

## **Citizens Advisory Committee**

**Jay Heritage Center, 210 Boston Post Rd, Rye, NY 10580**

### **Hybrid Meeting**

**Thursday, December 11, 2025 – Meeting Summary**

#### **Welcome**

- The meeting kicked off at 10:04am with 63 attendees (27 in-person, 36 online), and 21 CAC members represented.
- **Nancy Seligson** (CAC NY co-chair) thanked everyone who came and went over the meeting's agenda. She noted that while these are difficult times, we also need to focus on the great work going on and 'keep our eye on the ball of Long Island Sound'. **Holly Drinkuth** (CT CAC co-chair, The Nature Conservancy) also noted that the meeting would hold time both for business and to celebrate Nancy for her incredible work over 30-35 years. This meeting is Nancy's last as NY co-chair.
- **David Miller** (NY League of Conservation Voters) moved to approve the last meeting's meeting minutes, **Sarah Crosby** (The Maritime Aquarium) seconded. The motion carried.

#### **CAC Reports and Updates**

- **Maureen Murphy** (Citizens Campaign for the Environment) and **Denise Savageau** (CT Association of Conservation Districts) reported that no nominations were received for the NY CAC co-chair position. Maureen encouraged folks to send her nominations, and to really think about who can perform this role. A nomination slate must be sent 30 days in advance of the vote which could be held at the March meeting or by special election remotely.
- **Joint CAC/STAC Priority Letter:** Nancy Seligson reported the CAC and STAC co-chairs worked very hard on the joint priority letter to the Management Committee and forwarded to work group co-chairs. The Implementation Team requested that the CAC and STAC consider sharing priorities earlier in the year to be more easily applied to annual work plans. Meeting attendees discussed holding the joint meeting in June. **Jim Ammerman** (LIS Partnership/NEIWPC) noted the LIS Research Conference is the week before, so the group should check on that before making the decision final. *Action: Confirm dates of the LIS Research Conference to not complicate travel for researchers before confirming Joint CAC/STAC Meeting for June.*
- **Plum Island Letter:** The CAC in coordination with Protect Plum Island Coalition (PPAC) submitted a letter to the LIS Management Committee addressing a request from EPA Administrator Lee Zeldin's office. The letter outlined the importance of Plum Island and requested EPA work within existing authorities to advance its permanent protection. The

letter was delivered on the day the government shutdown. **Leah O'Neill** (EPA LIS Office) noted that the EPA LIS office is engaged and that the letter helped advance internal discussions regarding the federal and LIS Office roles. Nancy noted **Denise Stranko** (Save the Sound) and **Adrienne Esposito** (Citizens Campaign for the Environment) provided information during the discussion with Administrator Zeldin's staff which she felt contributed to his personal interest in the issue of Plum Island's conservation.

**Policy Updates** from policy chairs Adrienne Esposito (NY) and Denise Stranko (CT).

- **New York:**
  - The NYS passed a bill for septic replacement increasing grants to \$25k per homeowner. Suffolk County residents can receive up to \$40k when combined with the Suffolk County program which was increased to \$15k per household. (Average cost of a system is \$25-k\$35k). The NYS funding initiated by the governor is available to any county that adopts the program. *Potential Action: Invite Hope Savercool and Sarah Healy present a septic replacement presentation to help address questions about program implementation, particularly in counties such as Westchester that have not yet adopted it.*
  - Work continues with the governor's office to establish regulations that require leachate from landfills to be filtered for PFAs. Most sewage treatment plants are discharging in estuaries. Citizens Campaign for the Environment is pursuing grants for municipalities to help them adhere to these regulations.
  - Advocacy for legislation to protect horseshoe crabs continues. The Senate passed a bill and it moved to the governor's office. ([Update: Since the meeting, the NYS Horseshoe Crab Protection Act has been adopted.](#))
  - The NYS Clean Water Coalition is working to sustain funding for sewer and drinking water infrastructure funding. \$3.4 billion allocated in 2025 and efforts are underway to maintain that level.
  - CCE held a meeting attended by 40 local villages and towns to help communities to learn about the Environmental Bond Act with funding support from the LIS Funders Collaborative.
- **Connecticut:**
  - Preparations are underway for the 2026 legislative session, which is the third session in a row requiring defense against rollbacks to the Connecticut Environmental Protection Act (CEPA).
  - Advocacy will continue against imposing a tax on clean energy programs in the state. Work continues establishing protections for vegetative riparian buffers including submission of a work group report to the assembly by Jan 15. **Bill Lucey** (Save the Sound), who is part of the work group, said they might provide a majority and a minority report to the assembly, but he noted that CTDEEP has been very involved and they hope to have a committee bill by early February that would establish specific regulations for riparian buffer management.

- Efforts to restore EJ climate funding, secure thermal energy funding and release bond funds for the Renewable Energy Credit (REC) program are underway, in addition to state budget requests to support heat pumps, housing improvement, and retrofit funding.
- Federal Updates:
  - The first session of the 119th Congress is nearing completion and the current continuing resolution expires on Jan 30, requiring congressional action on FY26 appropriations.
  - The House announced it will not vote on appropriations until January. The Senate is holding votes on health care subsidies, which must happen before FY26 appropriations can be finalized. A partial government shutdown is a possibility.
  - Reauthorization of LIS. HR288 remains a priority. The bill includes the same funding authorizations, and in an election year, members may be inclined to support bipartisan legislation. Work on FY27 appropriations is underway now with a target date of Jan 31. The President's budget is due the week of Feb.

**Work Group Updates** were given by the CAC vice chairs Sarah Crosby (The Maritime Aquarium at Norwalk, CT vice chair), **Andrew Ely** (Project Oceanology, CT vice chair), **Victoria O'Neill** (National Audubon Society, CAC secretary and NY vice chair), and **Sarah Deonarine** (Manhasset Bay Protection Committee, NY vice chair).

- **Thriving Habitats and Abundant Wildlife** (presented by Sarah Crosby): The work group met on Tuesday, December 9<sup>th</sup>, with the goal of reviewing the projects that were under consideration for supplemental funding through LIS Partnership. The work group heard about projects including: Save the Sound's river restoration network, the LIS Eelgrass Collaborative with particular focus on ocean acidification, a lobster trap removal project from The Maritime Aquarium, the LIS Stewardship Strategy, and a river herring monitoring project from CTDEEP. The group also heard from USGS on a completed project focused on marsh migration modelling. For more information on this work group, reach out to its co-chairs **Harry Yamalis** ([Harry.Yamalis@ct.gov](mailto:Harry.Yamalis@ct.gov)) and **DeAva Lambert** ([DeAva.Lambert@ct.gov](mailto:DeAva.Lambert@ct.gov)).
- **Informed and Engaged Public** (presented by Andrew Ely): Since this work group is based on a new goal of the LIS CCMP, Andrew began his summary by reviewing the goal's 3 objectives: 1) public access and sense of belonging, 2) environmental education and literacy, and 3) fostering stewardship and sustainable behaviors. The most recent work group meeting included lighting talks from Surfrider NYC, CT Audubon, and NYSG, and focused on discussing the work group's priorities for 2026 that would be communicated to the Management Committee. Their next meeting will Jan 14. For more information on the IEP work group, reach out to its co-chairs **Lilli Genovesi** ([lg543@cornell.edu](mailto:lg543@cornell.edu)) and **Maggie Cozens** ([margaret.cozens@uconn.edu](mailto:margaret.cozens@uconn.edu)).
- **Clean Waters and Healthy Watersheds** (presented by Sarah Deonarine): This goal's objectives are centered around: 1) nutrients, 2) watershed health, 3) pathogens, 4) toxic

contaminants, and 5) marine debris. The group has a large membership that includes CAC members. They met in November and discussed 6 priority projects for 2026: a project comparing turfgrass replacement alternatives, a Suffolk County decentralized sewage plant, a land cover mapping analysis, Suffolk County pathogen action plan (DEC and Suffolk County – expanding to include 2 new pilots), lobster trap recovery and assessments, and marine debris cleanups. The work group has two subgroups: one to discuss a bay hypoxia indicator and one focused on nature-based protections. For more information on the CWHW, reach out to its co-chairs **Kelly Streich** ([Kelly.Streich@ct.gov](mailto:Kelly.Streich@ct.gov)) and **Hope Savercool** ([hope.savercool@dec.ny.gov](mailto:hope.savercool@dec.ny.gov)).

- **Sustainable and Resilient Communities** (presented by Victoria O’Neill): The work group hosted a packed working meeting on November 12 where they provided plenty of updates on their latest work for coastal resilience month: 2 coastal resilience forums in NY, field trip in CT, and a green infrastructure roundtable (partner event). In Westchester, they’re working to revive the LIS Intermunicipal Council, which as previously active in the 2000s, and hoping to eventually have all communities represented. The group also highlighted their SRC Annual Workshop scheduled for Dec 4 and 5, which would include a Resilience 101 session, a panel discussion on nature-based solutions, and a session highlighting three example community projects from the Planning Support Program. During this meeting, the group also heard about the latest round of funding through the Grant Writing Assistance Program and the Planning Support Program, received updates from the Community Decision-Making Subgroup and an ongoing NYC Needs Assessment, discussed priorities for 2026, and reviewed comments received on the work group’s new 5-year work plan. For more information on the SRC work group, reach out to **Elizabeth Hornstein** ([eeh78@cornell.edu](mailto:eeh78@cornell.edu)), **Sarah Schaefer-Brown** ([sarahschaefer-brown@cornell.edu](mailto:sarahschaefer-brown@cornell.edu)), **Sara Powell** ([slp285@cornell.edu](mailto:slp285@cornell.edu)), **Ben Goldberg** ([bgoldberg@cornell.edu](mailto:bgoldberg@cornell.edu)), **Deb Abibou** ([deb.abibou@uconn.edu](mailto:deb.abibou@uconn.edu)), or **Sarah Schechter** ([sarah.schechter@uconn.edu](mailto:sarah.schechter@uconn.edu)).

Following work group updates, Nancy Seligson encouraged CAC members to get involved in these work groups and collaborate. Holly shouted out **Christina Lizzo** (Citizens Campaign for the Environment), who regularly emails updates to the CAC on upcoming work group meetings.

### Long Island Sound Partnership Updates

- **Christine Ash** (Deputy Director, EPA Region 2) joined the call to provide an update on LIS Partnership’s director position (which has been vacant since **Mark Tedesco’s** retirement early last year, with **Nikki Tachiki** serving as Acting Director in June through the fall of 2025 as part of an EPA Detail). Christina noted that EPA is committed to hiring a permanent director for LIS Partnership, but the process is lengthy, with lots of stages of review and approval (might take some months). **Leah O’Neill** (EPA Region 1) will provide interim leadership.
  - When asked by the group why Nikki could not provide leadership again, Christine clarified that when someone is allowed a temporary promotion in EPA through a

Detail as Nikki was, they're only allowed a limited amount of days in that position per year.

- In a previous meeting, the CAC had requested a letter from the EPA explaining the decision to close the EPA Long Island Sound office in Stamford. Christine noted that the EPA is working on it, and that while the move helped reduce spending, they recognize it presented some challenges.
- Christine wrapped her updates by recognizing Nancy for her 30+ years of leadership. *Thank you on behalf of EPA!!!*
- Next, **Leah O'Neill** provided some updates from the LIS Partnership:
  - The Management Committee meeting usually held in person in October over the course of 2 days had to be cancelled due to the government shutdown.
  - Leah thanked the CAC and STAC for providing the priority letter and noted that work groups are currently working on addressing some of those recommendations into their work plans.
  - Funding for the program is currently tied up in appropriations; under a continuing resolution, the program is working with last year's funding amount.
  - EPA has received the last installment of the Bipartisan Infrastructure Bill budget. Recommendations on how to distribute that final funding should happen at the April 16<sup>th</sup> Management Committee meeting.
  - Leah clarified how supplemental funding is different to base budget: *base funding* is for ongoing work that has already been approved by the Management Committee in the past; *supplemental funding* is reserved for new projects or significant expansions of ongoing work that cannot otherwise go through the competitive channels (such as LIS Futures Fund or LIS Community Impact Fund).
  - LIS Futures Fund's 2025 slate of 36 projects was announced in early December. The grants represent a nearly \$12 million investment in conservation projects around the Sound and generated an additional \$8 in match. See the press release [here](#) for more details.
- **Cayla Sullivan** (EPA Region 2) announced that LIS Partnership will soon be unveiling a new microsite for tracking and reporting. The new microsite aims to enhance the connection between the CCMP actions and their impacts.
  - In the CCMP, *objectives* serve as 'ambitious goal posts' and they each have *measures of success* meant to measure their progress. Each objective also has *supporting indicators*, which they are not bound to, but which help provide further insight. In the past, LIS Partnership had *ecosystem targets* and *supporting indicators* that were not as connected to the CCMP and stood alone on the LIS webpage. In the new microsite, each CCMP objective will have its own page to illustrate its related measures of success and supporting indicators. Each page will also include a focus question to help "tell a story" and capture the user's attention, as well as illustrate the status of the measures and indicators (i.e. *behind schedule, meeting goal, ahead of schedule, under construction, or no data*), and include information on related challenges and actions. The project

team is working on developing the content for the indicator pages now and are planning to upload the content Dec 29-31, and have the final pages done by Jan 15.

- **Update:** Since the writing of these minutes, [the microsite has been published](#); the team is currently requesting people review the site and provide feedback to Cayla Sullivan ([Sullivan.Cayla@epa.gov](mailto:Sullivan.Cayla@epa.gov)) by **February 13**.
- Cayla also announced a **Hypoxia Communications Workshop** is scheduled for March 10 in Bridgeport. The workshop will focus on discussions around how to best communicate hypoxia to local communities. Those interested in attending can email Cayla Sullivan ([Sullivan.Cayla@epa.gov](mailto:Sullivan.Cayla@epa.gov)) or **Nicole Hammond** ([Hammond.nicole@epa.gov](mailto:Hammond.nicole@epa.gov)).

### **Celebrating Nancy Seligson**

The rest of the meeting was dedicated to celebrating Nancy Seligson on her last day as co-chair of the CAC. **Holly** opened the recognition, and thanked **Robert Burg**, noting the event was his idea, his work to secure the venue at the last minute, and his collaboration with **George Hoffman** (Setauket Harbor Task Force) to prepare a NY state proclamation. Robert shared a few words, and Holly read the proclamation aloud. Next, Holly invited Adrienne Esposito and Maureen Murphy to speak. “I simply adored working with you. Thank you doesn’t do it,” Adrienne said. On behalf of Citizens Campaign for the Environment and the CAC, Adrienne and Maureen presented Nancy with a custom-made glass etching of a sailboat. Mark Tedesco followed with a few words noting “Nancy always anchored the program and kept us as a government-run group connected to the public and people (...)”. Holly then opened the floor for additional reflections. David Miller, **Kamazima Lwiza** and many others in the chat expressed their gratitude, love, and congratulations to Nancy. To close out the meeting, Holly invited Nancy to speak. She reflected on how the program has evolved throughout the years, how the CAC has been a strong voice inspiring a greater vision for the LIS Partnership and the Sound and the meaningful relationships along the way. She emphasized the importance of continuing to move forward together and closed by saying, “I’ve got to thank you all, because of all the roles I’ve had in my life, this really has been the most rewarding one”.



The meeting adjourned at around 12:10pm; the next CAC meeting will take place virtually on **March 12, 2026**.