor ahead of the next season.

Kurnath noted that a contract had been awarded for repairs to the roof of the Zane Grey Museum, with a contractor site walk having occurred during the week. Emergency funding was obtained because of concerns about damage to the historic building and its structure. In response to a question, Kurnath explained that the Community Volunteer Ambassador helps connect people with volunteer opportunities, support events, and improve public-facing information about volunteering; the role is not principally a school-group programming position.

UDC Executive Director: Ramie presented organizational, staffing, funding, grant, and scheduling updates. She welcomed Fegley and noted that the Council had previously approved her hiring by electronic vote. Ramie also recognized Rodgers with the Oaken Gavel plaque in recognition of his 2025 leadership of the Council meetings. Richardson was absent due to illness. Ramie acknowledged Richardson's completion of a volunteer digitization project involving historical Citizens Advisory Council records provided to the UDC by the Equinunk Historical Society. The original materials had been returned to the UDC, and digital copies had been transferred to the Council's computer and supplied on a flash drive. A fuller description of the contents was deferred until Richardson could attend.

<u>New York State Funding and Contract Administration:</u> Ramie reported that the Council had obtained access to the New York State Statewide Financial System on November 2 after requesting an update of the outdated email address associated with the Council's vendor account. The primary contact change form had been submitted to the State Comptroller. Remaining steps included completing vendor registration and uploading insurance documentation naming New York State and the Department of Environmental Conservation as additional insureds, including required workers' compensation, disability, and general liability coverage documentation.

Ramie summarized an October 26 meeting with three DEC contract managers concerning the Council's $100,000 state funding allocation. The contract period is October 1, 2026 through September 30, 2027, and expenses charged to the award must fall within that period. Contract approval was expected to take approximately two to three months after submission of the work plan and budget. Payments will be reimbursement-based upon submission of claims, with the possibility of a one-time 25 percent advance for eligible recipients. DEC described allowable uses as relatively broad and including justifiable operating expenses such as salaries, utilities, programs, and general operating costs.

Ramie noted that the state allocation is subject to annual reappropriation and is not a permanent line item in the state budget. The Council's joint request for 2027–2028 funding with the Friends of the Upper Delaware River was submitted

October 16 to Assembly Member Paula Kay at the same funding level, following her recommendation as legislative sponsor.

Technical Assistance Grant Funding Recommendation: Ramie discussed whether state funding could be used for Technical Assistance Grant (TAG) projects. Following consultation with DEC contract managers, she recommended against using the state allocation for TAG projects because the contract approval period would significantly reduce the time available to municipalities to complete their projects. State requirements concerning equal employment opportunity, minority-business participation, and veteran contracting could also complicate sub-grant administration, particularly where applicants had already identified consultants or firms when preparing project budgets. Ramie recommends continuing to fund TAG projects through federal funds associated with the Council's Cooperative Agreement with the National Park Service, while using the state allocation to subsidize general operating expenses.

Proposed Fiscal Consultant: Ramie introduced the possibility of retaining an independent fiscal consultant to assist with development and administration of the new state funding work plan and revised federal funding budgets. Potential responsibilities could include establishing a segregated accounting system to track expenses from the two funding sources, advising on strategies to secure Pennsylvania operational funding, identifying attainable grants and fundraising opportunities, advising on investment of unrestricted funds, and supporting the Council's long-term financial sustainability. Ramie also noted that the Council's contractual bookkeeper, who had served as accountant since 2003, had in 2024 indicated an intention to retire within several years. She requests assistance from financially knowledgeable Council members in developing a scope of work and determining appropriate compensation for a potential fiscal consultant.

Grant Funds, Graphic Redesign, and Communications: Ramie reported receipt of the $2,000 grant payment from Sullivan County for the April Upper Delaware Litter Sweep, following Rajsz's advocacy. The Council also received its $5,000 Jeff Bank Small Business Recovery Grant payment deposited on October 21. The grant is being used for the Council's graphic redesign project with Mallory Lance of WOLVESTUDIOS in Roscoe, including a new newsletter template and related font purchases. Initial results will be evident in the Fall/Winter newsletter which publish in December. Ramie plans to prepare a press release about that grant and a separate press release announcing Fegley's hiring.

New Business:

a. **Appointment of a Nominating Committee to Develop a Slate of 2027 UDC Officers:** Ramie explained that the Council traditionally appoints a nominating committee at the penultimate meeting of the year to develop a proposed slate of officers for the following year. Members were reminded that the bylaws do not require automatic succession by the Vice Chair and no longer require alternation between New York and Pennsylvania representatives. Rodgers, Roeder, and Case volunteered. Ramie noted that nominations may also be made from the floor and that members may nominate themselves.

b. **Draft Resolution 2026-09: Awarding the 2027 Newsletter Contract:** The Council considered Draft Resolution 2026-09 concerning the award of the 2027 newsletter contract to Courier Printing. The proposed contract reflected an annual increase of $504 for the three newsletter issues. Ramie recommended approval and expressed satisfaction with the printer's performance A motion by Rajsz seconded by Breen to approve carried.

c. **Draft Resolution 2026-10: Awarding 2027 UDC Technical Assistance Grants:** The Council considered Draft Resolution 2026-10 concerning the award of 2027 Technical Assistance Grants. The grant requests originally totaled approximately $32,000 and were revised downward to a total award amount of $24,500 after additional time and a vendor price adjustment. A motion by Rajsz seconded by Martin to approve carried.

d. **Substantial Conformance UDC 2026-13: Data Center Zoning Amendment, Shohola Township:** The Council considered Substantial Conformance Review UDC 2026-13, concerning a datacenter-related zoning matter. A motion by Rajsz seconded by G.Dudko for discussion carried. Martin questioned whether data centers outside the river corridor could nevertheless affect the river through groundwater use or other impacts. Martin compared the similarities of fracking to data centers as concerning. The discussion distinguished the Council's jurisdiction within the corridor from municipal authority outside it. Kurnath explained that Section 7 review under the Wild and Scenic Rivers Act applies to federally funded or federally permitted projects that may affect the river's free-flowing condition, water quality, or outstandingly remarkable values, including impacts involving tributaries. Kurnath and Brown explained how data centers apply to a wide range of infrastructure and not exclusively large complexes. Members also discussed limits on municipal authority in Pennsylvania, including the distinction between prohibiting a land use and regulating where it may occur, and

described the township's zoning approach and industrial-zoning area. Dexter called for a vote on the resolution the motion carried.

e. **Substantial Conformance UDC 2026-14: Shohola Township Zoning Amendment:** The Council considered Substantial Conformance Review UDC 2026-14 concerning a Shohola Township zoning amendment. Pais advised that the Council had previously identified concerns with the proposal and had found one aspect of it to not be in substantial conformance. Following discussion with the township, wording had been revised and language added to address the Council's concerns. A motion by Rajsz and seconded by Breen to approve the revised item as being in substantial conformance carried.

f. **Substantial Conformance UDC 2026-15: Data Center Zoning Amendment, Damascus Township:** The Council considered Substantial Conformance Review UDC 2026-15 concerning the Damascus Township data center zoning amendment. Martin clarified that the item concerns zoning provisions rather than approval of a specific datacenter development. Discussion noted the value of establishing zoning regulations in advance rather than waiting until a particular proposal is submitted. A motion by Rajsz and seconded by G.Dudko carried.

g. **Other:** None.

Old Business:

a. **Proposed River Management Plan Amendment re: Federal Funding Obligation:** Ramie continued the UDC's discussion of a proposed River Management Plan amendment concerning federal funding obligations, including correspondence from Shohola Township requesting an update on the Council's position and a National Park Service comment letter included in the meeting packet. Martin reviewed the history of the discussion and questioned whether an amendment process would be meaningful, attainable, supported by the relevant parties, and a productive use of the Council's time. Thus, Martin raised a motion to table the amendment request, which Rajsz seconded for discussion.

Robinson said the motive for Shohola's amendment proposal centered on the Council's funding challenges, the implications of federal funding obligations, and the purpose of the proposed amendment as a possible means of bringing municipal, state, and federal partners together. Some members expressed concern that the proposal had become contentious, consumed substantial time, and created friction that could damage working relationships. Kurnath noted that an amendment to the RMP has never occurred in the past and would be willing to work through the process if it did arise.

The discussion included the need for outreach to federal, state, and congressional representatives and the distinction between educational outreach and lobbying. Members discussed restrictions on using federal financial-assistance funds, staff time, stipends, or mileage for lobbying. Participants expressed the view that members may meet with elected officials and explain the Council's purpose and needs, provided federally funded resources are not used for prohibited lobbying activity. Any outreach was suggested to be framed as education about the River Management Plan and the Council's role, rather than as a direct request for funding or an attempt to influence legislation.

Robinson suggested that the River Management Plan amendment procedure could simply lead to convening the relevant partners. Martin said she withdrew her motion to table. A proposed response to Shohola Township was discussed. It would explain that the Council was working to arrange an educational meeting with federal representatives, potentially also including state partners, after newly elected officials are seated in the new year as a next step. G.Dudko supported considering an invitation to Paula Kay to describe New York's approach to securing state funding and share that experience with her Pennsylvania counterparts, as she has offered to do.

b. **Concept to Develop a River Management Plan History Document:** Ramie discussed an alternative educational project: developing a historical document about the River Management Plan and the formation of the Council. She proposed contacting a Cornell University professor, Matt McMahon, who had last month attended this meeting to offer an in-place, learning project involving landscape-architecture students in the Upper Delaware River Valley.

The proposed student project could research and document the history of the River Management Plan and the Council through newspaper articles, historical society collections, archival records, existing literature, and interviews with people involved in the process. Ramie noted that the project could provide an objective public-education resource and preserve the recollections of participants. Robinson emphasized documenting the grassroots effort that led to the Council and the River Management Plan, including public response to earlier federal proposals, volunteer work, and development of the cooperative planning structure. Robinson cautioned that historical accounts vary according to the author's perspective and emphasized the need for an accurate and balanced account. Members generally viewed the project as worthwhile and

potentially achievable without cost to the Council. A November 12 conference call with the National Parks Conservation Association was also mentioned as a potential resource for advancing or supporting the concept.

A motion by Breen, seconded by Rodgers, was made for Ramie to contact Cornell Professor Matt McMahon to determine whether he and his students would be interested in undertaking the research project carried.

c. UDC-USGS Technical Assistance Agreement for Delaware River Barryville Gage: Ramie updated the council concerning the UDC–USGS technical assistance agreement for the Delaware River gauge at Barryville. Agreements from Sullivan County and the U.S. Geological Survey had both been received on November 4 and executed. The Council's pass-through funding obligation is $8,700. Discharge data collection had continued without interruption from October 1 while the agreement was being finalized. The current funding period supports continued collection and publication through September 30, 2027. Members were advised that another funding arrangement would need to be identified after that date.

d. 10/22 NPS Substantial Conformance Determination Letter: Town of Highland Comprehensive Plan: The Council acknowledged receipt of the National Park Service's October 22 substantial conformance determination letter concerning the Town of Highland Comprehensive Plan in concurrence with the UDC recommendations.

e. Other: None.

Public Comment: DeAngelis shared a personal connection to the Upper Delaware region dating to the 1970s, including experiences associated with Ten Mile River and the Boy Scouts and a seasonal residence in the area. He thanked the Council for its work.

Executive Session: Dexter introduced an Executive Session to discuss confidential negotiations. Ramie stated that UDC delegates, staff, and the National Park Service were invited to participate. Voting members were to retain Zoom access while the recording was stopped; are welcome to wait until the Council returns. Ramie stated, however, that no action was anticipated from the Executive Session other than a vote to adjourn after it concluded. A motion by Rajsz seconded by Breen to enter executive session at 8:49 p.m. carried. The Council returned to open session at 9:04 p.m.

Adjournment: Roeder commented favorably on the meeting, noting that participants had been able to express differing viewpoints while ultimately working together. Roeder described the exchange as an example of democracy at work. A motion by Roeder seconded Dexter by to adjourn the meeting at 9:05 p.m. carried.

Minutes prepared by Sara-Jo Fegley, 11/6/2026