

Meeting Minutes - 8/20/25

Summary

Committee Chair and Agenda Review

The committee discussed selecting a chairperson and reviewed the agenda, which included topics such as committee chair selection, grant decisions, budget planning for 2026, and open water quality issues. Julia mentioned that advertisements for committee positions had been published in the Supervisor's newsletter, and she had reached out to potential candidates. The group also discussed the NRI report, which highlighted the carbon offset by trees in town, and noted that 41% of local carbon emissions were offset by town trees, though this figure may need verification.

Columbia Housing Task Force Structure

Dennis explained the structure of the Columbia Economic Development Corporation Housing Task Force, which operates similarly to an accelerator. He described the roles of the chair, project director, and project communicator, emphasizing how they work together to meet the needs of end users while managing partnerships and funding. He highlighted that this structure allows team members to focus on their specific areas, ensuring efficiency and effective decision-making.

Water Quality Initiative Stakeholder Engagement

Dennis discussed the importance of identifying a broad range of stakeholders for a multi-year water quality initiative, including conservation organizations, funders, local businesses, and residents. He emphasized the need to create open lines of communication and hold meetings to gather feedback. He also highlighted recent progress, including a \$75,000 grant submission to the Hudson River estuary program, which was a result of collaboration with Cornell Cooperative.

Rural Water Quality Testing Plan

Julia and Ifetayo discussed the need for water quality testing and the development of a quality assurance project plan, emphasizing the importance of accurate data collection.

They highlighted the unique challenges of water management in a rural community, such as the presence of septic fields and limited resources for their maintenance. Julia mentioned the involvement of a professional engineering firm to assist with project planning and public listening sessions, while also acknowledging the complexity of the project and the need for a comprehensive stakeholder engagement strategy.

Water Quality Grant Planning Discussion

Julia and Ifetayo discussed the Water Quality Committee's grant application budget for \$13,619 in the first year, with Ifetayo explaining that the initial focus would be on capacity building and strategic planning. Julia emphasized the importance of identifying additional funding sources early and outlined the committee's structure, including collaboration with Cornell Cooperative Extension as the lead agency. They also touched on the need for prioritization due to volunteer commitments and the committee's role in providing information and education rather than enforcement. Julia advised that she would put the \$13,619 in the budget for FY26 in coordination w/ the Town Board.

Committee Formation and Membership Planning

Julia discussed the need of a new committee member, noting that Susan had stepped down. She mentioned speaking with several potential committee members, including Martina Deignan, who has a grant writing background, and Bernadette Winby, a former student of Diane Duffus. Dennis suggested aiming for a committee size of 5-7 members, excluding the secretary, to ensure an odd number for voting purposes. Julia also shared insights from her experience on the Rec. Campaign committee, emphasizing the importance of skill sets and diverse roles within the group. She further explained that the committee could not be designated as the lead agent by New York State due to potential SEQRA issues that could surface as a result of the committee's work, but could potentially be an agent of interest.

Water Quality Committee Secretary Needs

Julia & Dennis discussed the need for a paid secretary for the Water Quality Committee, explaining that since they don't have a paid secretary, a member must serve in that role. Julia and Dennis agreed that expanding the committee's capacity and identifying

stakeholders should be key next steps, particularly for grant applications. They also discussed the potential benefits of having a paid secretary, especially for emerging professionals seeking experience in environmental roles. It was decided that Julia would bring the budget need to the Town Board of \$18.64/hourly to appropriate funds this year and in next year's budget.

Grant Timeline and Networking Updates

Julia and Ifetayo discussed the timeline for grant notifications, with Ifetayo explaining that they expect to hear about the grant by February or March 2026, with the grant term starting in May. Tony mentioned signing up for events with the Hudson Watershed alliance and attending a USDA farm tour, where he made an introduction to a geochemist studying water quality.

Community Agriculture and Budget Planning

Dennis discussed the importance of agriculture in their community and encouraged participation in an annual event that highlights this aspect. She emphasized the need to focus on agricultural and rural aspects rather than urban water management to maintain the community's identity. Julia also provided an update on the grant timeline and budget process, mentioning that the town budget will be finalized in mid-October. She planned to send information to Wendy for budget integration and discussed the process for selecting new committee members, including advertising for public participation and scheduling monthly meetings.

Community Water Quality Issues

The group discussed water quality issues in their community, especially Upton Lake, including concerns about septic systems and the need for baseline testing to address knowledge gaps. They emphasized the importance of community engagement and outreach in advocating for resources and grant funding. Julia mentioned that they would receive the state of the budget at the next board workshop on September 8th, and the next meeting for the Water Quality Committee was scheduled for September 17th.

Next steps

- Julia to send budget information for the FY26 work of the Water Quality Committee to Wendy for budget integration, including secretary salary.
- Julia to send committee member applications to Rita Mary and the committee.
- Committee to review and vote on new members at the next meeting.
- Committee to start identifying stakeholders for water quality initiatives.
- Committee to develop lists of water quality aspects beyond testing that might be important for future work.
- Committee to meet again on September 17th.