

**MINUTES**  
**ORANGE COUNTY SOIL & WATER CONSERVATION DISTRICT**  
**BOARD OF DIRECTORS**  
**February 17<sup>th</sup>, 2026**

The **MEETING** was **CALLED TO ORDER** by the Chairwoman at 9:00 AM. Directors P. DeBlock, J. Wright, B. Cheney, and P. Ruskiewicz were present along with K. Sumner (SWCD), E. King (SWCD), K. Brown (SWCD) and M. Martire (NRCS).

Cheney noted two corrections needed for the January meeting minutes. It should be Ruskiewicz, not DeBlock, who seconded the Motion to nominate Wright as Board Treasurer. Additionally, Cheney noted the misspelling of Marie Ulrich's name on page five.

**2026-2-1 Ruskiewicz made the Motion, Wright seconded, to approve January's Board Meeting Minutes with the corrections. All in favor.**

**ACTIONS TAKEN BETWEEN MEETINGS** –Routine bills were paid by the District since January's meeting.

**CORRESPONDENCE**

- Bank Statements
- Collateral Agreements
- Region 6 Feb '26 SWCC Report from Travis Ferry
- Rural Futures Winter 2026 Issue
- CCE Notice of Annual Dairy/Livestock Day & Trade Show
  - The Board discussed whether to participate in the March 25th livestock trade show as an outreach opportunity for the yearly performance measures. Brown expressed an interest in attending on behalf of the District.
- NYACD 2026 Legislative Day Booklet
  - The Board discussed the annual \$1,500 NYACD dues request and NYACD's role in organizing legislative days. The Association also helps facilitate opportunities for Districts to meet with their legislators. Cheney suggested arranging a local meeting with Assemblyman Eachus, Senator Skoufis, and Assemblyman Brabenec rather than going to Albany as part of a lobby day. Sumner agreed with Cheney's recommendation to pursue a local meeting with the legislators.
- Zimmerman Farm Service: Open House
- ShelterPoint: Reminder RE: Non-Roster Group Term Life Policy
- Delaware County: Winter '25-'26 Newsletter
- Conservation Connections: Erie County SWCD Winter '26 Edition
- NYACD: Jan '26 Executive Director Report

**Correspondence Outgoing From OCSWCD**

- The employment letter for Brown was emailed to the Directors. A correction was noted regarding her scheduled hours, which are 21 hours per week rather than 20. It was discussed that, as a part-time position, total annual hours cannot exceed 1,040 (half of a full-time equivalent). Brown indicated that this should not present an issue this year due to a mid-February start date. The District will confirm compliance with the County.
- Additionally, letters were sent to Gantz Farm Services and Stanley Wronowski Trust, two landowners whose properties would need to be crossed to access the Celery Ledge site.

**FINANCIAL REPORTS-** King reported that the District received the first quarter County appropriation & the 25% advance for the AEM Round 19 grant at the start of February. King noted a correction to the no-till receivables balance which should state \$273.36. This outstanding bill is from Werner Bass, who Held has repeatedly contacted regarding his no-till invoice. The Board discussed Werner Bass and reached a consensus to not allow him to rent until he pays & to place him on a prepay status. It was reported that the unobligated balance is expected to largely offset the \$90,000 due to the first quarter County appropriation, with the 25% advance for AEM Round 19 consisting primarily of staff time. The unobligated balance will be updated to accurately reflect cash flow.

**2026-2-2 Cheney made the Motion, Wright seconded, to file January’s Financial Reports for audit review. All in favor.**

**BILLS FOR BOARD APPROVAL**

Sumner added an additional payment, in the amount of \$95, to the Computer Shop which covers the work done to set up Brown’s laptop. Sumner noted that the first five listed payments represent previously approved cover crop reimbursements made by the Board.

**2026-2-3 Cheney made the Motion, Ruskiewicz seconded, to pay the bills with the added payment. All in favor.**

**CONTRACT REPORT UPDATE-** Per usual, the updates to the report are highlighted in red ink. The District is working on paying out the remaining balance of the CRF6 grant to the farmers while keeping in mind the cover crop sign off issues. Sumner reminded the Board that the CRF6 contract ends 4/30/26 and feels hopeful that the District will not have to carry the weight of the soil health payments. The Ag NPS Rnd 27 time extension request is pending State Committee approval. Sumner does not think the District will receive the AEM Rnd 18 final payment before the State blackout date. The District will most likely receive this \$40k payment in early summer. Given the District’s current stable cash flow state, Sumner is not worried about it.

**INTERAGENCY REPORTS**

**NRCS:** Martire reported that he is adapting to the ongoing staffing shortages statewide and is assisting other agencies where he can. NRCS is waiting on additional federal guidance regarding the program changes.

**CCE:** Schellenberg could not attend today’s meeting, but he provided King with a written update that she shared with the Board. The planter is almost ready and the manufacturer will let CCE know when it can be picked up or delivered. The roller crimper order has been placed. Additionally, the stormwater management series is starting up next week on Wednesday 2/25.

**Comments from Directors RE: FSA:** Cheney reported that he and Ruskiewicz will serve another term on the Soil & Water Board pending a vote by the Legislature. Sumner reminded the Board that the non-legislative Directors serve on a staggered three-year schedule.

There were no representatives from CCE, FSA, or WCC present at the meeting.

**STAFF REPORTS**

\*Sumner, King, and Held emailed their written staff reports to the Board prior to the meeting for review.

**E. King (SWCD)-**

King reported that between meetings her work focused primarily on completion of year-end reports for the District and staff, all of which have been finalized. The annual audit is scheduled for the first week of March, and preparation is underway, including gathering required documentation to upload to the auditor’s online portal. King also helped with Brown’s hiring process and final setup needs.

**M. Held (SWCD)-**

Held was not in attendance at today’s meeting, but Sumner relayed sections of her report to the Board. Sumner will present a preliminary list of projects for the AEM Rnd 19 program. Sumner recommends that the Board can allocate the \$300k without a competitive review process since all project requests have environmental benefits and are being pursued through several funding opportunities. Sumner suggested that the Board consider allocating Part C funds towards locally approved conservation projects, especially since there are not any large-scale floodplain bench projects scheduled. The District will rely on Part C funds to account for Brown’s salary since it was not factored into the 2026 budget.

CCA Exams: Held is scheduled to take two exams today as part of her CCA certification. King shared the good news that Held passed the pest management exam the day before.

**K. Brown (SWCD)-**

Brown thanked the Board for rehiring with the District. She began reviewing and signing off on agronomic practices while consulting the necessary paperwork. Brown has kept her CCA license which will allow her to serve as a bridge with State Committee. Brown downloaded the RUSLE program and spoke with NRCS about receiving the MOSES data for the soil health loss equation calculations. Held has been working with Brown to bring her up to speed on the AEM planning task before Held goes on maternity leave.

**K. Sumner (SWCD)-** Sumner provided the following reports and discussions to augment and add to his written staff report. Review “Old and New Business” for further information.

**OLD & NEW BUSINESS**

**Walkkill Floodplain Bench-** As previously mentioned, the District does not have another phase of the floodplain bench project scheduled. Sumner asked the District’s consultants for an updated evaluation of the results of the past phases and whether it is beneficial to continue the bench project upstream.

**Celery Avenue Ledge Lowering Project-** The District distributed requests for proposals to four construction contractors after the RFP was reviewed by our attorney. Despite only receiving one proposal back, the District clearly tried to solicit proposals from other contractors, including contractors who have completed previous phases of the floodplain bench and contractors who specifically expressed interest in the project. Sumner acknowledged that there could be an argument to rebid the RFP, but given the working relationship with said contractor, CEC Excavating, and his history of bidding projects very competitively, Sumner recommends that the Board endorse selecting him as the contractor. Shuback Farms, who is the official farm sponsor of the project, supports hiring CEC. This project will be placed in an AEM group of projects, which makes it an official Ag & Markets project, and ensures that the District can use the Ag & Markets procurement policy. Sumner noted that CEC’s bid totals \$351,600 and is well within the project budget. Other expenses include vibration monitoring systems, inspections, and possible adjustments to account for poor weather conditions. Sumner sent the RFP to the Department of State, DOS, but he did not receive a response.

## ORANGE COUNTY SWCD FEBRUARY 2026 BOARD MEETING MINUTES

Sumner is waiting for our attorney to review the construction contract before he sends it to DOS. The District's contact from DOS told Sumner that if we have a signed construction contract before our grant contract is executed, then the District is not subject to their procurement requirements such as minority/women owned businesses requirements.

The other three construction contractors that were provided with the RFP are Gurda Landscaping, Weidig Construction and Bluestone Excavating Corporation.

In discussing the intention to inspect nearby properties before and after construction, the possibility that some landowners might refuse to grant permission for the inspections was mentioned. Cheney recommended that the District provide LOs with a signoff that indicates they refused entry.

**2026-2-3 Ruskiewicz made the Motion, Wright seconded, for the District to enter a contract with Shuback Farms to provide reimbursement of their expenses related to the Celery Avenue Ledge Lowering Project (the Project), pending attorney review, and to endorse Shuback Farms entering into a construction contract with CEC Excavating for the Project. The District's contract with Shuback Farms will reimburse them fully for those expenses. All in favor.**

**Town of Goshen Permit-** The District is still waiting on the work permit from the Town of Goshen. An escrow payment was issued on 1/14, but no response has been received. Sumner asked Rob Schreibeis to speak with Supervisor Betro & asked Wendell from to contact the Town of Goshen's engineer. There has been a lack of communication in the past between the Town & the District which Sumner hopes to avoid with persistent follow-up. The Board discussed that previous escrow or application fees made to the Town of Goshen need to be reviewed to ensure proper accounting and potential credit.

While the project is otherwise ready to proceed, we are focused on obtaining the remaining permits. CEC is prepared to mobilize materials once approvals are in place. Cash flow constraints remain a concern, as expected reimbursements have not yet been received, though short-term financial options may be explored.

Cheney informed Sumner that the meeting with the County Commissioner of Finance & County Attorney regarding the Walkkill Maintenance Agreement needs to be rescheduled and asked whether 2/26 is doable. Sumner confirmed that the new date is agreeable with his schedule.

**AEM Round 19-** The Board discussed allocating the \$300k in project funds from the AEM contract. The District has until 5/1 to notify Albany which projects we want to allocate the funding towards. Project selection is guided by cost considerations. The District aims to spread the funds across multiple smaller projects rather than committing the full amount to a single large project. For this reason, Sumner has omitted the Raap bedded pack barn project & Tom Owens' fuel storage project. Jason Touw has requested several projects that are being held out for board consideration. Instead, Sumner recommends submitting these three applicants in the Ag NPS Round 31 funding opportunity which is due 4/20. Sumner shared his proposed projects with the Board which include the following; The Celery Avenue project (discussed earlier), various projects at Winslow Therapeutic, Callisto Vineyards (agricultural mixing facility), Jason Soudant barnyard project, Alex Ronne fuel storage, and Tomas Helik grazing system, The District is waiting on confirmation from Greystone Stables & Pete Ewanciw whether they want to proceed with an application. If so, these would be added to the AEM 19 project list. Sumner recommended to Touw that he prioritize an access road project for the AEM funding and we pursue upcoming competitive funding opportunities for additional priority projects. Sumner is waiting on a response from Touw whether he is agreeable to this approach. This approach allows these applicants to access AEM funds directly without waiting for Albany's competitive review process.

Shuback has expressed interest in another irrigation project. If there were other farms that were interested in an irrigation project, then a group application could be submitted to the next CRF round. The District hopes to find out today if the project applications submitted for CRF Round 9, which included the Raap barn project and Pine Island Turf Nursery irrigation project, were selected for funding.

The District did not rank these proposed applications since they all would provide environmental benefits and all pending project funding requests are being actively considered. Sumner discussed cost sharing percentages with the Board and proposed that the District decide on a set contribution rate for farmers towards the project. The highest that the District can ask the State to pay is 87.5% of the total project cost.

**2026-2-4 Ruskiewicz made the Motion, Wright seconded, to approve the preliminary project funding plan presented to the Board. All in favor.**

**O'Dell PDR Project-** Sumner reminded the Board that Alan Sorensen, from the Planning Department, was expected to meet with the OC Land Trust to clarify why they could not work on the O'Dell application this year; however, that meeting has not occurred. Brown followed up and was informed that Jim Delaune had been out of the country. This matter is on the agenda for tomorrow's Ag & Farmland Protection Board meeting. The O'Dell's have completed the subdivision that was set by Dave Behm as a condition for FPIG (NYS) funding. They would be prepared to transfer the house out of their name, conditional on receiving funding. However, Ag & Markets has stated it will not consider the funding application until the house is removed from their ownership, while the O'Dell's attorney recommends waiting until funding approval is assured. This remains a key issue to be resolved. Sumner has communicated with the County Planning Department regarding whether the application could proceed without the Land Trust, but instead with Soil and Water co-sponsoring the application, along with the AFPB (County); however, concerns have been raised about procurement requirements and the need for a formal process if the County were to work on an application for a private individual. Sumner noted that tension between the Land Trust and the O'Dell's may further complicate the matter. The Board discussed potential next steps and strategies to move the application forward. DeBlock suggested that the Board enlist the help of an assemblymember to speak with David Behm at Ag & Markets regarding the Farmland Protection Implementation Grants Program application.

**Barton & Loguidice Agreement-** The District continues to work with Barton & Loguidice on an as-needed basis. The District received a memorandum outlining an anticipated scope of services for the upcoming year. Additionally, the term agreement extension is worded not to exceed \$15,000 without mutual consent. Sumner reviewed the updated 2026 billing rates and found them acceptable. Board approval was requested to execute the contract extension. A motion was made and seconded to enter into the agreement with Barton & Loguidice for 2026.

**2026-2-5 DeBlock made the Motion, Cheney seconded, to enter the contract as presented with Barton & Loguidice for 2026. All in favor.**

**NYCLASS-** Upon further reviewal, King & Sumner recommend that the District join NYCLASS, noting that many municipalities and Soil & Water districts participate. If the Board is supportive, then King will prepare the required resolution and enrollment paperwork at the March Board meeting.

**Next meeting date: March 16<sup>th</sup>.**

**ADJOURNMENT**

**2026-2-6 Cheney made the Motion, DeBlock seconded, to adjourn the meeting at 10:25 AM. All in favor.**

Report to Board

KMS

February, 2026

## **Wallkill Flood Projects –**

### **Floodplain Bench**

We currently are not engaged in any active efforts to extend the floodplain bench project further upstream from Phase 4. While the original conceptual plans prepared by our consultants showed the bench continuing to Oil City Road, I feel that a current evaluation of the feasibility of continuing the bench is warranted to determine whether significant modification of the design approach should be considered. This task is on the 2026 Continuation of Agreement for Services with B&L (on agenda for review/approval).

**Celery Avenue ledge lowering project** – Request for Proposals was distributed to four construction contractors after review by Attorney Hoyt. It was also provided to DOS contact. Results will be reviewed at the meeting, with potential selection of contractor in conjunction with sponsoring farm Shuback Farms.

Still waiting for reply from Town of Goshen on our permit application after escrow deposit was made on 1/14/26. I have included funding for this project in our DRAFT AEM Round 19 Tier 4 Implementation Program projects which will be presented to the Board for review at the meeting.

**Carbon Farming Project** – Still waiting on final payment of \$4,268.32 on Southway project.

**AEM Round 18** – Close out are being sent to NYSSWCC, waiting for comments and final payment (projected to be \$40,930).

**AEM Round 19** – 25% advance on technical services portion of contract has been received. A list of farms/farm projects we propose to fund through the Tier 4 Implementation portion of the contract will be presented at the meeting for preliminary approval.

**CRF Round 7 Irrigation Projects** - Two of three projects have procured equipment and/or completed construction work, with additional planning and administrative work ongoing. These contracts extend until 11/2028.

**Revision of Wallkill Maintenance Agreement** –Continues to be a frustrating effort. I am concerned that the Second Amendment distributed to the towns in October, 2025 will need to be revised yet again due to language in it that is no longer applicable. I have reached out to County Attorney's office about this twice with no reply. We also still have not received a reply from OCDPW with regard to the balance in the Fund.

### **AgNPS Round 27 –**

Time extension request is on the NYSSWCC agenda for their February meeting (today).

Current Contract end date – March, 2026. Amendment requests 1 year time extension.

**AgNPS Round 29** –. No activity to report

AgNPS Round 31 – We are awaiting results from the CRF 9 Round in which we requested funding for the Raap Pack Barn project. If that application is unsuccessful, we plan we re-submit under AgNPS Round 31 (due April 2026). We also plan to request funding for Owens fuel storage project through AgNPS 31. This

project was unsuccessful in AgNPS round 30. Neither Owens nor Raap project was considered for AEM Tier 4. Due to the high cost, we felt it was more appropriate to seek funding for these two projects through one of the competitive grants. Callisto Ag Chem project was also included in the non-funded rd 30 proposal, but because this project has a more modest budget, it is included in our proposed AEM Tier 4 project list.

### **Equipment Planning**

**Skoufis Equipment Funding** –Contacted Skoufis’ office yet again on 2/4 to request assistance on un-stalling the funding agreement.

### **Miller Farm Easement Violations**

Participated in a zoom meeting with the litigator retained by the Town on 1/30. Nothing further to report at this time.

### **Other Items**

New Hire – See employment offer letter prepared for Kristen Brown. She has accepted the position. Note that the letter states 20 hours per week, her schedule will actually be 21 hours/week.

O’Dell PDR – was discussed at the AFPB meeting on 1/21/26. I proposed a joint application effort between SWCD and the County. County department heads at the meeting thought this would not be possible without a ‘request for proposals’ preceding the application effort. Sorensen and Wiley offered to meet with OCLT to determine why they aren’t able to work on an O’Dell FPIG application until 2027. I also suggested that the AFPB should receive farmland protection funding requests that aren’t handled by the town. The meeting was discussed at the January SWCD Board meeting which ended up being postponed until the day after the AFPB meeting. Kristen followed up with Sorensen, who reported that he had not yet met with OCLT.

I am in the process of preparing second review of Four Corners Solar Project for the Town of Warwick Planning Board.

**Emily King**

**Secretary to the Board Update**

**2/13/26**

I completed and submitted the 2025 Annual Treasurer's Report and Part A report to State Committee via SharePoint. My attention is now focused on preparing for the District's yearly audit which will occur during the first week of March. I helped prepare the final budget report for the AEM Round 18 closeout. I updated and uploaded the District's hourly reimbursement rates for grant work to SharePoint. I requested confirmation from Travis via email that the State received all the needed reports for the 2025 State aid & annual reporting.

I have received a few phone calls regarding soil group worksheets, collected the needed information, and shared it with Mary to assist her in the process. In preparation of Kristen Brown's hire date, I ordered a new laptop, corresponded with our IT provider, and delivered it to him. Kristen's laptop is correctly configured, and I am currently working on setting up her desk work phone.

On 2/6, the District received both the 1st Quarter '26 County Appropriation, \$78,873.50, & the 25% advance payment for AEM Rnd 19, \$74,875.00. Kevin and I discussed the negative unobligated account balance and confirmed that it is not a cause for concern. The 1st Quarter County Appropriation payment will change the balance. Kevin and I intend on creating a new recording method to more accurately reflect the unobligated balance.

Lastly, I prepared the profit and loss report for January via QBO and added the approved 2026 budget. I updated the online bank accounts to reflect the total listed on December's Dedicated Fund Summary. I began tracking the District's cash contribution from the District to farm projects in closer detail on the DFS as well. As always, please let me know if you have any questions or concerns. Thank you!

As always, please let me know if you have any questions or concerns. Thank you!

Best,

Emily

## OCSWCD Technician Update

Mary C. Held

2/13/2026

### **Intro:**

Still pregnant.  
Still due March 17<sup>th</sup>.

SGW Info: Updated SGW form, sent to Orange County Assessors.

Em2 (base model) of EmRiver Portable Stream Table

- <https://youtu.be/Q42i9yNbwHI?si=NHuvwwgQ-QfdQAWI>

### **Equipment:**

No update

### **CIG Grant R/C:**

Going back and forth with I&J. Total cost for flex-wing 15.5' R/C is \$28,000. Forwarded invoice to Erik. **Update: Erik reached out to I&J to get updated quote since they couldn't get their act together to give it to me.**

### **Project Roller Crimper Plan for 2026:**

No update.

Jason Touw (CIG)

- Farm 2680 tract 8843 Field 1 (rye)
- Farm 1360 tract 7407 Field 45 (rye)

Alex Ronne

- Farm 1433 tract 791 field 3 (rye)

Phil Johnson

- Farm 2864 tract 8752 field 6 (rye)

Mike O'Dell (CIG and SWCD R/C)

- Spray Only:
  - Tract 755 field 25
  - Tract 755 field 9
  - Tract 9606 field 16 (half)
  - CRANBERRY HOLLOW, ~3.65 ac
- Crimping:
  - Tract 9606 field 16 (half), 17, 18, 30, 31

### **LCSP:**

Please see bills to be paid for 2026 Payments on CC planted in Fall 2025.

Additional payments to--

Mike O'Dell: 50 acres, \$3,500  
Jados Farms: 50 acres, \$3,500  
R&G Produce: 50 acres, \$3,500  
Chuck Rowe: 50 acres, \$3,500  
Minkus Family Farms: 50 acres, \$3,500

### LCSP 2026 Report

Allocated budget:		\$ 70,000.00
spent +	150 cap	\$ 60,542.05
remaining		\$ 9,457.95

Remaining is what we have remaining in LCSP budget after these payments.

### CRF Update:

#### Round 6:

No update other than working with Kristen and corresponding with State Committee to certify additional cover crop payments, crop residue management payments, and soil carbon amendment (compost spreading) payments.

Question of if Matthew Southway compost application is certifiable and able to be paid out through CRF6. There is considerable funding available within the CRF6 budget, and plenty of money to go around for everything and more. State Committee hasn't been able to provide us with any examples of complete close-outs for any of the practices we're requesting assistance with, so it's been a bit of 'trial by fire' in grabbing everything we need for the CRF6 close-out.

See CRF6 funding summary, though there has been no update since Jan.

Contract end date: April 2026

Round 9: Update on funding allocation/grant award should be available at some point Tuesday, Feb 17<sup>th</sup>. Otherwise, as of writing this report, no update. Jessy Raap and Chip Lain applications were submitted. I've been told to expect notifications about this grant in February. If Jessy Raap has not been funded through this grant round, we will submit through AGNPS.

### AGNPS Update:

Round 27: Contract End Date: March 2026 (was extended)

- No update from technician.

Round 29:

- No update from technician.

**AEM Update:**

Jessy Raap CNMP: Complete, paid.

*Round 18:*

- Contract End Date: Dec 31<sup>st</sup>, 2025
- Contract Final Report Due: Feb 28<sup>th</sup>, 2026
  - o Closeout mostly complete (this is where most of my time was dedicated this month), one financial summary still required – working with Emily on this. Closeout should be complete well in advance of deadline.

*Round 19:*

- Tier 3s in progress, workload re-allocated between myself and Kristen:
- We've discussed the requests for funding together, Kevin will have a more in-depth update on that.

**CCA Testing**

*Passed CCA test sections:*

- NE pest management
- NE soil and water management
- International soil management

*Registered for Feb 2026:*

- NE Regional nutrient management (taken 2/16/26)
- International nutrient management (scheduled to be taken 2/17/2026)
- International pest management (scheduled to be taken 2/17/2026)

*Remaining CCA test sections if I pass these:*

- NE regional crop management
- International crop management