



**Adirondack Park Agency**  
**JANUARY MEETING MINUTES**

**Thursday, January 9, 2025**

**Agency Members, Designees, and Executive Staff Present:**

John Ernst, Chairperson

Mark Hall, Member

Steve Hunt, Empire State Development

Benita Law-Diao, Member

Art Lussi, Member

Ken Lynch, Member

Zoë Smith, Member

Matt Tebo, Department of State

Dan Wilt, Member

Randy Young, Department of Environmental Conservation

Barbara Rice, Executive Director

Damion Stodola, Counsel

**Absent and Excused**

**Local Government Review Board Present**

Gerald Delaney, Sr., Executive Director

**1. CALL TO ORDER**

A quorum of board members being present in person, the meeting was called to order at approximately 9:40 AM and Chairperson Ernst welcomed the public, presenters and staff.

**2. WELCOMING REMARKS**

Chairperson Ernst welcomed commissioners, staff and public. Ernst welcomed Steve Hunt, who will be the designee from Empire State Development moving forward, and thanked Randy Young who is filling in as the designee from the Department of Environmental Conservation. Ernst went on to recognize and thank Bradley Austin, the outgoing designee for Empire State Development. Austin had been a Board member for 11 years, had been serving on five different committees and acted as Chair for more than a year. Ernst also thanked Rebecca Miller for her service as alternate designee. Ernst expressed condolences to the family of Betsy Falwell, the spirit of Blue Mountain Lake, writer and editor of Adirondack Life Magazine. Her contributions to the community were many, and she will be missed.

**3. PUBLIC COMMENT**

The Chair recognized Ron Konowitz, Adirondack Powder Skier Association, commented on the history of ski trails in the Park, and the future of trails in the forest preserve.

The Chair recognized Dave Gibson, Adirondack Wild who expressed concern about the inclusion of the use of OPDMDs in the proposed State Land Master Plan amendments.

**4. APPROVAL OF NOVEMBER 13, 2024 AGENCY MEETING MINUTES**

On motion of Art Lussi, seconded by Benita Law-Diao, the November minutes were unanimously approved without modification.

**5. RECUSALS**

Both Art Lussi and Zoë Smith recused themselves from discussion and voting on the proposed amendments to the 1986 Mount Van Hoevenberg Unit Management Plan.

**6. MOTION FOR EXECUTIVE SESSION**

None

**7. EXECUTIVE DIRECTOR'S REPORT**

Executive Director Barbara Rice presented the Executive Director Report, highlights of which included:

- Welcomed the new designee from Empire State Development, Steve Hunt. Rice thanked outgoing designee Brad Austin for his eleven plus years of service as a designee to the Agency board.

- Rice acknowledged the retirement of Protect the Adirondacks! executive director Peter Bauer, who has been an advocate for the protection of the Forest Preserve and for conservation of the State's private lands for the better part of 35 years.
- Rice extended condolences to the family and friends of Bill Curran, one of the original staff members who joined the Agency in 1972 and served in several roles throughout the Agency in his 30 years of service.
- Noted that staff is preparing the 2024 Annual report, and plan to present it next month.
- Rice reflected on 2024 highlighting trips to meet with Town Supervisors, Mayors, County Representatives, and State Legislators as well as the diverse group of experts that presented to the Agency board on issues that impact the Park.
- Rice acknowledged the complexities involved in placing the new headquarters project in a downtown location, but affirmed that revitalizing hamlets is sound land use policy and fully consistent with the Agency's legislative mandate. The team continues to work with the Office of General Services and their consultants on a preliminary layout, design and scope for the proposed project.
- Staffing has been a primary importance, and with the help of the Division of Budget, staffing levels have increased over 30% in the last 2 years and in 2024 the Agency added 5 new staff members. In November, the Agency posted 7 positions and is currently in the process of conducting interviews.
- Rice congratulated Benjimin Amos and Corrie Magee on their recent appointments as Environmental Program Specialist 2, and welcomed Lucas Cain, the newest addition to the RASS team who started earlier this week as an Assistant Engineer.

## **8. MOTION TO ADJOURN INTO COMMITTEES**

On the motion of Dan Wilt, and seconded by Mark Hall, the Agency Board voted by unanimous agreement to adjourn to committees at approximately 10:01 AM.

### **Public Awareness and Communications Committee**

The committee meeting convened at approximately 10:01 AM.

#### **Public Awareness and Communications Committee Members Present:**

Mark Hall (Chair), Benita Law-Diao, Steve Hunt (ESD)

#### **Other Members and Designees Present:**

John Ernst, Art Lussi, Zoë Smith, Ken Lynch, Matt Tebo (DOS), Randy Young (DEC), Steve Hunt (ESD)

#### **Local Government Review Board**

Gerald Delaney, Executive Director

Agency Staff Present:

Barb Rice, Damion Stodola, Keith McKeever

(1) Keith McKeever, Communications Director provided the Public Information and Communications report, highlights of which included:

- A goal has been set to have six community spotlight presentations for the Agency Board this year. In February, Supervisor Ernest Witkowski from the Town of Waverly in Franklin County will present. Supervisor Cathleen Reusser of Elizabethtown in Essex County is penciled in for March/April.
- The team is in the process of a major overhaul of the Agency website with a goal of improving organization of information for ease of use by the public.
- As presented at the November meeting, Ben Brosseau, Assistant Public Information Officer has been utilizing social media as a tool to communicate with current and future audiences. A short form video series on public and private land classifications is finishing up soon.

(2) Implementation of Next Move NY (Michelle Capone, Director of Regional Development and Ben Cruz, Program Administrator – Development Authority of the North Country)

- Michelle Capone and Ben Cruz provided an informational presentation on the Next Move NY Program, an REDC award-winning strategy to strengthen workforce opportunities for transitioning soldiers and their families by matching them with employment opportunities throughout the region.

Old Business

None

New Business

None

Public Awareness and Communications Committee adjourned at approximately 11:03 AM.

**State Land Committee Meeting**

The committee meeting convened at approximately 11:13 AM

*State Land Committee Members:* Ken Lynch, Chair, Benita Law-Diao, Zoë Smith, Randy Young (DEC)

*Other Members and Designees Present*

John Ernst, Mark Hall, Steve Hunt (ESD), Art Lussi, Matt Tebo (DOS), Dan Wilt

*Local Government Review Board Present*

Gerald Delaney, Executive Director

*Agency Staff Present*

Barb Rice, Damion Stodola, Megan Phillips, Mitchell Jones

(1) Planning Division Report (Megan Phillips, APA)

Megan Phillips, Deputy Director of Planning provided an update on recent Division activities, highlights included:

- The division has begun reviewing the public comments received during the 60-day public comment period for the proposed State Land Master Plan amendments.
- Local Government Services had a record year for variance referrals in 2024 with 134 referrals received by year's end. That is roughly 30% increase over the usual number.
- Save the date for the annual Adirondack Planning Forum, May 7-8, 2025. The Agency is in the process of contracting with the successful bidder and will release more information and open registration soon.
- The GIS team is in the process of hiring a Mapping Technologist 1. They received 21 applicants and are currently conducting interviews. The team is also working on projects including migration of the GIS server, training Agency staff and moving projects to ArcPro, digitizing wetland site visit data collection process, creating and deploying new in-house web applications and continuing to improve the functionality of our photogrammetry hardware and software.
- Phillips recognized the retirement of Peter Bauer from his role as Executive Director of Protect the Adirondacks! and a 35-year career working for the protection of the Adirondack Park.

(2) Mount Van Hoevenberg Unit Management Plan Amendment (Ashley Walden and Rebecca Dayton, Olympic Authority, Mitchell Jones, APA)

Ashley Walden and Rebecca Dayton from the Olympic Regional Development Authority recapped management actions detailed in the proposed amendment to the 1986 Mount Van Hoevenberg Unit Management Plan. Their presentation included feedback expressed during the public comment period and how those comments have been addressed in the proposed amendment. Mitchell Jones, Environmental Program Specialist 1, (APA) provided a follow up presentation reviewing the guidelines for state land which has been classified as intensive use, the proposed amendment's

conformance to the Adirondack Park State Land Master Plan (APSLMP) and offered a staff recommendation.

On motion of Benita Law-Diao and seconded by Randy Young, the committee unanimously voted (with the exception of Zoë Smith who was recused) to forward the resolution to amend the Mount Van Hoevenberg Unit Management plan as presented to the full Agency Board for review.

#### Old Business

None

#### New Business

None

Committee Adjourned at approximately 11:50 AM.

### **The Board returned to Full Agency at approximately 11:51 AM**

## **9. Committee Reports**

#### Public Awareness and Communication (Mark Hall)

- The committee received a division report from Keith McKeever and a presentation from Michelle Capone and Ben Cruz of the Development Authority of the North Country regarding the Next Move NY program, a strategy to strengthen workforce opportunities for transitioning soldiers and their families.

#### State Land Committee (Ken Lynch)

- The committee reported that they heard the Planning Division report from Megan Philips, and a presentation from Olympic Authority and APA staff recommending a resolution to amend the 1986 Mount Van Hoevenberg Unit Management Plan. On the motion of Ken Lynch, and seconded by John Ernst, the committee unanimously voted to approve the resolution, with the exception of Art Lussi and Zoë Smith who were recused.

## **10. Interim Reports**

The Administration, Economic Affairs, Enforcement, Legal Affairs, Local Government Services, Park Policy and Planning, Park Ecology, and Regulatory Programs Committees did not meet this month.

## **11. Member Comment**

A. Lussi added his condolences to those already expressed for the Curran family.

M. Hall acknowledged Brad Austin's time on the board, thanking him for his service.

M. Tebo also acknowledged the contributions of Brad Austin to the Agency board.

## **12. Old Business**

None

## **13. New Business**

None

## **14. Public Comment**

- None

[Link to video and audio recordings of the full Agency presentation to be added.]

Chairperson Ernst noted that the next meeting will be February 13 and 14, 2025.

The meeting was adjourned without objection at approximately 11:59 AM.

*John Ernst*

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John Ernst, Chairperson