

Watershed Agricultural Council

Agriculture ♦ Forestry ♦ Conservation Easements ♦ Economic Viability

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MINUTES OF THE WATERSHED AGRICULTURAL COUNCIL MEETING

May 27, 2025

I. Meeting called to order at 10:04 a.m.

Directors Present, via Teams:

Dwight Bruno
James Darling
Paul Gallay
Wayland 'Bud' Gladstone, *Chair*
Karl Gockel, *Treasurer*
Jennifer Grossman, *Secretary*
Barb Hanselman
Jason Helmbold
Fred Huneke
Tom Hutson, *Vice Chair*
John Verhoeven
Marilyn Wyman
Michael Vander Werff, *NYC DEP*

Directors Absent:

Steve Reed

Others Present, via Teams:

Ryan Naatz, *Executive Director*
Amy Faulkner, *Director of Operations*
Carol Bishop, *Finance Director*
Connor Young, *WOH Agricultural Program Manager*
Tom Pavlesich, *Forestry Program Manager*
Tyler Van Fleet, *EOH Forestry Program Coordinator*
Serena Orleski, *Easement Program Manager*
Kayla Henderson, *Head of Administration*
Kristan Morley, *Economic Viability Program Manager*
Heather Magnan, *Communications Manager*
Kayla Atanasoff, *Easement Program Executive Assistant*
Andy Cheung, *EOH Project Engineer*
Sara Storrer, *NYC DEP*
Lee Harris, *NYC DOI*
Morgan Tarbell, *NYC DOH*

II. Approval of Minutes

Motion to approve the April 22, 2025 minutes as presented.

Motion: Fred Huneke

Second: Tom Hutson

Approved

III. Executive Director's Report – Ryan Naatz

A. Operational and Programmatic Updates

1. **Columbia/AgMIP Project SOW Proposal**

At the previous Council meeting, members discussed a proposal for the WAC to provide funding support for a climate research project with AgMIP researchers from Columbia University. The proposal was in response to federal funding pauses earlier this year. Prior to the proposal, the WAC was collaborating on the project as a stakeholder. Ryan reported that the AgMIP team now feels confident that the original grant funding for the project will soon be restored. Given this update, Council members discussed how to move forward. Since the WAC has no direct interest in the grant, and a new funding source is no longer needed, it was decided that the organization will no longer be engaging in the proposal at this time. As for the research project itself, the Council majority would prefer more routine progress reporting and are requesting that if/when funds are restored, a representative from Columbia be available to present and answer questions to the Council as was initially planned for back at the April meeting.

2. **IT Security/Communications Plan**

Amy Faulkner reported on new initiatives from *Logically*, who is subcontracted to assist with network management and storage security needs. They recently assessed the organization's digital security measures. Their findings indicated a need for stronger guidelines and better consistency for data storage and sharing, and they are currently developing an implementation plan that will go into effect on July 1. Discussions ensued regarding specific recommendations and the implementation schedule.

3. **Transparency Policy Update (Effective May 23)**

Following months of consultation with both WAC and DEP legal counsel, the Executive Committee has advanced a new draft of the WAC Transparency Policy that has been posted to the organizational webpage for a 30-day public comment period. Comments received will be advanced to the Executive Committee meeting in June, and a final draft of the policy will be advanced to the Council for ratification in July.

4. **Contract Closeouts**

Carol Bishop and the finance team are currently working on contract closeouts for CAT403 and CAT487. An extension request through June 30 was approved. This is part of the final reconciliation to DEP. Some expenditures did not meet standards for approval; details discussed. Ryan does not foresee this negatively affecting WAC in any major way, as we are

in a good position to cover any contractual closeout costs that arise. Carol confirmed that the reporting of audited financial statements has been extended to December to align with the regular audit cycle. Ryan added that the new contracts have better language, and the separate administrative contract eliminates the need for comingling of funds that proved troublesome for the organization in the past. There is also gap funding and a line of credit as additional safety nets in the event that there is ever a delay in DEP funding in the future.

B. **Spotlight: EOH Agricultural Program Implementation Highlights**

Andy Cheung introduced himself and his role as EOH Project Engineer. For those unfamiliar, he designs, draws and inspects Best Management Practices (BMPs) for water quality in the Croton Watershed of the NYC water supply. He introduced the primary types of agriculture that occur in this watershed (compared to the Catskill/Delaware Watershed) and presented key highlights of recently completed BMP projects.

IV. **Chair's Report – Wayland “Bud” Gladstone**

Bud wished to note that it was nice to see staff and fellow Council members in person at the EOH Committee meeting on May 21, and the farm tour of a recent BMP project was very informative. Ryan thanked those who attended, and Amy thanked Kristan Morely for presenting updates to the Economic Viability Grant Program which is now open to East of Hudson participants.

V. **Finance Committee – Karl Gockel**

It was noted that there was no meeting held in April. Karl indicated that the Committee will be reviewing FY26 budgets at the next meeting.

VI. **Agricultural Committee – Connor Young (*on behalf of Steve Reed*)**

A. **Agricultural Committee Charge**

Motion to approve modifications to the Agricultural Committee Charge as presented.

Motion: Karl Gockel

Second: James Darling

Approved

VII. **Economic Viability Committee – Jennifer Grossman**

Kristan Morely reported that approval has been granted for an Executive Assistant position to support the EV and Communications programs.

A. **Economic Viability Committee Charge**

Motion to approve modifications to the Economic Viability Committee Charge as presented.

Motion: John Verhoeven

Second: Jason Helmbold

Approved

VIII. Easement Committee – Tom Hutson

The Committee recently reviewed several staff-level approvals of reserved rights requests from easement landowners. The program also recently filled the vacant Stewardship Specialist position. Within the next fiscal year, program staff expect to close on approximately 1,000 acres of conservation easements.

IX. Forestry Committee – Marilyn Wyman

The last meeting was held on May 17; a summary will be provided in next month's packets. Discussion ensued regarding The Nature Conservancy '*Women Owning Woods*' Grant details.

- A. **Motion to approve the Nature Conservancy '*Women Owning Woods*' Grant as presented and authorization of signature.**

Motion: Fred Huneke

Second: Jim Darling

Approved

X. East of Hudson Committee – Fred Huneke

- A. **Motion to approve modifications to the East of Hudson Committee Charge as presented.**

Motion: Jim Darling

Second: Tom Hutson

Approved

XI. Building Committee – Karl Gockel

Ryan Naatz reported that remaining funds will be utilized to conduct an inspection of the new building site property with Keystone Associates; details were discussed. Ryan, Carol Bishop, and Amy Faulkner met with Ken Gay to review generic ideas of how WAC operates along with design ideas. A preliminary sketch will be provided by June 17; looking at cost projection to become available by August.

XII. Governance Committee – Jason Helmbold

New Council member orientation outline to be revamped. By-law updates are currently underway.

- A. Board Member Nomination

Motion to approve the appointment of Kyle Clark to the Board of Directors for the term of June 1, 2025 – December 31, 2026.

Motion: James Darling

Second: Dwight Bruno

Approved

XIII. NYC DEP Report – Michael Vander Werff

Lacey Eichert will be onboarding June 2 as a summer intern.

XIV. Executive Session

Motion to enter Executive Session at 11:11 a.m.

Motion: Marilyn Wyman

Second: John Verhoeven

Approved

Motion to come out of Executive Session at 11:22 a.m.

Motion: Marilyn Wyman

Second: Jennifer Grossman

Approved

XV. Adjournment

The meeting was adjourned at 11:23 a.m. by common consent.

The next meeting is scheduled for **Tuesday, June 24, 2025 at 10:00 a.m.**