

# WATER USE/RESOURCE MANAGEMENT COMM. MEETING MINUTES

## March 19, 2024

Committee Members Present: Evan Padua, Bill Dudko, Al Henry, Fred Peckham (Zoom), Pat Jeffer, Jim Rodgers, Christine Martin (Zoom)

Committee Members Absent: None

Staff: Laurie Ramie, Kerry Engelhardt, Stephanie Driscoll

NPS Partner: Andy Weber, Kaetlyn Jackson, Carly Marshall (Zoom)

Guests: Ginny Dudko, Rosie Starr- WJFF Radio (Zoom), Ruby Rayner-Haselkorn- River Reporter (Zoom)

The UDC's Water Use/Resource Management Committee held its monthly meeting on Tuesday, March 19, 2024. Chairperson Padua called the meeting to order at 6:30 pm.

**Approval of February 20, 2024 meeting minutes:** A motion by Dudko seconded by Henry approving the 2/20 meeting minutes carried. There was no public comment on the agenda.

### **New Business:**

**UDC Representation for Sullivan County Bicycle & Pedestrian Master Plan Advisory Committee:** Ramie reported that on March 1<sup>st</sup> she received an email from the Sullivan County Planning Commissioner Heather Brown that Sullivan County has secured funding through the NYS Climate Smart Communities Program to develop a Bicycle and Pedestrian Master Plan. The plan will focus on improving the safety, comfort and convenience of these alternative transportation modes throughout the County, while reducing vehicle miles travelled (VMT) and the associated greenhouse gas emissions in the County. The email invited the UDC to become a member of the Advisory Committee. Ramie read from the message, "The project will culminate with a comprehensive plan to improve physical infrastructure and revitalize villages and hamlets in ways that help County residents walk and cycle safely as an alternative to motorized travel to work, school and essential services. The plan will align with existing services such as Move Sullivan, which provides bus routes for access to essential services and major employers; and the County's O&W Rail Trail project, which is developing a multi-use recreational trail, key portions of which may also provide alternative travel to work, school and essential services. We will work hard to cultivate public participation in this planning process, especially among the County's underserved and disadvantaged communities, which have extremely low rates of access to personal vehicles, as well as areas with high elderly, youth, and/or disabled population, all of whom are disproportionately affected by the challenges of transport in a rural county where destinations are far-flung. For example: 1) in Sullivan County's most populated towns and villages, the rate of households without access to a vehicle is 2 to 5 times the 4.3% national rate. 2) Pedestrian deaths on America's roadways have risen 70% since 2010. Motor vehicle-related mortality in Sullivan County is nearly triple that of NYS. 3) Walkscore® (<https://www.walkscore.com>) rates the villages of Liberty and Monticello as 'somewhat walkable,' while other hamlets are rated as 'car dependent.' Lack of safe options leads to pedestrian-vehicle accidents, intensifies unemployment and contributes to higher rates of chronic diseases correlated with inactivity such as diabetes and obesity. Walkable and bikeable communities support community revitalization, sustainable growth and residents' health and well-being. We hope you will join us and lend your expertise to the work of the Advisory Committee. The Committee's work will include several informational sessions and workshops where you will be asked to help formulate goals and develop strategies and priority projects. We anticipate that you will be able to attend these sessions virtually, and we will use interactive online tools to foster your participation. Please let us know at your earliest convenience, and not later than March 18<sup>th</sup>, and don't hesitate to contact my office if you have any questions about the plan." Ramie thinks the UDC should join to make sure the river valley communities are represented and volunteered to attend the meetings/information sessions.

Henry asked who the driving force is behind the plan. Ramie said Sullivan County was the recipient of the funding. Henry asked how much? Ramie said it doesn't say. Henry said it doesn't make sense to him; having people pedal on bicycles to go to work. Ramie said the bicycle/pedestrian lanes would be added where appropriate. Dudko thinks the Upper Delaware Scenic Byway (UDSB) should be involved. Ramie said the UDSB may have received an invitation, but this one was specifically to her to represent the UDC. A motion by Henry seconded by Dudko, for the UDC to be a part of the Advisory Committee carried.

**4<sup>th</sup> Annual Litter Sweep Updates:** Driscoll reported that she had submitted routes to the NYSDOT today (3/19.) Litter Leaders are still needed for Fremont, Manchester and Buckingham. Rodgers apologized for not stepping up for Fremont, since he will be away this year during the Litter Sweep dates. Highland and Tusten have chosen Saturday, April 20<sup>th</sup> for their Litter Sweep's and NPS will hold theirs on Tuesday, April 23<sup>rd</sup>. Deerpark will hold a Litter Sweep on Thursday, April 18<sup>th</sup>. Someone had reached out to her about becoming a Litter Leader, but was unsure if they wanted to hold a Litter Sweep in Lumberland or Deerpark since the routes they'd be choosing were on the town lines. He told Driscoll he would follow up via email with routes narrowed down so they could choose the town he'd be leading. Henry said Berlin will be holding their Litter Sweep on Monday, April 22<sup>nd</sup>. Padua asked if Damascus could hold a Litter Sweep on Tuesday, April 16<sup>th</sup>. Driscoll said yes, the window is technically from April 20<sup>th</sup> – 28<sup>th</sup>, but any date could be selected.

350 (50 more than last year) Litter Sweep t-shirts were ordered on March 12<sup>th</sup> in safety color pink with this year's artwork donated by Eric Hinkley. We will discuss giving t-shirts in exchange for donations at the 3/26 Operations Committee meeting. Engelhardt applied for two grants from Sullivan 180 and the Pocono Mountains Visitor Bureau. Engelhardt said we have not heard back yet from the Pocono Mountains Visitor Bureau. Sullivan 180 denied our request; there needed to be something new about the Litter Sweep program. Engelhardt said we would use the funds toward safety signage, but Sullivan 180 said those were things that the municipalities should be providing. She may call Shannon Cilento at Sullivan 180 to see if she has any suggestions.

Henry asked if the section of road on Route 652 between Damascus and Beach Lake has been discussed. Engelhardt said previously former UDC Secretary Ashley Hall-Bagdonas has done that section in memory of her friend. Someone can reach out to Hall-Bagdonas to see if she plans to do that section again this year. Henry was just concerned since the road is very narrow. It is technically in Damascus Township. Padua said he will look into it.

**4/12 10am NPS Spring Water Safety Partners Meeting at UDC:** Driscoll said this is on the agenda as a reminder that everyone is invited. Padua said Lindsey Kurnath had reached out to him about attending, and she feels that the fishing guides should be invited. Ramie said there is also an Annual Fishing Guides meeting in Hancock on April 18<sup>th</sup>, but there's no reason guides shouldn't be invited to the Water Safety meeting. Jackson said NPS has been working on the PowerPoint presentation and the Natural Resources Department may have a presentation to make as well.

**Delaware River Flow & Storage Report:** Included in the packet for review. Dudko said the water levels are very high. Padua said they want the water levels at 100% before June 1<sup>st</sup>.

**Other:** Padua asked Dudko to reply to the emails about attending the WU/RM meeting only if you cannot attend, not if you are attending. It will keep email traffic down.

#### **Old Business:**

**2/26 Upper Delaware Scenic Byway Meeting:** The minutes are included in the packet for review. Ramie said, like the UDC, there is a Nominating Committee that comes up with officer candidates that will be announced at the March meeting ahead of the annual meeting election in April. There was a vote to approve the 2024 budget for the UDSB.

A 2024 news release was issued to promote that applications are being accepted for the UDSB's four grant programs for Signage, Butterfly Promotion, Culture & History, and Vista Enhancements. The grants are open to residents, businesses, and organizations along Route 97. UDSB member Rosie DeCristofaro asked if there was any funding specifically for garbage, noting that in many communities that's always an issue especially in summer. UDSB will look into a grant program to potentially put out garbage receptacles and recycling containers that are branded for the UDSB, as long as there is a maintenance plan in place to pick up the garbage.

The solar-powered trash cans Ramie had discussed a year or so ago are still being pursued. They will have both solar capabilities for power and a WIFI signal to get internet connectivity within a certain radius of a trash can. These would be put in more rural/remote areas where it would help with emergency response if needed and trash collection. The company Universal Instruments of Rochester is testing the trash cans, both for the distance they can transmit a WIFI signal and temperature control during winter. The UDSB should be getting a report back on those tests.

At the next UDSB meeting there will be a presentation from the Callicoon Depot Building Committee. They are a smaller group within Callicoon Depot Inc. who is working on getting bids for restoration of the depot for its use as a UDSB Visitor Center.

The UDSB has applied for an award through the National Scenic Byway Foundation (NSBF) in their Partnership category for the 2023 Festival of the Founding Fish and the 20<sup>th</sup> Anniversary bus run from Hancock to Port Jervis. If awarded, the UDSB would receive full-page coverage in a driving-oriented magazine.

They discussed whether there was interest in holding the Festival of the Founding Fish (Shadfest) for 2024. One of the key parts of the festival was a canoe excursion recognizing World Fish Migration Day in May that Don Hamilton lead along with an educational program. Now that Hamilton is retired, they aren't sure if that would happen or not. The UDSB is deciding if they will take a break from the Shadfest in 2024 and shift focus to the butterfly habitat as a core mission and value of the UDSB. There was already an existing plan to partner with Fort Delaware in September to hold a Butterfly Ball; a family fun day transitioning into an adult Dance Party.

The next UDSB meeting is Monday, March 25<sup>th</sup> at the UDC building at 7pm. Rodgers asked if that was open to the public. Ramie said yes, those are always public meetings.

Padua said he didn't get a chance to attend Shadfest last year but has heard a lot of people speak highly of the event and that it was well attended. He thinks it would be a shame to let that event go. Ramie said it takes a lot of organizational work to put the event on. Last year it was mainly John Pizzolato that did the work and since being elected Town of Highland Supervisor this year, he likely can't dedicate the time to the event that it would need. No one else has stepped forward.

Padua mentioned from the minutes the idea of resurrecting passenger excursions. He quoted, "This scenic route from New York City to Hancock with a transfer in Port Jervis would take 5-1/2 hours, with limited occupancy and only operational on weekends. The estimated cost would be \$96 one-way." He said they would have to build some type of train station in Callicoon. Dudko said they would build the station in Hancock. Padua said it seems to him like it's a step-back in technology. Ramie said it would be for the scenic quality and not for speed. The tracks would need to be changed since currently they are meant for freight trains and not passengers. Henry said that would cost hundreds of millions of dollars. Dudko said people love to do the scenic excursions; they are very popular. Peckham said he has spoken to the railroad many times about making it a passenger rail. They told him that the rail is too high and would have to be lowered, the tracks would need to be welded together since they are currently bolted together, and they would need a large insurance policy. Norfolk Southern may be able to do that, but New York, Susquehanna and Western Railway doesn't have that type of money to put a passenger service in, if there are even enough people interested to warrant a passenger service. Ramie said if they worked through an existing train operator (in this case NJ Transit) they could use their insurance, but agreed that it is a super ambitious idea.

**3/4 BioBlitz Planning Committee Meeting:** Engelhardt attended this meeting via Zoom, run by Steve Schwartz. She reported that the various teams are coming together. Schwartz mentioned that he is concerned about funding this year. Committee assignments were discussed and she volunteered for site set-up and take-down and she will help out in other areas needed. There is a site visit scheduled for Monday, April 15<sup>th</sup> at the Highlights Retreat in Boyds Mills. They will decide where the boundaries of study will be and where tents will be set-up during that visit.

**3/5 & 3/19 Roebling Aqueduct 175<sup>th</sup> Anniversary Meetings:** Ramie said this is a smaller committee of the D&H Transportation Heritage Council (DHTHC) which has met a few times now, every two weeks, to talk about the 175<sup>th</sup> Anniversary of the first crossing of the Delaware and Lackawaxen Roebling Aqueducts happening on April 27<sup>th</sup> in Lackawaxen. This is part of the overall 200<sup>th</sup> Anniversary of the D&H Canal. Tomorrow, March 20<sup>th</sup>, is the deadline for sponsorships. The UDC had graciously donated at the \$200 sponsor level, as did many other organizations making a total of \$2,350 in donations so far. After knowing who all of the sponsors are tomorrow, ticket sales will begin at \$25 per ticket. The program will start at 10:00 a.m. with a guided walking tour by Roebling expert Professor and Historian Paul C. King. After that, everyone will convene at the New Inn at Lackawaxen (188 Scenic Dr.) for a buffet lunch including canal era inspired recipes. The speakers will include Sullivan County Historian John Conway, Professor and Historian Paul C. King, and President of the DHTHC and Historian Bill Merchant. Musician Dan Engvaldsen will be performing reenactment type music. Ramie has offered to help with the publicity

and ticket reservations. The ticket deadline will be April 19<sup>th</sup>. Please let her know if anyone would like to purchase tickets. Henry asked if anyone has looked into obtaining a permit from the NPS for the event. Ramie said NPS is involved with the event; NPS Chief of Interpretation Ingrid Peterec is introducing the 10:00 a.m. walking tour and their staff is on the committee. Jackson agreed, since the NPS is so involved in the event she doesn't think obtaining a permit is required.

**3/6 Eagle Committee Meeting:** Engelhardt said this was a quarterly meeting; the first one since the completion of the eagle season. Education and Volunteer Coordinator Rachel Morrow at the Delaware Highlands Conservancy (DHC) said it was a successful season despite a few cancellations due to winter weather. The bus tours were well attended. There were 55 people at the Eagle Watch training. There will be a 'thank you' event for the Eagle Watch volunteers at the Van Scott Nature Reserve in April. Rodgers asked what the volunteers do. Engelhardt said there are volunteers stationed at the Lackawaxen Boat Launch, Ten Mile River, and Mongaup Reservoir. Volunteers count the number of eagle sightings and number of people attending. They are also there to provide eagle facts, answer questions, and set up spotting scopes to view eagles provided by DHC. Rodgers said he noticed at this time of the year eagles are moving up and down the river. Are they following the spawning? Padua said they could be, they will follow the food. If the river is really high, they will look for other sources of water.

**3/12 Delaware River Sojourn Committee Reports:** Engelhardt said this meeting of the Steering Committee lasted over 2 hours. She and Peterec have a lot handled, but there is also a lot to get done. Peterec made a list of what is left; Engelhardt will be working on the day plans and the driving directions for the Upper Delaware. The catering, bussing, and programming ideas have been worked out. Before they can open up registration, the Middle and Lower Delaware need to finalize their camping locations and put in and take out spots. Hopefully they will be able to announce that registration is open before the April meeting. The first draft of the t-shirt design was shown during the meeting and people made some comments. Rodgers asked when the Sojourn will take place. Engelhardt said June 14<sup>th</sup> – 16<sup>th</sup> are the upper section days, with camping on the grounds of the Zane Grey Museum. Dudko asked where they are going. Engelhardt said the first stretch is from Zane Grey to Pond Eddy, and the second stretch is from Pond Eddy to a takeout in Port Jervis.

**3/13 NPS Water Safety Committee Reports:** Driscoll attended this meeting in person at Zane Grey Museum. A copy of the notes are included in the packet. Seven people have signed up for the Wear It Watcher volunteer program. If you are interested in volunteering you can sit at Mongaup Reservoir, Cowin Farm, Riverside, or Skinners with two people per location. The Spring Partners Water Safety meeting is set for April 12<sup>th</sup> at 10:00 a.m. at the UDC building and all are welcome to attend. National Canoe Safety Patrol has a new website; Hinton asked everyone to visit the website as someone who wanted to get involved in the program and give her feedback. If anyone from the WU/RM Committee does that and wants to provide feedback, you can send it to Driscoll and she will forward it to Hinton. There are three canoes that need to be delivered to TriVersity in Milford, however Peterec had just found out that TriVersity doesn't have the space to paint or store the canoe(s) at their location. NPS has agreed to let TriVersity staff/volunteers paint and store the canoe(s) at Zane Grey Museum. TriVersity is painting the canoe(s) to advertise for the Paddle for Pride that will take place on July 27<sup>th</sup>. The paddle will start from the Matamoras base with planned activities related to LGBTQ history and river recreation education that will be facilitated by NPS rangers and paddle back from Staircase Rapids. The Water Safety Committee was submitted to receive the "Visitor Safety Award" on the national level for the Water Safety Video and the Water Safety signs Hinton had made. The next Water Safety Committee meeting is scheduled for April 10<sup>th</sup> at 10:30 a.m.

Padua suggested ordering cheap carabiners as an alternative to the hooks on the Loaner Life Jacket signs. Often times if there's a lot of wind, the life jackets will blow off and end up strewn about the ground. The carabiners might work better to keep the life jackets secure. Driscoll said she will bring it back to the next Water Safety Committee meeting. She said they also have metal cages to be installed for the Loaner Life Jackets that may be a better solution.

**Other:** Henry said the NPS, DEC, PA Fish and Boat Commission, and towns and townships are always concerned about cleaning the accesses after high water. Everyone claims they don't have the money or resources, or are too far away. He is recommending that the NPS and DEC should think about having a local contractor on call to clean up debris after high water. They would have access to the appropriate machinery locally that can be on call. Padua said they end up cleaning up themselves after a while, not being cleaned up by anyone else. Henry said it's a shame to see the accesses like at Highland unusable after putting so much money into them.

Henry said he has some local people interested in volunteering for the trail rehab on the Ten Mile River (TMR) trail. He hasn't heard anything about it since Kurnath had brought it up a couple months ago. Weber said yes, they are doing a slight re-route due to an unstable bridge. Jackson said NPS plans to do a site-visit in May. Henry said regardless of what they are planning to do, this is the time of the year to get volunteers. Jackson said she thinks it's still a little early. She asked if Henry was saying he has people interested in constructing a trail? Henry said he had people interested in volunteering if they knew when it was happening. Ramie said Kurnath had reported that the Upper Delaware Scenic and Recreational River had been accepted into a Volunteer Vacation Program specifically for that project in September. It would be a 6 – 8-person crew from all over that will camp at the site. She is including an article in the Newsletter about it as well.

Henry said at one time the WU/RM Committee was advocating for a working ramp at TMR. Ramie said that has been on hold because the ownership transfer hasn't happened yet from The Conservation Fund to NYS DEC. Henry said he was speaking to someone from DEC that said for a ramp to happen it would have to be on the DEC's Access Improvement Plan. Jackson said she doesn't know about a ramp at TMR. Ramie said it wouldn't hurt to reach out to NYS DEC and remind them of it. Padua said Pennsylvania Fish and Boat Commission (PA F&BC) does a great job maintaining accesses compared to the New York side. In his opinion, there is not a single boat launch on the NY side that's useable. He doesn't know if it's worth the time to put a boat ramp in at TMR if it's going to be useless. Henry said if it's not brought up though, it won't be done.

Rodgers asked Marshall if the training for the GIS Tool was still on next week. Marshall said yes. Ramie said we will send a reminder of that 3/26 6pm demonstration to the full board.

Padua said there is a presentation happening at 3:00 p.m. on Saturday (3/23) at the Van Scott Nature Reserve in Beach Lake on the Biology of Fish, if anyone is interested in attending.

**Public Comment:** None.

**Adjourn:** A Motion by Jeffer seconded by Dudko to adjourn the meeting at 7:36 p.m. was carried.

*Meeting minutes prepared by Stephanie Driscoll, 3/21/2024*