

TUG HILL COMMISSION

MINUTES OF MEETING

December 9, 2024

Town of Watertown Municipal Building, 2867 County Route 67, Watertown, NY 13601

Chairman Bogdanowicz opened the meeting at 10:15 a.m.

Opened

Commission members included Messrs. Bogdanowicz, Keller, Boxberger, Scriber and Mdms. Cheresnoski and Ritter. Staff included Katie Malinowski, Gwen Decker, Felicia Passino, Chris Barboza, Maria Covey, Jennifer Harvill, Gabriel Yerdon, Taylor McKinney, Mickey Dietrich, Matt Johnson, John Healt, Paul Baxter, Heidi Tompkins and Angie Kimball. Guests – associate circuit riders Christine Healt, Lisa Bellinger, Joe Rowlands; Lee Willbanks, commission attorney.

Attendance

On a motion made by Commissioner Boxberger and seconded by Commissioner Cheresnoski members approved the agenda as presented.

Agenda Approved

On a motion made by Commissioner Cheresnoski and seconded by Commissioner Keller, members approved the minutes of October 21, 2024, with corrections.

Minutes Approved

Chairman's report followed.

Chairman's Report

Chairman Bogdanowicz welcomed everyone, wishing all happy holidays and thanked the town of Watertown for hosting the meeting. He thanked the commission staff and council of governments for their contribution to a successful 2024, with hope for another successful and prosperous 2025.

Welcome

Chairman Bogdanowicz welcomed Heidi Tompkins in her new position as circuit rider for the Salmon Rivers and North Shore council of governments and welcomed new staff Maria Covey to the planner position.

Paul Baxter announced he will retire in 2025, and the chairman thanked him for many years of service as circuit rider for the Salmon Rivers and North Shore council of governments, and looks forward to a celebration in the coming year.

Chairman Bogdanowicz shared it has been an honor to serve as chair for the last 10 years and hopefully making the Tug Hill region a better place. He asked for an update from the nominating committee. Commissioner Ritter shared that she hasn't spoken with Commissioner Scriber yet and he is not present today. Commissioner Keller also shared he has not spoken with Commissioner Scriber. Commissioner Ritter asked if anyone would like to serve as chair. Commissioner Boxberger suggested holding off on elections until January until the committee has spoken with Commissioner Scriber.

On a motion made by Commission Boxberger and seconded by Commissioner Keller members agreed to wait until the January meeting for the election of officers.

The proposed 2025 Commission meeting calendar (handout) continues meeting on Monday mornings if schedule works for everyone.

On a motion made by Commission Boxberger and seconded by Commissioner Ritter member approved the 2025 meeting calendar as presented.

Executive Director's report followed.

ED Report

Ms. Malinowski reported Maria Covey started last Thursday and fills the planner position. We have an accepted offer for the planner/local government specialist position, and he agreed to wait until spring to start. We need to wait until after Mr. Baxter retires to bring him onboard, as we are currently at our staffing limit of 15 FTEs. Our pending hire will be contracting with RACOG and CTHC as associate circuit rider until that time.

Administration

We received approval from OSC for our contract with Turning Stone. They have advised us to do an invitation for bid next year. We are now waiting for the countersigned contract from Turning Stone. We have a phone call with them today at 2:00 p.m. We are unable to move forward with the registration mailing until we have the contract signed by Turning Stone. Mrs. Malinowski reviewed the LGC session schedule (handout) with members. New for 2025 a checkbox was added to the form regarding that audio or video streaming or recording is prohibited.

LGC

The staff work group has met several times to work on the strategic plan and developed a rough draft (handout). The draft was shared with staff at last week's staff meeting. Mrs. Malinowski reviewed the draft with members. We received positive feedback from Mr. Halpin on the draft. There are 12 objectives or strategies in all. This will be the seventh strategic plan for the commission. Mrs. Malinowski asked members for feedback and if they would like to do a subcommittee.

Strategic Planning

Commissioner Bogdanowicz shared that 12 objectives are a lot. He suggested objectives six and seven could be merged. He offered to help work on the plan. He suggests having the framework done by January/February/March. Commissioner Keller suggested it could be pared down. Commissioner Ritter offered to help work on the plan.

Quick reference cards (handout) have been done and printed and laminated to provide to communities. Circuit riders will be able to give out at board meetings.

Quick Reference Cards

A new version of the Ayers Law Firm contract was made with changes that were requested at our October meeting to remove specifics of Lorraine. A new section B was added to this version for the contract code of professionalism.

Roads

Commissioner Bogdanowicz asked if any municipalities are challenged specifically with an MMR law would we cancel our contract if Ayers were going to represent the municipality. Mr. Willbanks stated in the new version the contract states that Ayers will not accept to represent the municipality.

Commissioner Bogdanowicz stated on the new version Ayers Law Firm is referred to as both Ayers Law Firm and ALF and needs to be changed to Ayers Law Firm. Mrs. Malinowski will have the change made to Ayers Law Firm.

Commissioner Bogdanowicz asked how the commission plans to pay the law firm. Mrs. Malinowski replied that funds previously set aside for the database conversion support will be less than originally planned as we are using a consultant instead of Caspio support. Commissioner Boxberger asked if there is a cap on payment. Mrs. Malinowski stated there is a cap of \$15,000.

On a motion made by Commissioner Keller and seconded by Commissioner Ritter members approved the Ayers Law Firm contract with changes.

Gabriel Yerdon shared we are collaborating with American Farmland Trust (AFT) on an agriculture and solar project. Cornell Cooperative Extension is done some similar work with funding from Lawrence Berkeley National Laboratories, and we have been involved. The commission applied for a voucher for a federal Department of Energy Voucher program. This is an opportunity for the commission to help provide support on land use for agriculture and solar. AFT plans to hold roundtables with producers, advisors and developers to identify barriers and solutions to increase agrivoltaics solar projects.	Solar and Agriculture
A meeting is scheduled with the Governor's office today at 2:00 p.m. to discuss ACUB funding that is on hold. Mrs. Malinowski has reached out to Katie Petronis, Deputy Commissioner of Natural Resources, DEC Albany.	ACUB
DEC wetlands is a big topic, with changes coming from the state if applying for a wetland permit. Discussions have taken place at the NorCOG meeting as residents are upset. There are a lot of unknowns currently.	DEC Wetlands
Ms. Tompkins shared that Richland will be joining SRCG. Richland is outside the region. SRCG is working on the agreement. The fee for Richland to join would be \$900, however, will be waived for the first year.	SRCOG
NorCOG fee will be \$1100 in the coming year.	
Mrs. Malinowski shared that with additional municipalities, more staff may be needed.	
Ms. McKinney shared she is working on road mapping for ATV trails to create a good comprehensive map of trails that are designated, not designated or any pending. She is researching town, county, and state resources and hopes to have a draft map by the end of January.	ATVs
We continue to track Micron including the Oswego housing study, North Shore regional sewer, and Route 49 traffic. There may be an update at the next Oswego County conference of mayors' meeting.	Micron
Mr. Barboza shared he has been doing MetroCount for West Monroe regularly due to concerns with the Rt. 49 corridor affecting the town roads. He has shared the data collected with DOT and hopes it's been useful for the influx of traffic for a temporary bridge.	
Mrs. Kimball reported that roads are one of the biggest issues CTHC has been dealing with. Montague and Harrisburg are dealing with MMR issues.	COG Report
Ms. Tompkins reported she is transitioning and meeting with Mr. Baxter weekly. Micron is a big issue for NorCOG.	
Mr. Baxter shared the Austin Wheelock has continued to attend SRCG and NorCOG meetings regarding economic study. He shared that the DEC wetlands will have a major impact on the North Shore communities.	
Mr. Healt reported that housing and the Amish are issues that are facing the NOCCOG communities.	
Mr. Dietrich report RACOG has been focused on youth involvement for local government. Six municipalities are working on comprehensive plans.	

The 2024-25 financial statement (handout) showing business as usual. The Ford Fusion has unexpected electrical issues and needed repairs done. Fifteen are on staff now. Payout for Mr. Baxter's retirement.

Finance Report

Request to move \$10,000 from database line to attorney legal line.

On a motion made by Commissioner Ritter and seconded by Commissioner Boxberger members approved the move of \$10,000 from database line to attorney legal line.

Commissioner Bogdanowicz opened the floor for public comment.

Public Comment

Commissioner Ritter suggested including SUNY Poly as a potential collaborator in the relevant strategic plan objective. She shared that the flooding damage in the Herkimer area destroyed business documents that affect municipalities. Commissioner Keller shared keeping records off site and having digital records backup.

There being no further business, on a motion made by Commissioner Boxberger and seconded by Commissioner Cheresnoski members adjourned the meeting at 11:52 a.m.

Adjourn

These minutes were approved by the Board of Commissioners.

Tom Boxberger
Secretary