

**Public Education Committee**  
**DRAFT MINUTES**  
**May 5, 2026**

**Committee Members Present:** Arthur Merrill, James Sofranko, Joseph Cetta, Innes Kasanof, Tina Molé, Shilo Williams.

**Members Excused:** Thomas Snow, Allen Hinkley (Zoom)

**Present:** Aaron Bennett (NYCDEP), Pat Palmer (NYSDOH), Karen Stainbrook (NYSDEC), Joan Lawrence-Bauer (Walton Reporter), Mike Meyer (NYCDEP), Kristina Gutches (NYSDEC), Gerson Tavaréz (NYCDEP), Mike Maloney (NYSDOH), John Schwartz (NYCDEP), Matt Gianetta (NYCDEP), John Wimbush (DOS), Jeff Baker, Ric Coombe, Greg Vurckio, David Kukle, Michelle Yost, Ritchie Gabriel (Andes Supervisor), Glen Faulkner (Middletown Supervisor), Lindsey Drew (NYSDOS)

**Others Present Via Zoom:** Pauline Wanjugi (NYSDOH), Tom Stalter (NYCDEP), Dymitry Ostapyszyn (NYCDEP), Nick Carbone (Watershed Affairs Coordinator), Ted Nitza (Ulster County Civil/Environmental Engineer), Rena Baker (CWC), Heidi Emrich (Ulster County Environmental Planner), and Morgan Tarbell (NYSDOH)

**Staff Members Present:** Jason Merwin, Timothy Cox, Jim Martin, Donald Brown, Jessica Fiedler, Lindsay Ballard, Gemma Young, Lynn Kavanagh, Brian Sullivan and Zach Baldwin-Way

The meeting was called to order at 11:10 A.M.

1. Minutes from the April 2026 meeting were accepted without change.
2. Workforce Development grant application review

Gemma Young gave a brief presentation and overview of the WFD program. She explained the evaluation criteria used for evaluating the applications were based on the program rules. She also talked about the process the team used to evaluate each application. Gemma talked briefly about the DEP internal review team process who provided their own comments and recommendations.

Gemma showed a chart of the pre-application deadline inquiries – who had reached out with questions and who may be interested in applying. Based on this she anticipated that there may be up to a dozen applications submitted for round 2. Gemma then shared a chart of the applications that were received which also showed recommended and not recommended applications.

Gemma then went on to show the five individual applications that were recommended by CWC for funding and referred to the two-page Executive Summary that was created for each application. John Schwartz wanted to remind everyone that scholarships are not part of the DEP contract and cannot fund WFD applications.

The five applications put forth for recommendation:

### ONC BOCES

This grant would help address the shortage of CDL Class B operators in the Watershed. It also provided funding for a septic-specific training in the EOR program. This program targets high school juniors and seniors. Tina noted how great an application this was and a much needed training opportunity in the area. The motion to move this application to the Board of Directors was moved by Arthur Merrill, and seconded by Jim Sofranko.

### Gilboa Conesville Central School

This grant would provide funding on drone education and certification for 10<sup>th</sup>-12<sup>th</sup> grade students enrolled in the CTE Pathways program. Tina noted how great an application this was and that Delaware County uses drones all the time. The motion to move this application to the Board of Directors was moved by Innes Kasanof, and seconded by Shilo Williams.

### Columbia-Greene Community College

This grant would provide a precertification course for WWTP management. The college is in a particularly useful area, being within an hour of many WWTPs. The target audience will be working-age residents wanting to become WWTP operators. Tina again noted how great the application was and that it is in an industry that will need qualified individuals. The motion to move this application to the Board of Directors was moved by Jim Sofranko and seconded by Arthur Merrill.

### Friends of the Upper Delaware River

This grant would fund an internship program for three interns and focus on technical training in watershed protection measures. The target audience is individuals connected to the WOH Watershed. Tina noted that Delaware County has reservations about FUDR as an organization but will support the application because it is for internships. The motion to move this application to the Board of Directors was moved by Shilo Williams and seconded by Jim Sofranko.

### Café Mornings

This grant would address the many challenges had by businesses in the hospitality industry by training people in proper food safety, customer service, and barista techniques. The target audience is individuals aged 13-30 who are early career residents in the WOH Watershed. The motion to move this application to the Board of Directors was moved by Jim Sofranko and seconded by Innes Kasanof.

John Schwartz commented on the thoroughness of the CWC team's review process and thoughtfulness in looking at each application. He then noted that the WFD program is meant to make a meaningful difference within the workforce and going forward applicants should think about how the programs implemented will affect the workforce, long-term. He suggested tracking the people who go through this program for a number of years to see where they are at and how the grant had potentially influenced their career choices.

Jim Sofranko also thanked the staff involved in the review process and noted he was impressed by the creativity of the applications.

The meeting was adjourned at 11:48AM

Next meeting: TBC