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UPPER DELAWARE COUNCIL MEETING MINUTES
October 2, 2025

The Upper Delaware Council held its monthly meeting on Thursday, October 2, 2025. Chairperson Rodgers called the meeting to order at 6:31 p.m. Roll call followed reciting the Pledge of Allegiance.

Attendees:
Town of Fremont- Jim Rodgers, Town of Hancock- Katt Judd, Town of Delaware- Harold Roeder, Town of Cochecton- Larry Richardson, Town of Tusten- Cathleen Breen, Town of Highland- Christine Martin (Zoom), Town of Lumberland- Nadia Rajsz (Zoom) Town of Deerpark- Ginny Dudko, Berlin Township- Al Henry, Damascus Township- Jeff Dexter, New York State- Ryan Coulter, Commonwealth of Pennsylvania- Tim Dugan, Delaware River Basin Commission- Beth Brown (Zoom)

Absent:
Westfall Township- Michael Barth, Lackawaxen Township- Doug Case, Shohola Township- Aaron Robinson, National Park Service

Staff:
Executive Director- Laurie Ramie, Resource & Land Use Specialist- Kerry Engelhardt, Administrative Support- Stephanie Driscoll

Media:
Tri-County Independent- Peter Becker (Zoom), River Reporter- Carla Guzman

Guests*:*
Town of Deerpark- Bill Dudko, Chuck Hoffman (Zoom), David Lillard (Zoom)

Presentation: "Creating an Upper Delaware Council Development and Communications Plan": Hoffman said he has had the privilege of working with the Upper Delaware Council for decades, starting way back in 1984. He helped with the original management plan, the public hearings, getting congressional approvals, and even setting up the council itself. He's seen this river and its communities in action for a long time. When we first talked about forming the council, the idea was simple. We wanted a nonprofit made up of government members: New York, Pennsylvania, the National Park Service, the Delaware River Basin Commission, and local towns. The goal was cooperation. We didn't want a federal commission telling towns what to do. We wanted everyone on the same page, solving problems together. Fast forward 37 years, the council has done a lot right with keeping towns coordinated, protecting the river, building relationships. But funding has always been tricky. The NPS has helped, but the states haven't stepped up as much as we hoped. And we need money to keep doing this work. That's why he suggested creating a Fundraising Task Force of volunteers, not council staff, who know how to raise money. People like former Chief of Staff to Congressman Matt McHugh Marvin Rappaport, UDC Berlin Township Representative Al Henry, UDC Town of Deerpark Alternate Bill Dudko, Molly Oliver from Friends of the Upper Delaware River, Adam Shellhammer from American Rivers, himself, and David Lillard with the Downstream Project who is here tonight for this presentation.

Lillard said he's worked on projects like the Downstream Project and the Delaware Estuary Program, helping small nonprofits grow from modest budgets to multi-million-dollar programs creating sustainable, long-term fundraising plans that actually work. Instead of hiring an expensive consultant, we can do a plan in-house. Steps include: taking stock of what we have—people, river, programs; Planning communication: website, newsletter, outreach; Developing a case statement: why the council exists, and what it does; Engaging donors, foundations, and government programs. The task force will help with interviews, drafting the case statement, and spotting funding opportunities. The beauty of this is ownership; when you're part of the process, you're invested. And it's much cheaper than hiring someone from the outside.

Hoffman said long-term, we want to restore staff positions from the original 1986 plan: a second project reviewer and a

communications specialist. Right now, we're balancing leadership duties and communications, but having dedicated people will make everything smoother. We also want to build a "Friends of the Upper Delaware" (Friends of the Upper Delaware Council) network. Residents, visitors, property owners, stakeholders: they all matter. Fundraising needs to be transparent, ethical, and accountable. People need to see where their support is going.

Lillard said fundraising is really about relationships. It's not just about writing grants or asking for money, it's about connecting with people who care. Start small, set realistic goals, and grow over time. Involving the task force creates ownership and keeps costs down. Most importantly, clear communication and a strong case statement are the keys to success.

Hoffman said that's the plan. It's practical, it's doable, and most importantly, it keeps the Upper Delaware thriving. Rodgers asked if there were any questions. G. Dudko said she liked the saying "Protecting private property rights since 1988" that was shown on one of the slides. It sounds catchy. Lillard said that's part of what they do. Lillard and Hoffman thanked the council for their time. Rodgers thanked them for the presentation and Lillard and Hoffman departed the meeting.

Approval of the September 4, 2025 Minutes: A motion by Henry seconded by G. Dudko to approve the September 4, 2025 meeting minutes carried.

Committee Reports: There were no questions regarding previously distributed minutes for Water Use/Resource Management 9/14 (Bill Dudko), Project Review 9/23 (Larry Richardson), or Operations 9/23 (Jim Rodgers).

Public Comment on the Agenda: None.

Status Reports:

Delaware River Basin Commission: Brown said she is planning to come in person to next month's UDC meeting and is looking forward to seeing everyone. She congratulated Ramie and UDC staff for another successful River Valley Awards Ceremony. The DRBC enjoyed attending for another year. There will be a virtual DRBC public hearing on 11/5 at 1:30pm and a virtual 3rd Quarter Business meeting on 12/10 at 10am. The next advisory committee meeting will be the Water Management Advisory Committee meeting on 10/15 at 10am, both virtual and in-person, and on 12/15 the Regulated Flow Advisory Committee Meeting, virtual only. The DRBC will be sending 5 staff members to Friends of the Upper Delaware River's Upper Delaware River Rendezvous on 10/15-16. They are still collecting public input on the scope of the DRBC's Water Resources Resiliency Plan. From a water flow and operations perspective, things have been quite dry. The DRBC has made several directed releases to meet the Trenton Flow Objective. They continue to hope for more rain.

NYS Dept. of Environmental Conservation: Coulter said we need rain. B. Dudko had just told him before this meeting the Governor has issued a burn ban as of 3pm from 10/2-10/15. The trout streams need rain; it's trout spawning season and more flow is definitely helpful. Everything is status quo in the fisheries department. A couple more surveys will be conducted this week. The Stream Restoration Project on the Mongaup Creek is now complete and looks good. Sometimes when the projects are first done things will look a little rough and need time to settle. Pheasant stocking season was last week in NY and will continue to go throughout hunting season. They stock once a week in some areas. October 1st kicked off fall archery deer season, which is his personal favorite time to hunt since it's not freezing cold.

He talked to Engelhardt this week about the Ten Mile River (TMR) property acquisition; the largest they have had in this region. Because it will be a state forest, it will fall under the Forestry staff's management. There will be a Unit Management Plan developed and the UDC and other organizations will be involved. There will be public meetings and they will dial in the uses and resources. NYSDEC, NPS, and the UDC met prior to the purchase of that property to make everyone aware of the River Management Plan (RMP) and that it needs to be followed. The TMR property falls under the scenic section and everyone is aware of that. There will be more meetings in the future. He knows they don't want to develop that land too much and plan to leave it as is. It's different than waterway accesses they purchase for river accesses. It would be nice to have a NYSDEC staff member give a presentation to the UDC on that process. Henry asked what the total acreage for TMR is? Coulter said he isn't sure of the exact number, but around 10,000 acres. It's one of the biggest purchases the NYSDEC has made in this region. G. Dudko asked if the TMR River Access would change? Coulter said there are no plans to change it.

G. Dudko said she was surprised the burn ban isn't "until further notice". Coulter said he isn't sure why they put a 10/15 end date. Engelhardt said they may not be able to put a burn ban in effect indefinitely. B. Dudko said it will be revaluated on the 15th. Roeder said the *Sullivan County Democrat* does a section "Down the Decades…" and in an

1895 article they talked about the drought being so bad that the water in streams to the D&H Canal dried up. We aren't alone when it comes to dryness this time of year. Coulter said mini bursts of drought may be the new normal. Rodgers said Unit Management Plans can take years to develop; he's seen some in the Adirondacks take almost 10 years to develop and implement. Henry asked relative to the RMP, would NYSDEC be able to acquire the property before the plan is complete? Coulter said the DEC will purchase the land and then develop a plan. That's how a lot of these acquisitions go. Most recently it was property purchased east of the Hudson River.

PA Dept. of Conservation and Natural Resources: Dugan said hunting season is kicking off in Pennsylvania. Saturday is the beginning of archery season for the majority of the state. Fall foliage is big this time of year; his office has been putting out reports. With the lack of rain, colors seem to be muted this year. There will always be some good pockets of color, though. He saw some early changes around swamps and wetlands. There are some areas where the soil is thin and leaves just browned. Fall fire season is around the corner. Last year was an active fall fire season, which is not typical. Spring fire season ends when the tree buds burst, the leaves come out, humidity starts, and greenery happens. Fall fire season starts when the leaves drop as we head into winter. If we don't get any precipitation soon, we will have a long fall fire season. Soil conditions are so dry we could have underground fires. DCNR will be bringing in aircraft this year for fall fire season. He heard today that there are two helicopters coming on and two scoopers. Those are statewide resources. DCNR staff are making an analysis of lakes that are and are not acceptable to scoop from.

The Pennsylvania budget still hasn't passed yet. Staff is still working and every unit is still operating based on direction they have. They are trying to maintain business as usual. In the last two weeks travel and hiring has been restricted. As they went into September, there was more urgency to reduce how to use funds or extending lines of credit.

Last Saturday there was a ceremony at Grey Towers in Milford to dedicate the Big Pocono Fire Tower. It was a Commonwealth fire tower at Big Pocono State Park. When Gifford Pinchot was in office decades ago, he allocated funds to have this tower built. In 2018 they removed the tower, refurbished it, and shipped it to its new home of Grey Towers.

He just shared a press release with Driscoll to send around: "Shapiro Administration Launches $5 Million Program to Help Forest Landowners Strengthen Pennsylvania's Woodlands". Landowners could be eligible for up to $25,000 of cost share.

Last month there was a question about Epizootic Hemorrhagic Disease (EHD) in the region. He checked and so far it's only in Western PA, though it does move around. The Syracuse, NY area had an outbreak. These dry conditions push it along, but the frost will knock it down. Coulter said Ulster County had it pretty bad. It can often get mixed up with Chronic Wasting Disease (CWD). Roeder asked if that was when the deer were just dropping dead? Coulter said yes, they were finding dead deer near water sources. Dugan said he has no update on CWD. There was a spot in Manchester Township. It was a captive deer in Manchester that tested positive for CWD. There are maps and information on PA's website. There are two collection bins for testing (typically the head is deposited there) at State Land in Honesdale and at the Manchester Township building. G. Dudko asked if the disease affects the meat? Dugan said he doesn't know and suggested you do your own research before using the meat of an infected deer. Coulter said deer can bounce back from EHD, but not CWD. Their hooves deteriorate with EHD. Dugan said CWD was originally discovered in the Rockies and it spread across the U.S.

PA DCNR is currently working on some interpretive displays in their new Delaware Forest Interpretive Center Facility in Pike County. One display is on historical artifacts on the bluestone industry in this area. When you broke bluestone, they would use a bit and drilled holes by hand. There was a feather and wedge set they would use while the drilled the holes. He asked if anyone knows of one from this region for the case and if you find one, please let him know.

Rodgers said if there was a diseased deer across the border in PA, does Sullivan County have any? Coulter said he could find out.

National Park Service: A copy of the monthly report (sent before government shutdown), and a press release on visitation statistics is included in the packet. Ramie said we wait for the visitation statistics for our report on economic impact in the region. It keeps getting better each year. Rodgers said NPS said they would be accepting comments to identify improvements that could be made to visitor services in parks until 10/9; will that change since the government is shut down? Ramie said you can still email NPS personnel, so she presumes comments will still be collected. During this shutdown, it was said that NPS personnel would be allowed to check their email. They were not allowed to do that during other shutdowns. Henry said according to this report, NPS is revising language on

fires; how will they be able to enforce that? It's super confusing. It is a restriction of what kind of fuels visitors can use to light fires. This unit doesn't have campsites run by the NPS for people to camp. Where would this be applicable? Dugan said he knows nationally, their agency has received updates on revisions of Wildland Firefighting through all federal agencies. It could be some over-arching messaging for all agencies. They are looking at consolidating the Department of Interior, Bureau of Management, etc. There has been a lot of work to synchronize all the efforts. Henry said he wrote the first Superintendent's Compendium; there was never anything on fuel for fire with limited jurisdiction.

UDC Executive Director: First, Ramie wished B. Dudko a Happy Birthday and then wished Driscoll a Happy Birthday on Monday. On Tuesday afternoon, the UDC had a visit from NYCDEP staff. She received a call on Friday (9/26) afternoon from Executive Director of Strategic Operations & Research Jennifer Garigliano asking to visit with the DEP's Acting Chief Operating Officer Anastasios Georgelis. They were bringing him on a tour of the Delaware Watershed to meet stakeholders. Ramie contacted NPS for a joint sit-down to save them a trip across the river. UPDE Acting Superintendent Jessica Weinman and Cultural Resources Manager Tom Kearns joined the meeting with five people from NYCDEP, Engelhardt, and herself. They asked for a briefing on what the UDC does, what the NPS is involved in, and we brought up the Delaware Aqueduct repairs. The liveries had just asked about the status of the Delaware aqueduct repairs at the Water Safety Partners meeting in September. After the repair project was delayed three times, they needed to restart the contract procurement process. They are now projecting that it could have a tentative start date of 2031. They are trying to be realistic about how long it takes to get funding in place. Henry said that is 40 million plus gallons of water lost per day. Rodgers said it's a shame that all that water is being wasted. Ramie said yes, that will continue to happen until the repair project is complete.

We were advised at the last UDC/NPS staff meeting that the UDC needs to have a whistleblower policy in place. This is a new requirement as of 2024; subsequent recipients of federal financial awards need to have one in writing in place. It falls under 2 CFR Part 200 of the Code of Federal Regulations for Uniform Administrative Requirements, Cost Principles, and Audit Requirements. We will need to draft and adopt a written policy of the whistleblower process and required documents. Marshall passed along the links to the relevant section of the 209-page long document for Ramie to review and write a draft policy. The question whether or not the UDC has a whistleblower policy comes up on our tax form, for which we've always answered no with no consequences. After this year we will answer yes to that question. Rodgers asked if the policy will be for UDC staff or council members? Ramie said it's for the UDC employees and anyone who does business with the UDC.

Kurnath's timetable to come back into her role as UPDE Superintendent is 11/1. She was supposed to be on a 120-day temporary assignment as Acting Associate Regional Director for Administration and Business Services that has turned into 6-months.

Referring to the calendar handouts, Ramie said currently have no presentations scheduled after tonight's. If you have any ideas, please let her know. On 10/8 Robinson, Dugan, and she will go to Harrisburg for a meeting about the UDC's funding. Robinson wasn't able to join tonight due to a function with Representative Olsommer, who set up that meeting, that he is attending. They will get together before 10/8 to strategize. Rodgers asked if they knew how much time they had? Ramie said not yet. They did send a parking pass for the Capitol complex.

New Business:

a. **Federal Government Shutdown Impacts:** Ramie said Weinman confirmed her interpretation of the memo she received on 10/1 about the government shutdown and how it would affect organizations like the UDC. Since we don't operate on NPS facilities or rely on their staff, and we've been funded through the end of the calendar year, we've been advised that we may continue business as usual. We are hoping for the best for our friends over at the NPS and hope this issue gets resolved soon. In the past years we've had to put a closure plan together for the UDC, but at that time we didn't have the same level of funding in place. We rely on the federal funding allocation. As mentioned, we are fortunate that the NPS was helpful in extending the Cooperative Agreement to the Fiscal Year 2026 1st Quarter. That is in our favor through the end of this year.
b. **Draft Resolution 2025-12: Approving 2026 UDC Technical Assistance Grants:** A motion by Roeder to approve Resolution 2025-12: Approving 2026 UDC Technical Assistance Grants of $3,000 to the Town of Delaware, $3,000 to the Town of Tusten, and $3,000 to Damascus Township, seconded by Richardson, carried.
c. **Substantial Conformance 2025-04: Golden Horde Farm and Campground, Town of Cochecton:** Engelhardt said this was an application reviewed at the last Project Review Committee meeting. The Town of Cochecton had a public hearing last Tuesday and the Planning Board hasn't voted on the application yet.

The Project Review Committee voted on 9/23 to recommend substantial conformance to the full council. A motion by Richardson to send the recommendation that the Golden Horde Farm and Campground substantially conforms to the River Management Plan to the National Park Service, seconded by G. Dudko, carried.

d. **2nd Annual Upper Delaware River Rendezvous, 10/15-16 at Villa Roma Resort, Callicoon:** Ramie said we wanted to remind everyone that this conference is coming up in a couple of weeks. Anyone is still welcome to sign up. She noticed Coulter's name on the speaker list. If the government shutdown is still happening, that will affect any federal employees on the speaker list. The UDC staff will be there and exhibiting, bringing back reports. If anyone would like to register, we can send the link.

e. **Other:** Judd said since she is new to the UDC, she called Hancock Town Supervisor Jerry Vernold wanting to know what her function is as UDC Representative. He told her he didn't know and to ask former representative Fred Peckham. That wasn't very helpful. In the meantime, she's been hearing from a woman who is having issues. She lives along the East Branch and is having a hard time. She would like to come to the next UDC meeting to speak. Rodgers said anyone can come to any meeting; no one ever needs an invitation. A person can come at any time and make a comment at the beginning or end of the agenda. Henry said, so a person doesn't waste their time, it would be beneficial if we knew what the concern was before coming here. We might not be able to do anything. Judd said she told the person about the Hardenbergh Patent. Ramie said that was a subject Peckham was passionate about. Judd said it was Peckham's Uncle George Frosch's (UDC Representative before Peckham) passion first. G. Dudko said this goes back to the presentation we heard tonight; we need more information about the UDC out there. Not a lot of people know what the UDC is. At a full council meeting, representatives don't have the time or energy to sift through information that should go through a committee first. A letter needs to be sent to Ramie so we can determine where the issue needs to go. Rodgers said Judd should have received a folder full of information on the UDC and what the representatives' responsibilities are. Henry said there was information about the Hardenbergh Patent distributed at a recent WU/RM Committee meeting that might answer Judd and this person's concern. Ramie said this person could always attend virtually instead of coming all the way here. Judd said the folder she received was full of a lot of information. Rodgers said anything above the main stem of the Delaware River the council has no input on whatsoever. Judd said they both flow through Hancock. Rodgers said if you have questions on what the UDC does specifically, he suggests coming to a committee meeting. Each committee has its own responsibility. In his own experience, until you're on a subcommittee, it's hard to understand what the UDC does. Richardson suggested reading the River Management Plan; it tells you what the UDC and what representatives are responsible for right in the beginning.

Old Business:

a. **NPS Determination: UDC 2025-07: Rosen Use Variance, Town of Lumberland:** Engelhardt said we received this letter from NPS agreeing with our recommendation that the Rosen Use Variance in the Town of Lumberland substantially conformed to the River Management Plan (RMP). She asked Rajsz if she has any updates on where the project stands with the town since Sullivan County disapproved the use variance. Rajsz said it went in front of the Planning Board. She did not make that meeting. She believed it passed with no issues. There is a meeting on Monday she plans to attend and will find out more then. Engelhardt said the county did not approve of the use variance. Rajsz said she will be at the county offices tomorrow and will verify and call Engelhardt. She believes it passed with the Town of Lumberland Planning Board. She asked if the county stated why it was denied? Engelhardt said no, we received a letter that it was denied and stated it did not meet the criteria; they did not elaborate. G. Dudko said she doesn't remember the county ever getting involved with things like this. The full council gets the recommendation from the Project Review Committee, and then they review it to send the recommendation to the NPS. Why is the county involved this time? Engelhardt said the county does a GML-239 Review. G. Dudko said she's never heard of it. Engelhardt said she didn't think a 239 Review was required for this project since it's not on a county road. It must be within a certain distance of something that triggered a review. G. Dudko said she's never heard the county being involved or mentioned for this project until now. Engelhardt said sometimes they will do a review and take certain criteria into account. We don't see many use variances. Richardson said he just sat through three hours of training on variances. They stressed that towns should not be granting variances; 97% of use variances should not be granted. With a use variance, you need to meet all the criteria to be approved. An area use variance is different. He mentioned during the Project Review Committee meeting that Sullivan County refused the use variance for this project. If the town wants to override the county's decision, they need to do it by a certain majority. They also need to send a letter to the county on

why they disagree. Rodgers said that process doesn't involve the UDC. The Zoning Board makes a decision and that triggers a review with the county. Rajsz said the project is within a short distance of Route 97 and is below a county road, sandwiched between the two and that's probably what triggered the 239 Review.

b. **9/25 Skinners Falls Bridge Revised Study Public Meeting:** There is a handout on the first summary Ramie did on the revised Planning and Environmental Linkages (PEL) Study. There have been two meetings on the PEL since this handout was originally given out at the September WU/RM Committee meeting. The first meeting was on 9/17 to brief the Project Advisory Committee (PAC) and the second was a virtual public meeting on 9/25. The conclusion of the study was that they are removing rehabilitation as an option, since there is no bridge there to rehabilitate, leaving only no build/do nothing or full replacement. They do not currently have the funding programmed for a full replacement. Unless funding is found for this, it could not move forward. They explain various options and programs for which this project did not meet the criteria, wouldn't be enough funding, or it would require a cost analysis. On page 2 of the report it states: *"A review of available grant funding was completed; however, the low traffic volumes on the Skinners Falls Bridge would affect the availability of this type of funding. Additional efforts will be required for the planning and programming of both federal and state funds to advance further studies associated with the alternatives identified in this PEL study."*

   What was surprising to learn at the 9/25 meeting was that the PA abutment will be demolished and restored back to its original state like the NY side. The PA abutment was planned to be a river overlook. The decorative railing made out of scrap from the bridge was in process of being manufactured. The NPS discovered within the Wild and Scenic Rivers Act that if there is no structure there it must be restored back to as natural as possible. NPS let PennDOT and its partners know. It was not a local NPS decision; this came from regulations. The issue wasn't brought up during the presentation, it came up under the Q&A. This was another major deviation for this project on what was originally planned. There has been no timetable given. The funding was already spent to start the railing which caused a lot of disgruntlement. People pointed out that all of the funds going toward this PEL Study could have repaired the bridge if maintenance wasn't ignored. Weinman said at the meeting there may be some glimmer of hope, comparing the Skinners Falls Bridge crossing to the Lordville Bridge crossing which was historic when it was taken down. Through community advocacy, there is a crossing there now; somehow the funding was captured there. There is also litigation happening with the property owners in Milanville. They do not want a new structure built and will legally oppose that happening. Because of that, it plays into the restoration of the site so there aren't visitors coming down there. Their attorney asked what the timetable is for making a final decision on whether or not there will be a crossing there. If a funding source is suddenly identified, it could re-open the conversation. A whole new PEL Study would be required under the NEPA Act. The mitigation proposal is still going on so the UDC's Historic Preservation and Interpretation Grant Program for Upper Delaware River communities is still in consideration. They are currently drawing up a memo on what they will do for the mitigation strategies.

c. **"New Plaque Honors Congressman McHugh for his Upper Delaware River Legislation":** Ramie said the press release is included in the packet. The dedication ceremony went very well, with a nice lunch afterwards at the UDC office. The 26-minute ceremony was recorded and posted to the UDC YouTube. At the end of the ceremony, everyone gave former Congressman McHugh a round of applause for all of his hard work in our river valley. We had $128.10 after we paid all expenses for the dedication ceremony. Driscoll had the idea to donate the remaining amount to the Narrowsburg Beautification Group to maintain the Big Eddy Observation Deck, where the plaque has been installed. She said we spent the funds for this project responsibly. G. Dudko asked how many people were at the dedication? Rodgers said when he counted, there were 26 people present at the observation deck.

d. **Other:** Dexter said he's seen some whitetail deer with a growth off their chest. Dugan asked if it was just one deer or multiple? Rodgers said he has seen it too, and it seems like they all have it. Coulter said he will reach out to the Wildlife staff at NYSDEC. Dexter said he will send his trail camera footage of the deer to Ramie to send to Dugan and Coulter.

Public Comment: None.

Adjournment: A motion by Roeder seconded by Henry to adjourn the meeting at 8:29 p.m. carried.

Minutes prepared by Stephanie Driscoll, 10/17/25