



DRAFT BOARD OF DIRECTORS MEETING MINUTES

Center for the Inland Bays
Hybrid: CIB office and via Zoom
March 21, 2025

ATTENDANCE

<u>Board Members Present</u>	<u>Board Members Absent</u>
Patti Drago (Board-Elected)	Pat Coluzzi (Speaker of the House Appt, Board Chair)
David Baird (SCD, Treasurer)	Sec. Shawn Garvin (DNREC)
Don Clifton (DDA)	Marlene Saunders (Board-Elected)
Jerry Esposito (Board-Elected)	Jamie Burk (SCAT)
Todd Lawson (Sussex County)	Rony Baltazar-Lopez (Pro-Temp, Ex-Officio)
Claire Simmers (CAC)	Justin Healy (Board-Elected)
Andrew Wozniak (STAC)	Aimee Isaac (Senate Pro Tem Appt, Secretary)
Amie Howell (EPA ex officio)	Nicole Bailey Ashton (Board-Elected)
<u>Board Alternates Present</u>	<u>Center for the Inland Bays Staff Present</u>
Chris Brosch (DDA)	Christophe Tulou
Stephen Williams (DNREC Alt. for Sec. Greg Patterson)	Meghan Noe Fellows
Steven Hohman (EPA)	Mary Hartnett
	Nivette Perez-Perez
<u>Other Attendees</u>	Jaime Argo

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CALL TO ORDER/INTRODUCTION

Patti Drago called the meeting to order at 9:30 AM. P. Drago led the Pledge of Allegiance, then welcomed new Board Members Andrew Wozniak and Don Clifton. The meeting attendees introduced themselves.

MEETING AGENDA REVIEW

Patti Drago called for any changes to the meeting agenda. There were none.

SECRETARY'S REPORT

Patti Drago confirmed that the Board members received the minutes from the previous meeting. P. Drago called for comments or changes, and none were heard. J. Esposito made a motion to approve the minutes. D. Baird seconded. The vote was unanimous.

TREASURER'S REPORT

David Baird stated that the finance committee met on February 19. The Center's Financial Policies manual has started a revision and updating process. The Budget Report assesses the Center's overall financial situation as satisfactory, but notes that it is tightening due to uncertainty surrounding federal funding streams to the Center.

OTHER REPORTS

Citizens Advisory Committee (CAC)

Claire Simmers presented the CAC's activities from the previous meeting, including water health and ecosystem initiatives. C. Simmers discussed the Rare Earth Group's monthly meetings and their efforts to monitor Sussex County Council and participate in tabling events. They are also working on improving community conversations, particularly in the pilot of the Bays to Backyards Program.

Science and Technical Advisory Committee (STAC)

Andrew Wozniak shared updates on the Scientific and Technical Advisory Committee's activities. The last meeting was held on February 7, during which they discussed an RFP for hydrodynamic model development, updates to the bylaws, a new member presentation, and the Southern Delaware Coastal Resilience project. The next STAC meeting in April will focus on water quality. Meghan Noe Fellows discussed the upcoming Coast Forward Summit, which focuses on weather events and the steps that can be taken to create a sustainable and resilient community by 2080. This summit will include a professional panel and is open to the community.

Development Committee

Jerry Esposito reviewed the Development Report from the last meeting. J. Esposito shared challenges, including staff changes, but also highlighted successful fundraising efforts, such as the recent \$14,000 raised during the Do More 24 event. Upcoming events include a benefit show with Dar Williams and the Green Screen movie night at Bayside Signatures.

Sussex County

Todd Lawson discussed the new council's priorities, including land-use reform and the formation of a working group that includes the Center for the Inland Bays. T. Lawson also mentioned ongoing negotiations with the City of Rehoboth to access unused capacity in their ocean outfall. The county is in early negotiations of the potential acquisition of a property at the headwaters of Herring Creek to be used for preservation.

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Delaware Department of Natural Resources and Environmental Control (DNREC)

Steve Williams provided updates from DNREC and reported on the Indian River Inlet North Beach Nourishment project, the sand bypass plant, and the Indian River Inlet Navigation Project. He also mentioned the reduction of cost shares with the Army Corps of Engineers and the progress of the Delaware Coastal Beach Nourishment projects.

DEIJA

Postponed until the next meeting.

Delaware Department of Agriculture

Chris Brosch reviewed updates from the Delaware Department of Agriculture, including information on staffing changes, such as Brooke Walls assuming the leadership of the Nutrient Management Commission and Jimmy Kroon becoming the first Chief of Planning. They report a new record for cover crop acres planted statewide despite challenging conditions. The department feels confident that the highly pathogenic avian influenza outbreak has waned, with only three commercial flocks in Kent County and one backyard flock in Sussex County affected. Don Clifton, the new Secretary, emphasizes the importance of cover crops and discusses budget challenges associated with the increased demand for the program.

EPA

Amie Howell reported on updates at the EPA and announced that they have seen progress with the issuance of updated guidance for the National Estuary Program. This includes Program Evaluation Guidance and National Program Guidance. The new guidance should facilitate progress in moving forward with funding recommendations. The National Estuary Program meeting in Washington, DC is being held next week in person and virtually.

House & Senate

Aimee Isaac was not able to attend, and no updates were reported.

OLD BUSINESS

James Farm Master Plan Implementation Update

Christophe Tulou provided an update on the James Farm Master Plan implementation. The project is nearing completion, with the developer expected to be off-site by April 4th. The new facilities include an education building named after Susie Ball, a maintenance facility, and a concession facility on the beach. Additional features of decks and amphitheaters will enhance the center's capacity to educate visitors, regardless of weather concerns. The site currently attracts about 30,000 visitors annually. Plans for a small-scale ribbon-cutting ceremony are in the works, with a larger open house celebration planned for later in the summer. The center is also working on reprogramming some historic BIL funding through EPA Region 3 to cover construction costs, which would reduce dependence on loans. C. Tulou commends the county's engineer, Patrick Brown, for his stellar work, noting minimal cost differentials and change order requests during the project.

NEW BUSINESS

Fiscal Year 2024 Audit - Approval

The board reviewed the fiscal year 2024 audit, which has been completed and is now up for review and approval. Jamie Argo and David Baird provide an overview, noting that the audit went well with some suggestions for improvement, particularly regarding the accounting software. C. Simmers made a motion to approve the minutes. J. Esposito seconded. The vote was unanimous.

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Federal Funding Status/Response

Christophe Tulou presented on the federal funding status, highlighting that about 60% of the Center's income and 85% of its staff support comes from federal funding, which is currently at risk due to the new federal administration's priorities. He expressed concern about potential funding cuts and discussed efforts to plan for alternative funding sources, including conversations with state legislators and private donors. The organization is working on strategies to continue its mission, particularly in vulnerable communities, while aligning with new federal priorities.

Executive Director's Report

The Center for Inland Bays is facing potential funding cuts and is seeking urgent financial support. Executive Director Christophe emphasized the critical role the Center plays in protecting the watershed and local economy, which is valued at \$4.5 billion annually. He outlined plans for a series of community fundraisers with a goal of raising \$1 million through matching donations. The Center is also reaching out to businesses, realtors, and developers to highlight the economic relevance of the Center's efforts to their work. Board members were encouraged to be more active in fundraising and outreach efforts. The Center is also involved in discussions about land use planning with Sussex County, which could have significant implications for future development in the area.

Open Forum

There were none

Adjournment

Patti Drago made a motion to adjourn the meeting at 11:05 am.