

Upper Delaware Scenic Byway, Inc.

July 27, 2020 Meeting Minutes

Attendance:

Voting members:

John Pizzolato, Town of Highland representative, Chairperson

Rosie DeCristofaro, Town of Delaware rep., Vice-Chair

Bianca Velez, Town of Lumberland rep.

Josh Felderstein, Town of Tusten rep.

Ginny Dudko, Town of Deerpark rep.

Teresa Spradling, City of Port Jervis rep.

Freda Eisenberg, Sullivan County alternate

Bill Dudko, Town of Deerpark alt.

Non-voting members:

Jamie Myers, National Park Service Upper Delaware Scenic and Recreational River

Roberta Byron Lockwood, Sullivan Catskills Visitors Association (SCVA)

Nicole Vallance, Callicoon Business Association (CBA)

Laurie Ramie, Upper Delaware Council

Guests:

Chief Richard Styndor, Town of Deerpark Police Department (departed at 7:22 p.m.)

Herb Clark, SCVA

John Erik Karkula, CBA Depot Committee

Kate Hawk, CBA Depot Committee

Linda Drollinger, River Reporter

Call to Order: Chairperson Pizzolato called the meeting held at Catskill Provisions in Callicoon to order at 7:03 p.m. He thanked proprietor Claire Marin for hosting the meeting in Catskill Provisions' newly-opened tasting room and acknowledged the small group tours that were provided of the Callicoon Depot in advance of the meeting. Self-introductions were made around the room.

Dialogue with Town of Deerpark Police Chief Richard Szyndor re: Hawk's Nest: Pizzolato thanked Chief Szyndor for making the trip upriver to speak with the committee. The chief said in the early part of this year, they had received many complaints about graffiti and speeding vehicles, in particular, at the NYS Route 97 Hawk's Nest. It had calmed down since Memorial Day and been less problematic due to COVID-19 restrictions. Thanks to funding from the National Park Service, the Deerpark Police Department is able to subsidize patrols of the Hawk's Nest from 11 a.m. to 7 p.m. every Saturday, Sunday, and on holidays. He said addressing the issues there is a work in progress. There were eight arrests since January. The Town of Deerpark has initiated a proposal to reduce the speed limit along that stretch of highway and is also looking into creating a law to decrease parking time at the scenic overlooks to 15 minutes in duration. They also took action with the permission of the hunting club that owns the former bus turn-off to block that area, which has done a tremendous job of curbing traffic. Pizzolato said that UDSB, Inc. is here to help protect, defend and promote the byway. He asked the chief whether options such as solar-powered speed signs and surveillance cameras would help or hinder, understanding that needing to review footage from cameras could add to the department's workload? Szyndor said that a lot of technology would be difficult to deploy in that area due to the terrain and, since this is a State highway, anything done would require approval by the NYS Department of Transportation. Pizzolato said UDSB, Inc. has formed a small committee consisting of Ginny Dudko, Bianca Velez, Bill Dudko, and himself. They are in the process of researching various options and will present their findings when the information is compiled. UDSB, Inc. perhaps could be helpful in applying for grants or searching for funding sources as well. He asked the chief to advise them of any initiatives he is interested in pursuing.

Velez said that she has been researching national grants which would require permissions and certain safety protocols. Pizzolato said he likes the idea of the 15-minute time limit to guard against loitering. Szyndor said that the town had asked the DOT to block scenic overlooks during COVID temporarily but the agency did not respond. G. Dudko said that would be a shame to deny access to the overlooks which are enjoyed by a lot of people. She said the Hawk's Nest is a big draw for the Upper Delaware Scenic Byway and our "gem" really. Pizzolato said it's arguably the most photographed section of the byway route. Szyndor said they found that most of the people congregating at the overlooks appeared to come from further away, the metropolitan and New Jersey area. Pizzolato said he had attempted to infiltrate the Facebook groups that are focused on the Hawk's Nest without much success. Some of them seem angry about the graffiti vandalism. This effort requires everyone's vigilance. Szyndor commented that there had been fewer filming permits requested for the Hawk's Nest lately, compared to approximately a half-dozen issued in 2018 for television and film projects. Velez asked who receives the revenue from those permits? Szyndor said that's a good question to explore that idea further. Ramie asked for more information on the speed limit reduction proposal. Szyndor replied that NYS DOT is currently doing an engineering study on a proposal to decrease the speed from 55 to 35 miles per hour in that vicinity, though they may choose to go lower. Pizzolato reiterated that the committee will get its ideas together for presentation and told Chief Szyndor, "We're here to support you" as he thanked him again for attending.

Business Items:

a.) **Approval of June 22, 2020 Meeting Minutes:** On a motion by G. Dudko, seconded by Velez, the teleconference minutes were approved, with all in favor.

b.) **Correspondence Report:**

Ramie handed out a report of outgoing and incoming correspondence, a list of informational requests through the website and hotline, memberships and book sales, and voting membership status since the last meeting. The written report is available upon request. She pointed out: 1) Sullivan Catskills Visitors Association has announced its new #CatskillsConfidence campaign which encourages businesses to follow CDC and NYS guidelines as they reopen and offering advertising opportunities through a radio spot with Bold Gold Media Group and a promotional video that will be posted on the SCVA Facebook page; 2) an exchange with the Delaware Highlands Conservancy, whose director Diane Rosencrance said the organization does not have the capacity to assume long-term maintenance responsibility for the pollinator garden at the Highland Access with the Barbara Yeaman Eagle Observation Blind but could request volunteers to help weed it; 3) a report from DOT Region 9 Maintenance Environmental Coordinator James Buck stating that the DOT has a contract to remove tree debris from recent storms two miles north of Barryville on Rt 97 between Dry Brook Road and County Rt. 21A on Aug. 3 with traffic maintained by flag persons; and a notification about the potential expiration of the UDSB logo trademark on Oct. 31 of this year that she will check for legitimacy since it may be a solicitation for the requested \$870 renewal fee.

c.) **Treasurer's Financial Report:**

Richardson provided a written report in his absence. The current balance is \$31,112.62. He received an email from NYS Comptroller DiNapoli requesting businesses and not-for-profit corporations to look into any un-cashed checks, credits, gift certificates, etc. to turn over to the State under the NYS Unclaimed Property Law. A review of his records found no such instances. Pizzolato asked Eisenberg if she had any information on when UDSB, Inc. can expect to receive the \$20,000 that Sullivan County granted through its 2020 Legislative Discretionary Contracts program. That revised amount of the allocation was affirmed through a resolution approved on April 29. Eisenberg suggested that Richardson re-submit an invoice and copy her on it for follow-up. Pizzolato noted that Sullivan County Manager Josh Potosek had recently mentioned the Upper Delaware Scenic Byway in a public forum positively.

d.) **Grants: Vista Enhancement; Butterfly Promotion; Business & Non-profit Signs:**

Pizzolato noted that The Delaware Company had submitted its Vista Enhancement grant application just prior to tonight's meeting but Ramie had not received it in time to forward to the committee. He linked in Debra Conway by speaker phone to explain the proposal. Conway reviewed the idea for The Kate Project to connect the National Park Service's Towpath Trail at the Roebling Bridge to the Highland River Access south of Minisink Ford. The Delaware Company would develop this in multiple phases, leading up to raising funds to commission a life-size bronze statue of a girl leading mules along the Delaware & Hudson Canal towpath to tell the unique story of the D&H and the children whose work was integral to its 1828-1898 operation. The path would be a ½ mile addition to connect those two sites, creating a 3-mile roundtrip trail. While The Delaware Company lost grants as a victim of COVID-related funding freezes, they hope to tackle selective vegetation clearing along that stretch as a first phase to show some progress. After soliciting bids, they received two for \$50,000 and \$30,000 which Conway said she considered excessive. This caused them to scale back the initial vision to focus on four major shade trees near where the benches and interpretive signs will be placed in the project's second phase. There is already kind of a natural trail there and it's a nice, scenic walk. The next bids came in at \$10,000 and \$5,000 but Conway said that the contractor with the lesser quote does not meet the NYS DOT's insurance requirements. Pizzolato said that one purpose of the byway is to serve as an economic engine. This enhancement of a historical resource in tandem with the National Park Service is a way to draw more visitors and keep them here to explore the area. Conway said the D&H Canal story is captivating and it's easy to get people excited about it as a phenomenal 19th century engineering feat, but the child labor story is largely untold. Pizzolato summarized that Conway's request is for UDSB, Inc. to designate \$10,000 to improve the path between the Towpath Trail and the Highland Access. Asked how much funding UDSB has available, Pizzolato said \$11,000 was allocated and not yet spent in the budget for Vista Enhancements. Felderstein asked if all the permissions are in place for the right-of-way work. Conway said the property is wholly owned by NYS Department of Transportation and they are on board, having walked the site with her. On a **motion** by G. Dudko, seconded by Velez, the committee voted in favor of allocating a \$10,000 UDSB Vista Enhancement Grant to The Delaware Company as proposed, with all in favor. G. Dudko said this will show the county that we're serious about investing these funds meaningfully and the historic hook is important. Pizzolato agreed this is a very visible project, a powerful story to tell, and shows coordination with federal and state entities.

e.) **Other Business Items:** None

Public Comment: None

Discussion Items:

- a) **Marketing Projects** – Pizzolato referenced handouts from Mid-Hudson Web showing the proposed basic outline for the new UDSB website based on discussions between the Marketing Committee and Steve Franzken. Images will be generously provided by nationally-renowned photographer Noah Kalina. Pizzolato reviewed the proposed blocks for a top slider featuring title, images, and a short description; History/About to tell users where and what UDSB is; Visitor Center with subcategories that will include updates on that developing physical space, byway visitor amenities, services like real estate agents, links to NPS and others; News & Events, which will require us all to contribute information to that feed; Experiences, from river trips to driving tours off the byway, nature walks, liveries, fishing guides, etc.; Health & Wellness, which is an opportunity to counteract poor health statistics by showcasing beneficial mind-body-spirit programs and recreational pursuits; Home Grown, featuring unique artisans, crafts, and products that are native to the byway region; Newsletter Sign-up; a Shop block for UDSB's revenue-generating items including several local history books; Support Us, to offer that opportunity; Directions, for navigation purposes; and Call to Action, to be determined for what story we want to tell. Pizzolato said that the web designer's proposal also includes Search Engine Optimization. Pizzolato said the Experience block could be organized by community.

The links to the National Park Service would be helpful since they maintain current lists of their registered permit holders for liveries and guides. He asked committee members for their reactions to the outline and what would they do with this website if funds were no object? Velez said she feels Americans are craving making connections to places which can be accomplished by telling their histories. Old photos provide context. The About Us section could be extended as an area to learn more about the history of this region. Keep the county historians busy by contributing articles. Velez said that makes it come alive. B. Dudko said that highlighting excerpts from Norma Schadt's book on the construction of the Hawk's Nest would be very appropriate as well as her expertise on historic markers. Pizzolato suggested that a subcategory could be called Discover Our Rich History.

- b) **Delaware Riverkeeper Network Initiative: Eldred Preserve Project** – Pizzolato said that Delaware Riverkeeper Network (DRN) Director Maya von Rossum had reached out about that organization's issues with the new Eldred Preserve's plans to discharge 17,000 gallons per day of treated wastewater into Halfway Brook. DRN initiated a lawsuit to try to compel a public hearing on this since the NYS Department of Environmental Conservation has granted the permit. Sullivan County Legislator Robert Doherty wrote a Letter to the Editor that was published to express environmental concerns. The Greater Barryville Chamber of Commerce had committed to writing a letter; however, a judge denied the public hearing first. Pizzolato said that GBCC's concern is that Eldred Preserve is promoting themselves as an ecolodge, and the Chamber is worried about imposing on the land and businesses that border along Halfway Book. He understands that it is a dual filtration system that removes paper products but everything else goes downstream. The DRN and Doherty would like to get others engaged. DeCristofaro asked if there had been a public comment period as the DEC deliberated on granting the permit. Pizzolato affirmed that there was and added that the project is located outside the Congressional boundary of the Upper Delaware Scenic and Recreational River. DeCristofaro said apparently the proposed wastewater treatment plant is in compliance with State regulations or it would not have been approved. Pizzolato said von Rossum's request expired once the decision was made but suggested that she could be invited to offer a presentation to the UDSB Committee to explain DRN's position.
- c) **Town of Highland Vista Clearing, Pollinator Garden Upkeep, and River Access Projects** – Previously discussed and/or included in the Correspondence report.
- d) **Workshop to Discuss Updating Upper Delaware Scenic Byway Enhancement Concept Plan** – Pizzolato asked Ramie to re-send the link to the 2002 plan so members can read through it and start making notes about areas that should be updated.
- e) **Other** – None

Follow-up Actions and Committee Reports:

- a) **Callicoon Depot and Visitor Center Project Update** – Vallance referenced three enlargements of conceptual renderings of the Callicoon Depot and Visitor Center that Construction Coordinator John Erik Karkula had developed in coordination with an artist, noting that these were prepared in part to solicit feedback through the upcoming community outreach process. The committee received its building inspection report with the results showing that the building is in good shape overall with no cracks observed in the foundation. It does need a new roof but the "bones" are solid. The committee is in the process of lining up Requests for Proposals for architects and contractors, and getting the necessary organizational structures in place. Once a lease is signed, the Callicoon Business Association will become responsible for taxes and insurance. The project awaits the U.S. EPA's review of the Phase I environmental study which found historical evidence

of fuel leaks and floods. The property housed a train station for 140+ years but no hazardous materials were ever stored on site. They found no buried tanks or materials there. A Phase II environmental study has been submitted to Sullivan County for approval of the costs. Kate Hawk noted that while the committee hopes that this project is on the precipice of the lease-signing, it has been a big problem to get estimates from busy contractors so that they're ready to go as soon as it is signed. Asked by Spradling who owns the property, Vallance replied that it's the New York, Susquehanna & Western Railway Co. The Depot portion is a 0.5-acre portion of the 127-acre parcel. The parent company's taxes are offset by a large abatement granted by the Sullivan County Industrial Development Agency. Since the railroad still uses this line to ship freight, the property is not for sale. Pizzolato thanked Vallance, Karkula, and Hawk for providing the chance to view the building's interior space.

- b) **NYS Department of Transportation Report** – UDSB Liaison Kris Gilbert had provided a written report which was included in the packets. B. Dudko said that it's difficult to make sense of the reference marker numbers that Gilbert provides. Pizzolato asked if it would be possible to get clarification of the nearest cross-roads to assist the committee in locating the work areas that she cites in her reports. DeCristofaro said she spoke with Gilbert about the guiderails section in the Town of Delaware just before the hospital. That area sits on a slope and the pavement is badly eroding which makes her feel unsafe driving past it, particularly during winter. Gilbert explained the huge amount of engineering that has to be done to address that area which is why it requires time to repair.
- c) **7/6 Letter from DOT Regional Director Choubah** – The meeting packets include a letter addressed to Upper Delaware Council Chairperson Larry H. Richardson and courtesy copied to the Upper Delaware Scenic Byway chair, Senator Metzger, Assemblywoman Gunther, and Sullivan County Legislature Chairperson Doherty, among others, from NYS DOT Region 9 Director Nicolas Choubah. It was in response to UDC May 7 correspondence regarding the Rt. 97 guiderail condition. It states that the contract for 18 runs of guiderail (Project 9TGD21) in the Towns of Delaware and Cochection was awarded on Feb. 27, 2020 and construction will occur this summer. Project 938949 (Rt. 97 slope stabilization in the Towns of Fremont and Delaware) "is still being designed and is still on schedule to be awarded in 2021". Choubah further writes, "In addition to these two projects, we are in the process of designing a repair for the area between reference markers 97 9602 1390 & 1366. This work is planned to occur this year using a separate contract. As you noted, some of the barrels had fallen down the hill and were no longer in place to provide warning. The barrels have been retrieved and replaced so as to warn travelers of the potential danger." Pizzolato reiterated his comment about detailing the locations of reference markers to facilitate the committee's understanding of locations.
- d) **7/9 River Reporter Letter to the Editor** – A copy of a Letter to the Editor of the River Reporter submitted by Ramie to clarify points made about the Callicoon Depot project from coverage of a recent UDSB meeting was handed out. Pizzolato thanked reporter Linda Drollinger for attending the UDSB meetings and helping to publicize the group's activities.
- e) **Anti-Littering Community Signage Rendering** – Pizzolato offered color copies to demonstrate a new signage concept which would add the circular logo stating "Please Keep [insert community name] Beautiful & Clean; No Littering" to the existing posts underneath the UDSB logo highway signs. This stacking was proposed by designer Eve Fisher in response to feedback at the last meeting expressing concern for a proliferation of new signs along Rt. 97 and their readability. No new locations would be required. Pizzolato asked if the committee is comfortable with submitting this rendering to the NYS DOT for approval. Hearing consensus that the sign concept is not overloaded, stands out as a different shape, but is not distracting to motorists, he then asked

whether the name should be that of the town or a hamlet, village, or city? It was decided that the first step will be requesting DOT approval of the design, then the committee could ask each supervisor for preferences on names. Pizzolato said he would like to see if Orange County Legislator Tom Faggione, who represents the City of Port Jervis, could facilitate a request for sponsorship of one sign there. The manufacturing cost is still being determined but is expected to be between \$150 and \$250 per sign. DeCristofaro commented that the names of the towns don't generally mean much to tourists. They're more familiar with the population centers.

- f) **Resource for Purchase of Milkweed Seed Packets** – Ramie noted that Upper Delaware Council Secretary Ashley Hall-Bagdonas had come across the Bentley Seed Co. which markets milkweed mix seed favors in “Help Save the Butterflies” packages for \$.075 per packet or less depending on the quantity ordered which she thought UDSB, Inc. may be interested in incorporating into its “Flyway on the Byway” campaign. A handout was provided. The committee agreed it was a good resource that could perhaps be linked to on the new website.

- g) **Other** – Lockwood was asked to comment on the state of tourism in Sullivan County. She said that the Sullivan Catskills Visitors Association will be moving to its new office in Liberty within a week. The space at the Liberty Mall will serve as an education center as well as its headquarters. They recently had a successful campaign with travel writers and influencers by delivering Sullivan Catskills gift boxes to provide a little taste of what this region has to offer. She said that visitation this summer continues to grow, including river traffic. The Dove Trail from last year's Woodstock 50th anniversary continues to be popular and has proven to be a great legacy tour. The Sullivan Catskills has been doing social distancing long before it was the thing to do with much open space and accommodating activities. The #CatskillsConfidence movement aims to instill confidence in travelers as everyone vies for leisure dollars and social media action. Businesses are participating in radio commercials and a promotional video to show what's open and how the safety guidelines are being followed. Everyone wants to come to the Sullivan Catskills, she said, noting that there were 10,000 travel guides requested in one week and that the website visitation is going wild as well after they had taken a pause in their promotions. SCVA put out a series of posters available for businesses to download that take a creative twist on safety measures in keeping with the Catskills brand, such as a “wash your hands” message showing that being done in a natural brook. Fall attractions will be promoted and there are major events booked through New Year's. If everything remains on track, she hopes that the room occupancy tax will be on par by the end of the year, making up for the closure period. Lockwood said she is confident that the tourism trade domestically will come out of this pandemic in a strong position.

Next Meeting Date: 4th Monday, August 24, 2020 with a presentation of the Friends of the Upper Delaware River, Inc.'s Japanese Knotweed study.

Adjourn: On a **motion** by G. Dudko, seconded by Spradling, the July 27, 2020 UDSB meeting adjourned at 8:56 p.m.

Minutes prepared by Laurie Ramie, 8/2/20