

MINUTES
ULSTER COUNTY SOIL & WATER CONSERVATION DISTRICT
5 PARK LANE
HIGHLAND, NY 12528
November 20, 2023

The **MEETING** was **CALLED TO ORDER** by Chairman L. Tantillo at 9:00 AM. Directors Present: F. Wilklow and H. Litts. SWCD Staff in attendance: J. Wedemeyer - Exec. Director, T. Ferry - District Technician, M. Wagner – Program Assistant and C. DeGrootd - Program Assistant. Others: Ben Luskin (NYS Ag & Markets) and Justin Wood, CPA (Nugent & Haeussler, P.C.).

1. AUDIT RESULTS

J. Wood, CPA from Nugent & Haeussler, P.C. introduced himself to the Board. Back in May 2023, Wood received a request from the District to audit the District's books for year 2022 and also to complete an Agreed Upon Procedures Report to New York City related to the NYC DEP CAT-494 Contract. Wood passed out the audit report to the Directors which summarized the District's 2022 audit results. No difficulties were noted with the District's 2022 audit. Discussion followed. It was mentioned that the last District audit was in 2017.

(K. Nolan joined the Meeting at 9:08 AM)

CAT-494 Agreed Upon Procedures Report – Wood started by thanking District staff for working with him to complete the CAT-494 Report as it was a huge undertaking to catch up on the past few years. Wood stated that before Wedemeyer was hired as Executive Director (ED) in 2022, there were no attempts to reconcile the CAT-494 accounts by the previous ED. Discussion followed.

(H. Litts left the Meeting at 9:12 AM and returned at 9:13 AM)

The Directors thanked Woods.

(J. Woods left the Meeting at 9:14 AM)

2. STAFF REPORTS

Written staff reports (available at the time) were mailed and emailed to Board Members and B. Luskin prior to the meeting for review (attached to the filed minutes).

a) Work Reports

SWCD - J. Wedemeyer (see attached staff report)

b) SWCD – C. DeGrootd (see attached staff report)

(Sam Roberts, NRCS, joined the Meeting at 9:15 AM)

Roberts introduced himself as the new Soil Conservationist for the Ulster County NRCS field office.

c) SWCD – T.Ferry (see attached staff report)

d) AWSMP – A. Doan - Stream Project Manager (see attached staff report). Since Doan was not present, Wedemeyer read the report.

3. NEW BUSINESS

- a) Audit Results were previously discussed.
- b) NY Erosion and Sediment Control Certification for T. Ferry. Discussion followed.

4. Minutes Approval

2023-11-1 A Motion was made by Litts to approve the October 2023 Minutes, seconded by Wilklow. All in favor.

2023-11-2 A Motion was made by Litts to approve the October 25, 2023 Special Meeting Minutes, seconded by Wilklow. All in favor.

5. Financial Report and Abstract – October

2023-11-3 Litts made the Motion, Wilklow seconded, to accept the book balance and Abstract for October 2023. All in favor.

STAFF REPORTS CONTINUED

a) **USDA NRCS – O. Velez-Juarbe**

Velez-Juarbe did not attend the meeting. Wedemeyer read his work report to the Directors. There are ~26 EQIP applications for 2024. Velez-Juarbe has been doing a lot of site visits, high tunnels, wetland determinations, and covering other Counties.

b) **NYS SWCC**

- **Region 5 Report** – Ben Luskin, Region 5 Associate Environmental Analyst, submitted the Region 5 report. The report was included for review in the Directors package (see attached report). Luskin thanked the District for hosting a New York State Soil and Water Conservation Committee (SWCC) meeting and project tour on October 12th. Various local farm projects were visited. Director Van Nostrand attended. Doan presented at the Stony Clove Project and Lent presented at the Panther Kill Restoration Project. Taylor presented at the Emerson CSBI project. Luskin said it was excellent and staff offered a vast amount of knowledge.

M. Wagner submitted her letter of resignation from her position as Program Assistant. She took this opportunity to thank Wedemeyer for his support and guidance throughout the years. She also wanted to inform the Board Members that Wedemeyer turned the Ulster SWCD around when he became the Executive Director in 2022. He works well with all of the employees and has been a pleasure for her to work with. See attached letter.

2023-11-4 Nolan made the Motion, Wilklow seconded, to go into Executive Session at 9:36 AM to discuss a particular employee. All in favor.

(H. Litts left the Meeting at 9:36 AM)

The Board came out of Executive Session at 9:44 AM.

6. Next Meeting

The next Board Meeting is scheduled for Wednesday, January 24, 2024 at 9:00 AM.

7. OLD BUSINESS

- a) Part C Cover Crop Program Update
- b) No-Till Drill Program Update – discussion on purchasing a new 12' drill.
- c) CRF Round 7 Status – Our CRF Round 7 application was approved. Two Irrigation Water Management Projects.

8. Adjournment

2023-11-5 A Motion was made by Nolan to Adjourn the meeting at 9:50 AM, seconded by Tantillo. All in favor.

Respectfully Submitted,

Christine DeGroot
Program Assistant

JLW Activities October 12 – November 13, 2023

AEM: AEM Tier 4 – Concrete sealant verification, assistance locating laminated posts, T/O Marbletown. AEM Outreach – Meat the Farmer Event, promoted farms who participated in the AEM program. AEM Tier 3A – Assisted with grazing acreage and watering system plan, T/O Marlborough. AEM Tier 4 – Cover crop certification and reimbursement, T/O Ulster.

Inventory and Evaluations: Brett Fox, T/O Olive – PDR assistance. Travis Hermanance, T/O Esopus – pasture seeding recommendations.

NYC DEP CAT 494: Contract administration and reviewed and approved timesheets, payroll delivery, Bi-Weekly meetings with AWSMP staff. Elk Bush Kill construction inspection and weekly storm water inspections and reports. Completed FY23 Q1 Expense recon, working on Capital recon. Answered auditors questions regarding pay apps and travel and training for M. Tollefson. Assistance with CSBI equipment and supplies purchases. Reviewed and approved engineering invoices. Successor contract negotiations with DEP.

CRF Round 6: Cover crop certification and seed source clarification on one farm.

Ag Assessments: 1

District Updates/Other Projects:

- Working with other state certified instructors to teach the NYS Erosion and Sediment Control Certificate Program in November 2023.
- Working with UC Dept of Environment with the Arbor Day initiative for the Town of Olive and Town of Ulster.
- Working with CCE of Ulster County with the Town of New Paltz Riparian Corridor Assessment and planting projects.
- Chris and I attended the NYS Administrative workshop which covered District Finance Management, Open Meetings Law, Civil Service and Managers Meeting.
- Taught a 4 Hour Erosion and Sediment Control Course for Rockland County SWCD, generated \$1,450.00 in revenue.
- Coordinating a 4 hour Erosion and Sediment Control Course with UC DOE for December 5, 2023. Free of charge to all County employees.

Christine DeGroodt

Activities October 21 – November 17, 2023

Attended the budget hearing on October 27th w/ MW and TF.

Attended the Administrative Conference on Nov 6-7 in Syracuse with JW. OSC Audit class, Investments for Districts and State Aid to Districts, Records Retention and Grant Funding, A Review of Open Meetings Law (Kristen O’Neill). Going forward we will be adding our Board Minutes and a meeting notice on our website.

Set us up to pay deferred comp online for TF and JW.

Started numbering the Board Meeting Motions and set up a spreadsheet so going forward we can keep track of the motions. This was suggested by the OSC when they audited OC.

I have been added to the bank accounts and can also do online banking. Switched an old unused account to the new CRF 6 account. We can now view online statements the first of every month (as soon as they are available).

Our Delta Dental account is now online.

Switched over most of the Districts accounts from MW to myself (amazon, Usherwood, WB Mason, WEX, etc.) There were issues switching over QB.

TRF Activities - October 12, 2023 – November 13, 2023

AEM: Tier 2 – T/O Marlborough – site visit to complete tier 2 with beef producer. Outreach – T/O Saugerties – attended Meat the Farmer event. Program Evaluation – submitted Round 18 Annual Action Plan and received approval letter from Ag & Markets. Tier 4 – T/O Ulster – deliver drill and show producer how to set it up. Tier 4 – T/O Ulster – certify cover crop for Cover Crop Program.

Inventory and Evaluations: None

CRF Round 6: Certified Cover Crop for 1 grant participant.

CRF Round 7: Awaiting official release of ranked list from NYS SWCC.

NYC DEP CAT 494: Elk Bushkill construction inspection approximately 2 days a week.

Round 27: No activity.

No-Till Program: Delivered drill to 1 farmer.

Misc: Submitted application for NYS Erosion and Sediment Control Certificate Program, received approval to sit for test.

Worked with Joe Basil Chevy to get revised truck quote, approved at special board meeting.

New York State Soil & Water Conservation Committee
Region 5 Report – November 2023
Submitted by: Ben Luskin– Region 5 Associate Environmental Analyst

NYS SWCC News

New NYS Grants Management System Coming: The SWCC wanted to make SWCDs aware that NYS is anticipated to launch a new integrated grants management system during the Month of January 2024. We expect to have more details on the transition to this new system in the coming weeks. The new system will effectively be replacing the grants gateway, and vendors (SWCD) that have registered in the old system to apply for grants will be rolled over to the new system automatically. At this time we don't expect any changes in the application process for CRF or AGNPS. As we learn more about the new system, we will be sure to relay the information to SWCDs ASAP.

November SWCC Meeting: The next SWCC meeting is scheduled to convene at **10:00 AM on November 21st**. Further details and an agenda for this meeting will be sent out shortly. Reminder – participation at a SWCC meeting is eligible toward PM1, Part C of State Aid to Districts.

2023 Part C Performance Measures: The end of the year is rapidly approaching, and you should be checking to make sure that your District is fulfilling its Performance Measure goals. Please contact your Regional AEA with any specific questions.

Reminder of Open Funding Opportunities: A reminder that these funding programs are accepting rolling applications.

- **Source Water Buffer Program:** Funding is available to support the purchase of development rights on agricultural land to support the protection of active public drinking water sources. More information can be found here, <https://agriculture.ny.gov/soil-and-water/rfa-0181-source-water-buffer-program>
- **County Agriculture and Farmland Protection Planning Grants:** Counties are eligible for grants up to \$50,000 for developing a county agriculture and farmland protection plan. Any county that has established an agricultural and farmland protection board and has not had an agricultural and farmland protection plan approved in the last 10 years is eligible for funding. For more information and to assess your Counties eligibility, please visit: <https://agriculture.ny.gov/land-and-water/rfa-0262-county-agriculture-and-farmland-protection-planning-grants>

Other Events

2023 Northeast Region Agribusiness & CCA Conference: Including the Basic Training track for those preparing to take the CCA exams as well as the Advanced Training track for current CCAs. An in-person track will commence at the Doubletree Hotel, East Syracuse, NY on **November 28th-29th, 2023**, followed by a virtual track will commence on **December 12th-13th, 2023**, when additional programming will be offered. More information and a registration link can be found here, <https://www.nysaba.com/educational-meetings>

NACD 2024 Annual Meeting: Registration for The National Association of Conservation Districts' (NACD) 78th Annual Meeting is now open! Hosted in partnership with the California Association of Conservation Districts, the 2024 Annual Meeting will take place in San Diego, California, from **February 10th – 14th, 2024**. To learn more and to register, please visit: <https://www.nacdnet.org/news-and-events/annual-meeting/>

Great Lakes Action Agenda Sub Basin Work Groups – Save the Dates: NYSDEC has announced that dates and locations have been set for the Great Lakes Action Agenda Sub Basin Work group meetings. These work groups are being held in each of New York's Great Lakes Sub Basins to offer opportunities for stakeholders to learn, connect,

and coordinate to support implementation of New York’s Great Lakes Action Agenda, which was recently updated in 2023. Please let DEC know if you would like to attend in person or join remotely by emailing greatlakes@dec.ny.gov.

- Southeast Lake Ontario: Wednesday, **11/29/23, 1:00 - 4:00pm** – McCrobie Civic Center, 21 Lake St. Oswego, NY
- Northeast Lake Ontario-St. Lawrence River: Thursday, **11/30/23, 1:00 - 4:00pm** – Massena Town Hall, Massena, NY
- Lake Erie: Monday, **12/4/23, 1:00 - 4:00pm** – Tift Nature Preserve 1200 Fuhrmann Boulevard, Buffalo, NY
- Southwest Lake Ontario: Tuesday, **12/5/23, 1:00 - 4:00pm** – Seymour Library, 161 East Ave. Brockport, NY

Other Funding

Urban Farms and Community Gardens Grant Program – NYSAGM invites eligible organizations to apply for funding through the Urban Farms and Community Gardens Grant Program. Funding is available to support the development and expansion of community gardens, school gardens, and urban farms across the state. **The deadline for applications is December 1st, 2023 (4PM)**. The program website supplies the RFP, FAQ, and an informational webinar recording (<https://agriculture.ny.gov/rfp-0318-urban-farms-and-community-gardens-grant-program>).

NOAA Transformational Habitat Restoration and Coastal Resilience Grant: NOAA recently announced that they will provide nearly \$240M to prioritized high-value, high-impact habitat restoration projects that advance resilience. The competition closes **November 17th**. For more information and to apply, visit, <https://www.fisheries.noaa.gov/feature-story/240-million-available-transformational-habitat-restoration-and-coastal-resilience>

DEC Urban and Community Forestry Funding Available: NYSDEC is accepting applications for a total of \$12.9 million for urban and community forestry projects through the Inflation Reduction Act funding opportunity. Applicants may apply for funding under two categories, Community Forest Management Plan Implementation (\$10 million) and Ash Tree Management (\$2.9 million). The maximum request is \$500,000 per application and no match is required. All projects must take place in disadvantaged communities as identified by any of three Federal and State tools listed in the Request for Applications (RFA). The deadline to submit applications is **Wednesday, Jan. 31, 2024**. DEC’s Urban and Community Forestry program is holding a virtual information session on **Wednesday, Nov. 15th**, from 10 a.m. to 12 p.m. to provide more information. The RFA can be found here: https://www.dec.ny.gov/lands/5285.html#Inflation_Reduction. Register here: <https://meetny.webex.com/webappng/sites/meetny/meeting/register/e9d8613039a14fac9460fd9ea65c74ca?ticket=4832534b0000000684ded2171befed1f26676dae10067ec1d683ebd24a06e2f60e6ae4650bc148bc×tamp=1699014406078&RGID=raf052a25587eccb5b719641845d549d1>



Soil and Water Conservation District
5 Park Lane
Highland, New York 12528

November 17, 2023

Dear Board of Directors,

I am writing to inform you that I have decided to resign from my position as Program Assistant, at Ulster County Soil and Water Conservation District. My last day of employment was October 31, 2023. As you know, I am still working at the district on a part time basis helping out Chris and Jake.

I would like to take this opportunity and experience provided to me during my tenure here.

Under the supervision of the Executive Director (ED) during the time period 12/03/2007 to 9/27/2019 the ED had a negative tone and outlook. The ED at times was unprofessional in his inappropriate behavior which was a challenging situation.

From the time period 10/1/2019 -12/31/2019 supervision under of the Acting ED there was lack of communication in the office. Presence in the office would be for approximately half an hour, three or four times a week. On 1/2/2020 when the Acting ED position became the ED full time position the ED received a raise of \$20,000 yearly. Still there was lack of communication. I did not receive any guidance with the City's Contract Funding including the District Funding from the State. During the time of COVID I was in the office along with Oscar Velez-Juarbe NRCS District Conservationist. During COVID the City's bills from SLR were piling up on the ED desk for months unpaid. The only time the ED was present in the office was to pick up his payroll check. Received an email in June of 2020 that the ED had limited availability. It was difficult working under these conditions with no guidance.

When the new ED (Jake) took position in January 2022 the district was finally headed in the right direction. Jake focus primary on motivating the positive outlook for the district employees. There was finally effective communication and good management giving clear direction, listening to subordinates, and started success for the district. Jake took the time to review and straighten out the City's financials as well as the district financials. When help is needed Jake has always given a helping hand and is responsible for making my job interesting and rewarding.

I have greatly appreciated the support and guidance provided to me by Jake during my time at the district. It has been a pleasure working under Jake's guidance.

Thank you again for the support and opportunity to work with ED Jake.

Sincerely,

A handwritten signature in blue ink that reads "Margarete Wagner".

Margarete Wagner