

TOMPKINS COUNTY WATER RESOURCES COUNCIL

February 24, 2025

Zoom Meeting

Final Minutes

Attendance

| Member | | Seat | Member | | Seat |
|-----------------|---|-----------------------------|---------------------|---|----------------------------|
| Annie Bastoni | P | At-Large | Elaine Quaroni | P | Municipal Government |
| Shawn Bossard | P | Agriculture | Stephanie Redmond | A | At-Large |
| Cynthia Brock | P | Recreation | Steve Riddle | A | Water Purveyor |
| Liz Cameron | A | Co. Environmental Health | Becky Sims | E | Municipal Government |
| Amanda Champion | P | County Government | Vacant | X | Business & Industry |
| Brett Hayhurst | E | At-Large | Vacant | X | Cooperative Extension |
| Kristen Hychka | E | Municipal Government | Vacant | X | Environmental Mgmt Council |
| Darby Kiley | P | County Planning & Sustain. | Douglas Barnes | P | Associate |
| Liz Kreitinger | P | Watershed Organization | Roxy Johnston | P | Associate |
| Andrew Murphy | P | At-Large | Patrick King | P | Associate |
| Jon Negley | E | Soil & Water Cons. District | Lynn Leopold | P | Associate |
| Eileen O'Connor | P | Environment | Rebecca Minas | E | Associate |
| Holly Payne | P | At-Large | Grascen Shidemantle | A | Associate |
| Frank Proto | P | At-Large | Tom Vawter | E | Associate |
| | | | Linda Wagenet | P | Associate |

Guests: Graham Savio

Call to Order/Agenda Review –Chair Cynthia Brock called the meeting to order at 4:16pm. There were no changes to the agenda.

Privilege of the Floor – None

Presentation: An Introduction to the Design, Function, and Oversight of Onsite Wastewater Treatment Systems (OWTS) in Tompkins County – Doug Barnes, Tompkins County Whole Health

Doug's talk covered on-site wastewater treatment systems (OWTS) and began with public health concerns, including a "fatberg" threat that canceled a Bryan Adams concert in Australia. He explained OWTS' role in achieving phosphorus reduction targets for Cayuga Lake as outlined in the total daily maximum load (TMDL). Doug detailed the biological and physical processes within septic systems, highlighting soil and microbes' crucial role in purifying effluent. He addressed common OWTS failures, like biomat accumulation and root intrusion, while describing prevalent system designs. The Environmental Health Division's responsibilities include permitting, inspecting, and certifying OWTS installations, with grant programs available for system replacements. Future strategies involve proposed sanitary code revisions for realty transfers and considerations for routine inspections. The Q&A covered multiple topics, including total phosphorus guidance values for streams, state grant eligibility criteria, and the projected one-year timeline for code revisions. Additionally, the group discussed the effectiveness of voucher programs for system pumping, noting significant underutilization despite their availability to residents. Doug stated he would follow up to determine factors affecting participation rates.

Action: Approval of draft minutes

The January draft minutes were approved as submitted.

Federal & State Public Notices/Actions Subject to Public Comment

The group reviewed comment letters concerning the NYS DEC's proposed phosphorus guidance values and EPA's 303(d) list additions — the 303(d) letter was already submitted, and the phosphorus guidance letter remained in progress. The DEC proposal introduces differentiated guidance based on water body type, ecoregion, and acknowledges that a single value is inadequate. Using Cayuga Lake as an example, the discussion highlighted options to change designations or develop individual guidance values, noting a shift from recreation-aesthetics to drinking water protection with a focus on disinfection byproducts. Concerns were raised about Class A water bodies not used for drinking water, the broadness of EPA's ecoregions, limitations of main lake monitoring that neglect swimming beaches and stream loading, and the DEC's capacity to address existing 303(d) listings. The discussion covered the importance of addressing questions before finalizing guidance values, the risks of lowering designations, the need for detailed analysis, defining the Water Resources Council's role, and public education on HABs and recreation. The group emphasized the importance of maintaining drinking water protection status for the southern end of the lake despite it not currently being used as a drinking water source, recognizing its potential future use. For next steps, the draft letter will return to the Monitoring Partnership for revision incorporating the feedback received, with particular attention to language ensuring adequate protection while allowing flexibility for water-body-specific guidance values without appearing to reduce protections. The Executive Committee maintains authority to approve the letter after circulation, and participants were encouraged to submit suggestions regarding outreach strategies, both locally and for DEC implementation, particularly concerning public health messaging about water recreation and HABs.

Committee Reports

Roxy gave updates from the Monitoring Partnership and recently created Drinking Water Protection Committee. Her report covered both committees' review of the comment letters, noting that this was the extent of the Monitoring Partnership's agenda. She further reported that the Drinking Water Protection Committee had begun examining their expanded responsibilities under the Water Quality Strategy. These responsibilities include potential collaboration with municipalities to implement land use controls, with particular emphasis on stormwater management.

Chair and Staff Reports

Chair's Report – Cynthia reminded everyone that annual report contributions should be submitted to Kristin. She also reported that the EMC is seeking a liaison from the WRC and has invited her to provide a WRC update at an upcoming EMC meeting.

Staff Report – Darby encouraged members to review the DEC's presentation on the new wetlands regulations, either by checking out the recording or registering for one of the upcoming sessions:
<https://dec.ny.gov/nature/waterbodies/wetlands/freshwater-wetlands-program>

Member Announcements

Roxy provided an update on the Cayuga Lake Watershed Intermunicipal Organization, which will hear a presentation by Lauren Townley from NYSDEC on funding opportunities. Liz K. said she will circulate any relevant Cayuga Lake Watershed Network news via email.

Adjournment – The meeting was adjourned at 5:39pm.