

WATER USE/RESOURCE MANAGEMENT COMM. MEETING MINUTES

December 12, 2023

Committee Members Present: Ginny Dudko, Al Henry, Fred Peckham (Zoom), Evan Padua (Zoom), Andy Boyar, Dennis Bernitt

Committee Members Absent: Pat Jeffer

Staff: Laurie Ramie, Stephanie Driscoll, Kerry Engelhardt

NPS Partner: Don Hamilton, Carly Marshall (Zoom)

Guests: Bill Dudko, Jeff Dexter

The UDC’s Water Use/Resource Management Committee held its monthly meeting on Tuesday, December 12th. Chairperson Dudko called the meeting to order at 7:45 pm.

Approval of November 21, 2023 meeting minutes: A motion by Henry seconded by Bernitt approving the November 21, 2023 meeting minutes carried. There was no public comment on the agenda.

Old Business:

11/15 Housing Solutions in the Upper Delaware Region: This report is coming to this committee after moving the topic from the full council meeting. At the meeting they talked about renaming the group, since the term “affordable housing” can have a negative connotation. Other suggestions were “attainable” or “regenerative” housing. Comprehensive planning and visioning, density in development vs. open space in the river corridor, land stewardship, healthy and sustainable communities, and economic vitality are all ways that the group aligns with the River Management Plan.

Some of the discussion points at this meeting were; how affordable housing is “underproduced” and young people can’t afford to tackle the repairs and improvements that existing older housing stock often requires, regulators must approve infrastructure that will support this “affordable housing”, and how this topic is a way to build community around shared goals.

Boyar asked why this topic made its way to the WU/RM Committee; wouldn’t it be better at Project Review where they discuss land use? Ramie said the reason it came to WU/RM is because here we talk about economic development. Boyar brought up the AirBnB “issue” within the Town of Highland. Houses that would be turned over to new owners or rented full time aren’t being occupied. As long as they are able to continue being rented as short term, it will have a serious impact on the housing market. He referenced the article in the *River Reporter* about 36 properties in the Town of Highland that were approved for short-term rental. B. Dudko said people just can’t afford a mortgage. 10 – 15 years down the line in a 30-year mortgage if a major expense comes up, they can’t afford the repairs.

Everyone agreed this is a better topic for the Project Review Committee and it will be moved going forward to that agenda. The next meeting will be in late January or early February and they plan to do a larger presentation in the spring.

11/27 Upper Delaware Scenic Byway Meeting: The minutes were included in the packet. There won’t be another meeting until January, since December’s meeting would have fallen on the 25th (Christmas day). Henry asked about the construction work on the Visitor Center at The Callicoon Depot; wasn’t that supposed to be presented to Project Review? Ramie said yes but there aren’t even bids out on the project yet; nothing has happened since it was last discussed.

G. Dudko asked about the walking path they are trying to put in the Town of Highland. Ramie said Town of Highland Supervisor Elect John Pizzolato mentioned a TAP grant and that the project is very preliminary. They still need pre-approval. There is an article included about this proposed project in the Project Review packet with the Resource and Land Use Specialist’s discussion items.

11/28 Upper Delaware River Watershed Plan Committee: Ramie attended this meeting that took place via Zoom with 21 participants. Kurnath, Hamilton and Andy Weber from NPS attended, and she represented the UDC. She

mentioned there were attendees from US Fish and Wildlife Service, National Parks Conservation Association, Department of Environmental Conservation, NY Department of Health, Academy of Natural Science, CRISP, Friends of the Upper Delaware, NYS Division of Homeland Security and Emergency Services Hazard Mitigation, New York City DEP, Sullivan County Planning, and The Corps Network.

At this meeting, they gave an overview of the programs that were done in 2023. There was also an update on the status of the Neversink River Watershed Plan that is being developed. Currently within the group people are committed to writing certain chapters. There was a shared list of existing plans; the RMP and Land and Water Use Guidelines were listed. They asked the group to review the list and see if there's anything missing. Kurnath told them it would be helpful to have the Foundation Document for UPDE added. They will be looking for anything else to fill in the gaps.

12/5 Upper Delaware River BioBlitz: Engelhardt attended this Zoom meeting. There were scheduled site visits to two candidate properties: the Van Scott Nature Preserve and the Highlights Foundation Retreat Center. Participants checked in to give their thoughts on the locations as far as biodiversity. Both locations have decent forested areas with running water and beaver dams. They decided to go with the Highlights Foundation Retreat Center location in Boyd Mills, PA. They will be using the 24-hour format through the weekend. Engelhardt will be volunteering and helping with the social media and marketing.

12/6 Eagle Conservation Meeting: Engelhardt attended the quarterly meeting last Wednesday. Within the last few months, a new president came on board who suggested that the various chairs be rotated to give board members different views of the organization. The new chair for the Eagle Conservation Committee is Scott Van Gorder. Engelhardt commented he was happy to learn and friendly. There were 51 people that registered for volunteer training of which 13 were brand new. The training took place at Settlers Inn this past weekend. They trained on: eagle etiquette, how to dress, how to deal with various problems, etc. After the training, Engelhardt went to the Lackawaxen Boat Launch. Some of the newer volunteers were there to get ready for the new season that starts the first weekend in January.

Henry asked if there are limited busses. Engelhardt said yes, they sell out, but she doesn't think registration is fully open yet. You can find out when registration is open on the Delaware Highlands Conservancy website. G. Dudko commented that 51 volunteers are a lot. Engelhardt said a lot of people come to the training, but don't go out a lot. If there are a lot of volunteers at the boat launch, they will send them to the Barbara Yeaman Observation Area. Hamilton asked how many trips they do and if they all start from the same spot. Engelhardt said there are 8 trips, 2 leave from Settlers Inn and the other 6 leave from Zane Grey Museum.

12/12 Delaware River Sojourn Committee Meeting: Engelhardt said this meeting was earlier today. They were encouraged to look for some possible corporate sponsors, although that's not really what anyone is on the committee for but they could keep an eye out. The lower day planning team has been assembled. There were a few topics added to the upper day planners schedule to be discussed during their next meeting.

Other: None.

New Business:

NYS DEC Open Space Plan Update: The NYS DEC is updating their Open Space Plan for the entire state. Heather Jacksy reached out to the stakeholders for their comments on the Catskill River and Road Corridors section, which is a regional priority conservation project for both Region 3 and 4. There are sections on the Delaware River branches, main stem corridors and the Upper Delaware Scenic Byway (UDSB). Engelhardt looked through them and has some comments to go over with Ramie before sending them. For example, they said the UDSB Visitor Center was to be at Fort Delaware rather than The Callicoon Depot, so that needs to be updated. The plan is not yet open to comments from the general public. They are first getting comments from organizations and agencies.

DRBC Water Audit Report: This is a report prepared by the Delaware River Basin Commission. The full title is: A Comprehensive Assessment of the Delaware River Basin Commission's Water Audit Program 2012-2021. It is 193 pages and Engelhardt is looking forward to reading through the entire report. The purpose of the study is to perform a comprehensive assessment of the 10 years of data collected through the DRBC's Water Audit Program.

There are multiple recommendations made at the end of the report to move the water audit program in the Delaware River Basin from monitoring progress to promoting progress.

When we think of the water supply coming from the Delaware Water Basin, we're thinking of the Upper Delaware and the reservoir systems going to NYC. This is a report on the entire river basin. The Delaware Basin supplies roughly half of the water for NYC (the largest city in the U.S.). However, the majority of the population served resides within the basin boundary which was estimated in 2020 to be 8.6 million people. Of those 85% are served by hundreds of public water supply systems, included 2 of the 14 water supply systems that were built prior to 1776.

Water withdrawals by public water suppliers in the basin have decreased by about 100 million gallons a day on average over the last 30 years, while the in-basin population is estimated to have increased by about 1.3 million people. She recalled Jennifer Garigliano from NYC DEP talking about how in NYC, even though the population has increased, the water usage has decreased. The assessment of the Water Audit data highlights that there is much room for improvement, with a decent amount of water that is lost or unaccounted for.

Peckham asked if the report was for PA, NY or the whole watershed. Engelhart said it's the whole watershed. Peckham said PA law says you don't need to have a permit or register a well with the state; there could be a lot of wells dug that the DRBC isn't aware of. Engelhardt thinks the report is just covering public water supply systems, which make up 85% of the system. G. Dudko asked if they are looking at just the usage or are they looking at water quality too? Engelhardt thinks it's just usage.

Ramie said there was a press release from the DRBC about the Water Audit included in the December 7th UDC meeting packets, announcing the availability of the report. G. Dudko asked Engelhardt to read the report and interpret it to the committee. Engelhardt agreed. She also plans to reach out to someone at NYC DEP about the dewatering test that had happened.

Delaware River Flow & Storage Report: This was included in the packet for review. G. Dudko said the river is up from the recent rainfall. B. Dudko asked if they are still releasing a lot out of the Lackawaxen. Padua said no releases, just a lot of rain water.

Other: Ramie said there is a copy of an article that references voting for the Lackawaxen River for 2024 PA River Of the Year. This is not just an honorary title; the award comes with \$10,000 to the organization that nominates the river. She inquired with Christine Dettore, our PA UDC alternate, who said the Wayne County Community Foundation nominated the river. The money will go toward the Lackawaxen River Trails project, if successful. You can vote until January 19th with one vote per email address. Currently the Lackawaxen River is in last place out of the three nominees so she encouraged everyone to vote.

Ramie acknowledged that this is the last meeting for Town of Highland Representative Andy Boyar and National Park Service Natural Resources Manager Don Hamilton. G. Dudko thanked Boyar for his years on the council and his years as chairman. She thanked Hamilton for his many years of dedication to the Upper Delaware, his support of the UDC and wished him luck in his retirement. Everyone gave a round of applause. Boyar mentioned that Dr. Peter Kolesar was interested in coming to a meeting to make a presentation again about river flows.

Padua asked Hamilton if he had results from the algae sample he had provided. Hamilton said he had not had a chance to evaluate it yet.

Public Comment: None.

Adjourn: A Motion by Boyar seconded by Bernitt to adjourn the meeting at 8:22 p.m. was carried.

Meeting minutes prepared by Stephanie Driscoll, 12/18/2023