



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

### **DATE & TIME**

Thursday, August 27, 2026, from 6:00 – 8:00 pm

### **LOCATION**

#### **Option 1: In Person (Registration Required)**

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

In-person attendance is free but limited due to room capacity and requires advance registration. Registration is accepted on a first-come, first-served basis until capacity is reached. Once capacity is full, registrants will be invited to attend virtually. To register for in-person attendance, visit:

<https://www.eventbrite.com/e/citizens-cafe-tickets-1992506726255?aff=oddtctcreator>

#### **Option 2: Virtual Participation (Zoom – Overflow or Preferred Attendance)**

Join Zoom Meeting: <https://us02web.zoom.us/j/83174379002>

Meeting ID: 831 7437 9002

One-tap mobile:

+1 646 931 3860,,83174379002# US

+1 929 205 6099, 83174379002# US (New York)

Dial by your location:

+1 646 931 3860 US

+1 929 205 6099 US (New York)

+1 301 715 8592 US (Washington DC)

Find your local number: <https://us02web.zoom.us/j/83174379002>

Meeting called to order by: Claire Simmers 6:05 pm.

## ATTENDEES

|                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                      | In-Person | Virtual | Total |
|------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------|-----------|---------|-------|
| CAC<br>Attending: in-person (8); virtual (3)<br>Dennis Bartow, Gail Dubowe John Fehrenbach, Mary Kunst, Cheryl Rehrig, Ken Silverstein, Claire Simmers, Cheryl Winston; Lee Bunting, Frank Piorko, Ken Sigvardson<br><br>Absent (4): Jay Headman, Irene Legiec, Tianyin (Tia) Ouyang, Richard Watson | 8         | 3       | 11    |
| Public                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                               | 7         | 8       | 15    |
| Center for Inland Bays                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                               | 4         | 0       | 4     |
| Total                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                | 19        | 11      | 30    |

### Meeting Summary

The meeting of the Citizens Advisory Committee (CAC) for the Delaware Center for the Inland Bays focused on resilience in the Inland Bays watershed, with presentations on state policy and climate action. Senator Stephanie Hansen detailed the history, process, and provisions of Senate Bill 9, Delaware's new freshwater wetlands protection law, explaining its permitting structure, exemptions, and the role of the Regulatory Advisory Committee (RAC). Susan Love from DNREC's Division of Climate, Coastal, and Energy presented Delaware's new Climate Action Plan, discussing greenhouse gas emissions, the impacts of climate change in Delaware, and the importance of land use, wetlands, and forests for both mitigation and adaptation. The meeting also included updates from the Center, such as the opening of a new resilience-themed exhibit and the launch of a community resilience webpage. Public questions covered topics like the comparison of the wetlands program to other states, the economic impacts of climate action, and challenges related to farmland preservation and solar energy deployment.

### 6:00-6:10 pm — Welcome & Overview

#### AGENDA

Topic: Resilience in the Inland Bays Watershed: Adapting, Protecting, and Thriving  
Claire Simmers, chair of the Citizens Advisory Committee, opened the meeting with a welcome and one minute reflection. Lisa Swanger, director of Outreach and Education at the Delaware Center for the Inland Bays, welcomed attendees and outlined meeting ground rules. Claire introduced the year's theme and introduced both speakers. Throughout the year, Citizens Café gatherings will explore resilience at different scales—from individual actions to community collaboration and public policy, recognizing that lasting progress depends on the combined efforts of individuals, organizations, and decision-makers. This August conversation builds on the strong foundation set in the previous two meetings by focusing on Delaware's resilience efforts through policy development as well as statewide planning and implementation.

### 6:10-6:50 pm — Guest Speaker

### *Senator Stephanie Hansen the 10th Senate District*

Senator Hansen represents people in Glasgow, Middletown, Odessa, and communities along the western side of Southern New Castle County. Senator Hansen has a bachelor's degree in geology from the University of Delaware and a master's degree in earth science from the University of New Orleans. Hansen began her professional career as an environmental scientist, and later a hydrologist, at DNREC. She also has a law degree from Widener University School of Law. Sen. Hansen is a prolific legislator best known for her work on Delaware's energy policy, the opioid epidemic and a host of environmental and conservation issues, including the prevention of native species extinction, the promotion of renewable energy and the protection of DE's wetlands. She currently serves as chair of the Senate Environment, Energy & Transportation Committee, vice chair of the Senate Elections & Government Affairs Committee, and a member of the Senate Agriculture, Education, and Health & Social Services committees. She also holds a seat on the budget-writing Joint Finance Committee.

#### Delaware Freshwater Wetlands Bill Overview:

Senator Hanson presented an overview of Senate Bill 9, the freshwater wetlands bill, highlighting the importance and value of wetlands in Delaware. She explained that Delaware was the only mid-Atlantic state without a freshwater wetland program prior to the bill's passage and discussed the categories of wetlands, with unique wetlands now explicitly protected as exceptional value wetland areas. The senator also addressed the decline in federal wetlands protection over recent years and emphasized the need for state-level action to protect Delaware's freshwater wetlands.

#### Delaware Freshwater Wetlands Program Proposal:

Senator Hanson discussed the long history of efforts to create a freshwater wetlands program in Delaware, dating back to 1988 when she started with DNREC. After multiple attempts and stakeholder engagement through various bills and resolutions, Senate Bill 9 was developed with input from over 50 groups and 180 people through stakeholder meetings from 2024 to 2026. The bill aims to streamline the permitting process by identifying 12 exempt activities that would not require permits, addressing previous concerns about lengthy approval times for simple projects.

#### Delaware Wetland Permit Regulations:

Senator Hanson explained the new wetland permit regulations in Delaware, outlining exemptions, conditional exemptions, and general permit categories. She clarified that the regulations were not related to offshore wind and described the role of the Regulatory Advisory Committee (RAC), which consists of 25 members and must develop initial regulations by August 1, 2027. The Wetlands Regulatory Advisory Committee established under Delaware

is composed of 25 diverse members representing environmental, agricultural, and business interests, alongside county executives or administrators. The purpose is to guide the rollout of Delaware's combined tidal and nontidal wetlands preservation and permitting program. RAC responsibilities are to assist in crafting initial rules, establish general permits for environmentally beneficial activities, minimize duplication with federal U.S. Army Corps of Engineers requirements, and formulate mitigation strategies. Initial regulations and the formal framework are targeted for implementation by August 2027.

She expressed a difficult point for her is that under Delaware Senate Bill 9, non-unique wetlands of one-half acre or less are subject to fewer protections through a streamlined permitting process, prompting concerns over reduced oversight despite mandatory landowner certification, environmental mitigation. She did note that full protections for unique, "Exceptional Value" tracts are included.

Senator Hansen asked Christophe Tulou, Executive Director, who is on the RAC, to express thoughts on the process of formulating SB 9 and he thanked all involved for willingness to work to achieve this bill. He sees the biggest challenges of RAC as definitions and members finding the courage to get to majority before the deadline.

**6:50-7:35 pm — Guest Speaker**

*Susan Love - Administrator, Climate & Sustainability Programs, DNREC Division of Climate, Coastal and Energy*

Susan holds a Master of Public Administration (MPA) and a bachelor's degree in environmental Soil Science from the University of Delaware. With over 20 years of public service experience, she applies her background to lead the state's efforts in climate change mitigation, sustainability programs, and sea-level rise adaptation. Currently, her team is driving Delaware's transition to net-zero carbon emissions by 2050 by implementing the Climate Action Plan. To directly benefit local Delaware communities, her initiatives focus on accelerating vehicle electrification, transitioning the energy grid away from fossil fuels, and preserving local wetlands and forests for natural carbon storage. Additionally, she spearheads localized public outreach, such as interactive community displays, to ensure residents are directly involved in building coastal and climate resiliency.

**Delaware Climate Action Presentation:**

Susan Love, Administrator of Climate and Sustainability Programs at DNREC, presented on Delaware's climate action plan and climate change impacts. She explained that Delaware's emissions per capita are 16 times higher than China's and 32 times higher than India's, with transportation being the largest source of climate pollution. Love detailed the state's climate projections, including a 3-degree Fahrenheit temperature increase since the late 1800s and

expected sea level rise of 1.5 feet by 2050, affecting 11% of the state at 5 feet of rise. She noted that 79% of Delawareans believe climate change is happening and poses a serious threat, with 66% supporting stronger state action on climate change.

#### Delaware Climate Action Plan:

Susan presented Delaware's new climate action plan, which was developed following the 2023 Climate Change Solutions Act passed with Senator Hansen's leadership. The plan includes 537 actions aimed at achieving net-zero greenhouse gas emissions by 2050 while also addressing climate resilience through strategies covering emissions reduction across sectors and four resilience categories including sea level rise and extreme heat. Susan emphasized that implementation is a shared responsibility across state agencies, businesses, nonprofits, and community groups, noting that while federal rollbacks make achieving targets more challenging, Governor Meyer's leadership in the U.S. Climate Alliance provides ongoing opportunities for collaboration.

#### **7:35-7:45 — Reflections**

*Christophe Tulou – Executive Director, Delaware Center for the Inland Bays*

He thanked presenters and attendees. Christophe highlighted the intersection of these topics with resilience building and land use policy, particularly affecting eastern Sussex County.

#### **7:45 pm — Public Comment**

Comment made that much of farmland in DE is owned by out-of-state investors. Delaware's Agricultural Lands Preservation Program is a voluntary, two-phase state initiative managed by the Delaware Department of Agriculture to protect working farms and forestlands from commercial development. What they can offer is being outpaced by the increasing land prices and the large investors who can pay more than DE Farmland Preservation Program. It is becoming increasingly difficult to maintain farmland. It was mentioned that solar deployment can help provide another revenue stream for farmers.

A question was asked about why solar panels are not more widely deployed. There are several challenges including a one-way electrical grid and the fact that not all buildings and locations are ideal, but technology is improving especially with battery back-up systems. There are going to be a few renewable energy-related bills in the Delaware legislature coming in 2027.

#### **7:45-8:00pm — Center Updates**

*Lisa Swanger, Director of Outreach and Education at the Delaware Center for the Inland Bays*

She announced the opening of the 2026 traveling exhibit: *Resilient Earth, Resilient Communities*, developed by the U.S. National Science Foundation's National Center for Atmospheric Research

(NSF NCAR). It is at the Susie K. Ball Environmental Education Center at the James Farm from August 29 – Oct 24 weekends.

The Center is excited to present a new section on the website, Community Resilience Resources. You can find this latest addition under the “Public Resources” tab at the top right-hand side of our website homepage. This new page reflects community thoughts, priorities, and questions surrounding resiliency for Delaware and its Inland Bays. The “Explore Community Concerns” area is divided into eight (8) major concerns or stressors, with an individual page dedicated to each one. Each “concern” page highlights how the stressor impacts the Inland Bays and its residents (both human and non-human) and offers multiple associated resources for further information and solutions that community members can explore. Check it out.

Decked Out – Join the Delaware Center for the Inland Bays on Thursday, September 24, from 6:30–9:30 PM at Big Chill Beach Club for an evening of food, drinks, live entertainment, exciting auction items, and fun—all in support of the Inland Bays.

Tickets available here: <https://inlandbays.org/events/decked-out-2026/>

#### **8:00-8:10 pm — CAC Discussions**

- Approval of draft CAC meeting minutes - April 15, 2026 – approved as circulated
- CAC Business

CAC continues to meet monthly in working sessions for planning and coordinating efforts on issues of public concern brought forth by the community related to the protection of the Inland Bays and their watershed. Details about the next meeting in September are forthcoming.

Frank Piorko, CAC member, reminded attendees about an upcoming Sussex County council vote on forest preservation legislation and encouraged continued support for the bill. The Sussex County Council is scheduled to vote on a final draft of its new forest preservation and tree-planting ordinance during its regular meeting on Tuesday, September 1, 2026. There is still time to contact your Sussex County Council representative.

8:10 pm: Claire Simmers closed the meeting with appreciation for all who attended.

#### **2026 CAC Meeting Schedule**

6:00 - 8:00 PM

Thursday, February 12, 2026

Wednesday, April 15, 2026 (formerly April 16, 2026)

Thursday, August 27, 2026

Thursday, October 8, 2026 (formerly October 22, 2026)