



Citizens Advisory Committee (CAC) Citizen's Cafe — *Drafted Minutes*

DATE & TIME

October 23, 2025 from 6:00 – 8:00 pm

LOCATION

Option 1: In-person

Delaware Center for the Inland Bays office
39375 Inlet Road
Rehoboth Beach, DE 19971

Option 2: Zoom

Join Zoom Meeting
<https://us02web.zoom.us/j/83174379002>
Meeting ID: 831 7437 9002

ATTENDEES 43 (22 in-person, 21 virtual)

- CAC: 12
 - Present: in-person (6); virtual (6)
Dennis Bartow, Lee Bunting, Jay Headman, Mary Kunst, Irene Legiec, Frank Piorko, Cheryl Rehrig, Ken Sigvardson, Ken Silverstein, Claire Simmers, Richard Watson, Cheryl Winston
 - Absent: Gail Dubowe, Tianyin (Tia) Ouyang
- Center staff: 3
 - In-Person 3: Lisa, Jackie, Christophe
- Public 24
 - In-Person 9
 - Virtual 15
- Panelists: 4
 - Michael Bott – Program Administrator, DNREC Division of Watershed Management, Watershed Assessment and Management
 - Jessica Watson – Program Manager, Sussex Conservation District
 - Bob Collins – Manager of Programs and Facilities, Delaware Center for the Inland Bays
 - Helen Raleigh – Owner, Story Hill Farm/Henlopen Sea Salt

6:00-6:10 pm — Welcome (Claire/Lisa)

6:10-7:35 pm — Panel Discussion
Panelists' Introductions (Claire)

Panelist Questions

We asked the same broad set of questions to all four panelists, alternating among the panelists so each had the opportunity to answer a question first. Each panelist had 5 minutes to answer each of the questions (below) in a round-robin format.

- Q1: When it comes to caring for water, how can approaches such as shoreline restoration, stormwater best practices, watershed management, and regenerative agriculture support the health of the Inland Bays as conditions change across the watershed? *Asked by Cheryl Winston, CAC*
- Q2: What kinds of policies, incentives, workforce training, or enforcement measures are needed to strengthen our collective efforts in caring for water? *Asked by Jay Headman, CAC*
- Q3: If you were given \$75 million, no strings attached, how would you allocate those funds to advance ‘caring for water’ across the Inland Bays watershed? *Asked by Ken Silverstein, CAC*
- Q4: What are your final thoughts on the topic of “caring for the water”? *Asked by Frank Piorko, CAC*

Panel Discussion

Executive Summary

The last quarterly Citizens Advisory Committee meeting featured a panel discussion with four distinguished speakers (Michael Bott, Jessica Watson, Bob Collins, and Helen Raleigh, introduced by Claire Simmers, CAC chair) who shared their insights on protecting and managing local waterways and addressing the challenges facing the Inland Bays watershed in a changing environment. The panelists discussed various approaches to stormwater management, surface water protection and watershed management, agricultural best practices, and nature-based solutions in coastal zones.

Delaware Water Management Strategies

The panelists discussed the importance of integrated approaches to water quality, including shoreline restoration, stormwater management, and regenerative agriculture, explaining how these practices support the health of the Inland Bays by addressing cumulative impacts across the watershed. Discussions touched on Sussex County Conservation District's role in the field of stormwater management, living shorelines as a nature-based solution for erosion control and water quality improvement, and more. One panelist shared her personal journey from city life to farming, motivated by concerns about environmental impacts, particularly the potential

extinction of monarch butterflies. She discussed the interconnectedness of land and water issues, highlighting how human activities affect ocean systems and water quality.

Nature-Based Solutions for Coastal Preservation

The panelists talked about the importance of nature-based solutions, including in the context of the Thompson Island Living Shoreline Project to preserve an ecological and culturally-significant site. They emphasized the need to institutionalize the use of such solutions as a community approach, prioritizing them over traditional methods like bulkheads. They also shared personal experiences with regenerative agriculture and its positive impact on water quality and soil health, highlighting the role of conscientious consumer choices in promoting sustainable practices.

Sussex County Stormwater Policy Evolution

The panelists discussed the evolution of stormwater management policies in Sussex County, highlighting the shift from simple plans to complex, science-based analyses. They outlined incentives for compliance, including Conservation Stewardship Awards for developers and homeowners who go above and beyond regulatory requirements. Panelists also discussed ongoing workforce training efforts and enforcement measures, such as holding up building permits and writing violation letters. One panelist also emphasized the need for more consistent funding and institutional support for nature-based solutions like living shorelines.

Building Resilience in Community Projects

The panelists emphasized the need for a shift in attitude towards building resilience and green infrastructure in community projects, highlighting the importance of comprehensive, well-funded solutions to address environmental challenges. They discussed the necessity of workforce training to attract younger people to the area and the need for self-policing and active public participation in environmental efforts. They reflected on the progress made in water quality management over the past 30 years, citing significant improvements in point sources of pollution. They emphasized the importance of caring for water through various perspectives and actions, including restoring habitats and educating communities about sustainable practices.

Water Quality Challenges and Solutions

The panelists explored the challenges of achieving further water quality improvements, noting that more expensive and difficult solutions are needed as "low-hanging fruit" have been addressed. They emphasized the importance of data-driven policies, creative use of existing funds, and workforce training to address these challenges. They highlighted the need for a range of incentives that balance the interests of all stakeholders, including private landowners and public agencies. They suggested institutionalizing nature-based solutions and proposed using community efforts and local resources to achieve environmental and agricultural resilience in Sussex County.

Water Quality Improvement Strategies

A variety of strategies were discussed for uses of a fictional \$75 million for water quality improvements (refer to question #3). They share the importance of, focusing on data-driven assessments, working with a Total Maximum Daily Load (TMDL) which is the maximum amount of a pollutant that a waterbody can receive and still meet water quality standards. It serves as the scientific calculation and planning framework used to develop management strategies for restoring polluted waters by setting pollutant reduction targets and allocating reductions among point sources (such as discharge pipes) and nonpoint sources (such as stormwater runoff). The importance of large-scale submerged aquatic vegetation (SAV) restoration to build resilience against storms was also mentioned during the discussion. Another idea was to increase the purchases of ecologically-valuable land for conservation and continue to fund the conservation district's cover crops program, as it is successful and is a cost-effective environmental initiative.

7:45-8:00 Public Comments

Time was allotted for public comments and questions with discussions about community engagement, educational initiatives, the potential for HOAs to adopt more sustainable practices, and the need for continued progress in environmental restoration efforts. Comments and questions recognized included:

- A question from a public attendee about environmental restoration progress in Sussex County: Panelists discussed the progress made in environmental restoration efforts, highlighting the need to communicate success stories effectively while remaining cautious not to oversimplify or understate ongoing challenges. They emphasized the importance of visualizing improvements and sharing success stories like SAV restoration and living shorelines to inspire continued progress, while also acknowledging that not all areas have seen improvements. The development of a Backyards Community Engagement Program aimed at providing practical guidance and mentorship for HOAs involved in restoration efforts was mentioned as an example of collaborative work to enhance caring for the water as an important component of environmental restoration in the area.
- A public comment about Delaware's status on water quality: This prompted a discussion on successful examples like the DE Living Shoreline Committee's work based on community partnerships. The recreational water quality standards in Delaware were discussed and are based on a national standard allowing for a 36-in-1,000 risk of illness, and noted that natural sources like wildlife (e.g., birds) can also contribute to bacterial levels.
- A question from a public attendee about the economic value of green stormwater infrastructure: Panelists' response highlighted the positive impact on property values and the importance of maintenance and cost considerations for its implementation. There is a

potential for HOAs to adopt more natural, native planting designs to enhance community aesthetics, which could increase properties' economic value.

- A public comment regarding ideas on environmental education efforts, particularly aimed at youth: Prompted a discussion between both panelists and members in the audience about the use of the James Farm Preserve and the new Dr. Susie K. Ball Environmental Education Center, need for increased funding and curriculum development in STEM (Science, Technology, Engineering, and Math) education, particularly to incorporate local environmental examples. There was also a discussion of education funding challenges with recent school funding referenda in Sussex County.

The meeting ended with Claire thanking the panelists and all attendees for an informative and thought/action provoking discussion on the importance of community engagement, government support and business partnerships in addressing caring for the water, a complex environmental issue. A CIB staff member also announced details on an upcoming public event in Georgetown focused on coastal resiliency.

**CAC - 2026 Meeting Schedule 6-8 pm
Center Conference Room & Virtual**

Thursday, February 12, 2026

Thursday, April 16, 2026

Thursday, August 27, 2026

Thursday, October 22, 2026