

**TOMPKINS COUNTY WATER RESOURCES COUNCIL**

Nov. 20, 2023 Via Zoom

Final Minutes

**Attendance**

Member		Seat	Member		Seat
Annie Bastoni	P	At-Large	Brian Rahm	P	Environment
Shawn Bossard	P	Agriculture	Stephanie Redmond	P	At-Large
Cynthia Brock	P	Municipal	Steve Riddle	E	Water Purveyor
Liz Cameron	P	Co. Environmental Health	Linda Wagenet	P	At-Large
Susan Currie	P	County Government	David Wolfe	A	Environmental Management Council
Jenna DeRario	P	Cooperative Extension	Douglas Barnes	A	Associate
Kristen Hychka	P	Municipal Government	Roxy Johnston	P	Associate
Darby Kiley	E	County Planning & Sustain.	Lynn Leopold	E	Associate
Patrick King	E	Business & Industry	Rebecca Minas	P	Associate
Liz Kreitinger	P	Watershed Organization	Elaine Quaroni	P	Associate
Jon Negley	P	Soil & Water Cons. District	Grascen Shidemantle	P	Associate
Holly Payne	P	At-Large	Tom Vawter	P	Associate
Frank Proto	E	At-Large			

**Guests:** Becky Sims, Liz Thomas

**Call to Order/Agenda Review** – Chair Cynthia Brock called the meeting to order at 4:17pm. No changes to the agenda.

**Privilege of the Floor** – None

**Presentation: Owasco Lake Watershed Rules & Regulations Process and Current Status** – *Eileen O’Connor, Retired Cayuga County Environmental Health Director*

Eileen presented on the challenges encountered while updating the Owasco Lake Watershed Rules and Regulations. Her talk covered background including information on the original public health laws, which primarily addressed basic updates like sanitation, and the 1984 update, which incorporated septic systems and agricultural regulations but lacked specific provisions for pollution prevention. She explained this factor become more critical in 2016 when toxins were detected in Auburn and Owasco’s drinking water, prompting calls for stricter regulations. She also talked about the collaborative three-year update process, which involved a steering committee, technical writing teams, focus groups, and public comment aimed to address these concerns. The process involved reviewing and adapting existing rules from Skaneateles Lake, addressing stakeholder concerns, and incorporating public feedback. However, the process was impacted by delays due to COVID-19. Last, she shared highlights from the NYS Department of Health’s 18-month review, remarking that while sections like stormwater management received approval, others faced denial. The state’s proposed draft further removed certain key protection. Despite local concerns raised by public health officials and elected representatives, the state is moving forward with the proposed regulations, which are considered by some to be weaker than existing protections. Legislative solutions are being explored to address these concerns. Discussion covered numerous themes and topics. These included concerns about the nullification of regulations, limitations of Ag and Markets Law, effectiveness of voluntary programs like AIM in reducing nutrient runoff, legal ramifications, challenges faced by smaller farms in accessing funding for voluntary programs, importance of regulations in protecting water quality, especially in regards to harmful algal blooms, and more. Participants emphasized the need for evidence-based decision-making, transparency and accountability, and effective regulations to safeguard water quality.

**Action: Consider letter on Owasco Lake Watershed Rules & Regulations** – Roxy led discussion on the draft letter regarding the Owasco Watershed Rules & Regulations that was included in the agenda packet. She provided context, explaining that it was developed by the Monitoring Partnership. She also shared that since 2016 the local water purveyors (Cornell, City of Ithaca) have been working to update their watershed rules and regulations and have been monitoring the Owasco process. long-standing effort to update the rules since 2016. She acknowledged the state's recent proposal on the Drinking Water Source Protection Program and the strong reactions it generated. Johnston emphasized the importance of the Owasco Watershed Rules & Regulations as a safeguard for drinking water sources and expressed concern about the state potentially removing this authority without justification. She clarified that the letter aimed to support the purveyors' right to engage in the process, not endorse specific aspects of the draft rules. The letter also included data to support the argument that current approaches are ineffective, along with extensive background information to establish a legal foundation for their claims. Despite some disagreement about the letter's tone and content, particularly regarding agricultural programs and enforcement mechanisms, the group acknowledged the need for a revised letter that incorporates diverse perspectives. The letter will be sent back to the Monitoring Partnership to gather additional input. All WRC members, including those not already involved, were encouraged to participate in drafting the revised letter. While the timeframe is flexible, the group emphasized basing the letter on evidence and ensuring a balanced focus on all relevant issues.

**Action: Consider Applications for Voting and Associate Members** – Nominating/Membership Committee Committee chair Linda Wagenet presented the list of new and returning voting members up for appointment/reappointment by the County Legislature, as well as the associate members up for reappointment by the Water Resources Council.

**Action:** Linda Wagenet made a motion, which Jon Negley seconded, to recommend that the Tompkins County Legislature appoint Brett Hayhurst (At-Large) and Becky Sims (Municipal Government) voting members of the Tompkins County Water Resources Council. Motion carried.

**Action:** Jon Negley made a motion, which Annie Bastoni seconded, to recommend that the Tompkins County Legislature reappoint Shawn Bossard (Agriculture), Cynthia Brock (Recreation), Liz Cameron (County Environmental Health), Jenna DeRario (CCE Tompkins), Kristen Hychka (Municipal Government), Stephanie Redmond (At-Large), and Linda Wagenet (At-Large) voting members of the Tompkins County Water Resources Council. Motion carried.

**Action:** Linda Wagenet made a motion, which Cynthia Brock seconded, to recommend that the Tompkins County Water Resources Council reappoint Grascen Shidemantle and Elaine Quaroni associate members. Motion carried.

**Action: Approval of draft minutes** – October 2023 meeting minutes were approved (moved by Shawn Bossard, seconded by Linda Wagenet) as submitted. Motion carried.

### **Committee Reports**

Jenna reported on the Nov. 13 municipal training session organized by Kristen and Darby, with technical support from Annie. Held online, it attracted around 12 participants and highlighted online GIS tools for municipal employees. Kristen hosted an office hour that evening for further assistance. Annie noted the engaged group and praised the presenters. Slides and other materials are available online. Shawn gave an update on the clean boating map, which has been sent for printing.

**Chair and Staff Reports**

No chair's report. Kristin reminded members to complete their NYS annual sexual harassment prevention training by Dec. 8

**Member Announcements**

Liz Kreitinger announced that the Cayuga Lake Watershed Network's Fall Community Conference will be held Dec. 4 in Ithaca. In addition there will be a virtual Hydrilla session held on Dec. 18.

**Adjournment** – The meeting was adjourned at 5:37pm.