

## York River Stewardship Committee

### Minutes for the January 27, 2026 Meeting

Voting Members Present: Karen Arsenault, Beth Cromwell, Joan LeBlanc (Chair), Sally Harold, David Marshall, Mary Marshall, Judy Spiller

Non-voting members present: Philip Brekke (alt), Emma Lord (NPS), Jenn Hunter (Coordinator)

Guests: Clayton Smith

1. **Welcome:** Joan opened the meeting at 5:35 and welcomed our guest.
2. **Minutes:** Joan asked for a motion to approve the minutes. Judy made a motion to approve, Sally seconded. All approved.
3. **Committee membership** - Update and recommendations to add a non-voting member:
  - Joan announced that Karl Honkonen, our representative from South Berwick has resigned from the committee due to new commitments as a York County Soil and Water District trustee. According to our bylaws, alternate Philip Brekke would become South Berwick's voting member of the committee, and he has agreed. Joan will send a letter to South Berwick with that recommendation.
  - Joan noted that Anna di Chiara has submitted an application to become an alternate for York, filling that vacancy.
  - We all have differing initial appointments of 3 and 4 years, with the three-year terms ending in June 2026. Current committee members should indicate to Joan if you are still interested in staying on the committee for a second term. If you want to stay, we will send letters to each community about your interest in continuing as a member of the committee. If anyone is interested in becoming an officer, let Jenn know.
  - Joan noted the Executive Committee's recommendation to add Paul Dest to the committee as an advisory, non-voting member. Paul's expertise, history and active participation will benefit the committee and he is interested in continuing. This advisor appointment is consistent with our by-laws. **Mary made a motion to appoint Paul Dest to the York River Stewardship as a non-voting advisory member. Seconded by Judy. All approved.**
4. **Updates and discussion:**
  - NPS PWSR Program: Emma reported the good news that our program is finally being equally funded with the other PSWR programs. We will need to get a workplan in place as soon as possible. The amount should be \$210-220K. We will have a draft work plan and budget for the February meeting.
  - Chair/Executive Committee: Joan thanked Jenn for a super Annual Report. She announced that it is time to update town boards on our activities. Mary and Joan will present to York. February 9<sup>th</sup> is the date for updating Kittery. No dates scheduled yet for either Eliot or South Berwick. Joan can share a slide presentation for anyone who wants it.
  - Coordinator: Annual report sent out using Mail Chimp to our distribution list. It had a slightly lower open rate than typical newsletters. She asked for any other ideas on where to post the newsletter. Next newsletter will be sent out the first week of February announcing two final reports and Paul's retirement. Semi-annual report was sent to the Park Service in early January.
  - River Access Ad Hoc Committee: Mary announced that the dock project will be on the May 27 ballot rather than as previously planned for May 2026. GEI will continue with the permitting. They are investigating other locations to do a dock or access improvement project, possibly Scotland Bridge.

Ron Nowell spoke with their group about river access and rights of way. The group is also discussing possible ordinance changes that would allow for more private docks along the river.

5. **Quarter 2 Budget Report:** Sally announced that there were two errors in the report she emailed. She will email the corrected version, which was projected on screen and discussed. Sally noted that there was money set aside for projects not yet contracted. Now that we have more money in our budget, we will have additional opportunities. We need to determine how much money we want to set aside for special projects. We need to think about what we want to do capacity wise.
6. **2026 Watershed Grants Program:** Jenn asked if we wanted to stay on track with our previous two rounds of grants, issuing an RFP in mid to late February with about two months to apply and projects starting after July 1. Also do we want to continue to keep 10K as the maximum award? She suggested it was a good number for small to medium sized projects and that we are connecting with more partners. With the possibility of some larger special projects identified through other processes, the \$10K cap seems reasonable for this grants program.

**Judy made a motion to authorize Jenn to issue the watershed grants program RFP in February, following last year's template. Seconded by Beth. All approved.**

Jenn solicited committee members to be part of the application review team that will make a funding recommendation to the full committee.

7. **Salt Marsh Restoration Project:** Jenn reported that the final report from Geoff Wilson is on our website. It's a lengthy narrative report that includes the mapped features in an appendix. The actual data sets are available for project team members. MCHT will shepherd the next phase of the project, with MNRCP funding awarded for implementation. Sally and Jenn will be active in some of the sub-teams for permitting, monitoring, and outreach. YLT asked Jenn to lead a marsh walk and talk as part of the Climate Series, and she recruited Sally and Paul to co-lead with her.
8. **Calendar/activity planning for 2026:** Jenn ran through some upcoming events she was aware of and asked for others from the committee where there could be a role for coordination or tabling. Planned events include: meeting with York Harbor Board on February 4, meeting with the Kittery Conservation Commission (date TBD), Climate Series salt marsh walk on April 29, and the YRCA Climate Fair (likely May). There is no Seacoast Film Fest this year. Other events that were noted include the annual W&S film fest hosted by GWRLT and the June Kittery Block Party. Jim is running his boat tours again for partner orgs this summer, and Sally and Paul will assist with the P&R kayak trips. Jenn will continue to work with the Outreach Team to explore other opportunities.

Jenn noted Blue Ocean's Symposium in March and that we have travel funds for committee members to attend workshops like this. Reach out to Jenn, Sally or Joan with workshop attendance interests.

9. **Public Comments:** none

Meeting adjourned at 7 p.m.

Submitted by,  
Karen Arsenault, Secretary

Approved: 2/24/26