

Ag Advisory Committee Virtual Meeting

Meeting Minutes

February 4, 2026

Chair Fink called the meeting to order at 10:04 am

Welcome, Roll Call, Approval of Draft Minutes

Roll Call:

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| <input type="checkbox"/> Che Axum (DC) | <input type="checkbox"/> Barb Glenn (MD) | <input type="checkbox"/> Kevin Craun (VA) |
| <input type="checkbox"/> Kristof Grina (DC) | <input checked="" type="checkbox"/> Amanda Barber (NY) | <input checked="" type="checkbox"/> Bob Waring (VA, Vice Chair) |
| <input checked="" type="checkbox"/> Will Carlisle (DE) | <input checked="" type="checkbox"/> Marty Young (NY) | <input type="checkbox"/> Greg Mitchell (WV) |
| <input type="checkbox"/> Bill Powers (DE) | <input checked="" type="checkbox"/> Bill Fink (PA, Chair) | <input checked="" type="checkbox"/> Jerry Ours (WV) |
| <input checked="" type="checkbox"/> Amanda Cather (MD) | <input type="checkbox"/> Mark Rohrbach (PA) | |

Additional Attendees: Jessica Blackburn, Doug Wolfgang, Doug Bell, Sarah Brzezinski, Eric Hughes, Alisha Mulkey, Kathy Stecker, Todd Deroba, Jen Nelson, Kelly O'Neill

Minutes approved: Jerry Ours 1st, Will Carlisle 2nd, Minutes approved

Public Comment Period

- No public comments

Updates from Members

- Bill Fink- Successful PA Farm Show, Ag Innovation Grants open, PA working on PACS Conservation Cost-Share Program- showing promise on Country View Farms
- Will Carlisle- Delaware Ag Week is an excellent program in Mid-January, including soil health, vegetable and agronomy sessions; Chris Brosch left DDA and Jimmy Kroon
- Amanda Cather- Leaders in Environmentally Engaged Farming (LEEF) Program getting underway, along with expansion of ag marketing work
- Amanda Barber- added upcoming programs in the chat; RCPP project; one program paying more for new acres enrolled versus returning farms; GO Crop nutrient management software available; AgWorkgroup talking about solar land uses when it intersects with ag land uses

- Marty Young- just trying to get his head around the program!

Subcommittee Reports

- Lead: Jen Nelson, AAC Coordinator with comments from subcommittee members
- Decisions: None
- Actions: None

Reports from the first meetings of the AAC's Technical and Communications Subcommittees were shared with the full committee.

Jen Nelson presented an overview of the Technical Subcommittee's meeting on January 16th, noting Amanda Barber and Amanda Cather volunteered as Chair and Vice Chair, respectively. The subcommittee's focus areas include addressing "sticky issues" with the Phase 7 model and looking at longer-term issues like soil health, nutrient management, and innovative technologies for the Phase 8 model. The group is interested in soil health and management systems supporting profitability, exploring tools like co-stream, and potentially collaborating with the Scientific and Technical Advisory Committee. William Carlisle emphasized the need for the subcommittee to understand how soil health can have the most leverage in the model and how it is validated.

The Communication Subcommittee met on January 22nd, which focused on internal and external messaging, outreach, and education. The group discussed the need to develop a cohesive message for the agricultural community, including a committee brochure or fact sheet, and to leverage the Chesapeake Bay Program's communication staff for content development, such as successful case studies. Alisha Mulkey shared that Maryland has initiated sit-down meetings between Maryland representatives, the Secretary, and their leadership to discuss Maryland's priorities, and also mentioned an Earth Day event in April where agricultural secretaries will be gathered, providing an opportunity for the Advisory Committee to convey a message.

- Discussion Notes:
 - Technical Subcommittee
 - AB- Wishes for opportunities to weigh in on current model, but most of the opportunities have passed; there are still opportunities to ID BMPs and practices that should be counted
 - WC- How can we get soil health to have the most leverage in the Model?
 - BF- soil health is one of our recommendations to the EC that intersects the most with economic viability
 - Communications Subcommittee
 - AB- Farm Days coming up- is that a need or opportunity to share a brochure or factsheet; how can we interact with the secretaries/commissioners?

- Doug Wolfgang and Alisha Mulkey talked about opportunities to engage with leadership; Alisha pointed out that it's in the AAC's bylaws to have engagement with leadership; AB pointed out that they'd like to have the chance to communicate messages with their leadership prior to a meeting with the Ag Secretaries; also PA Ag Progress Days and similar opportunities to share

Executive Council Meeting Follow Up

- Lead: Bill Fink, AAC Chair
- Decisions: None
- Actions: None

Bill Fink provided a report on the Executive Council Meeting on December 2. Bill highlighted the final Bay Agreement, which included agriculture references (7 to 11 times) due to this committee's influence. Jen Nelson reviewed the draft recommendations from the Principal Staff Committee (PSC) to the Advisory Committee, noting they are well-aligned with the committee's internal conversations. The PSC specifically requested the committee to collaborate on aligning conservation with farm viability and to offer detailed, implementable policy proposals, as well as to help identify data sources for nutrient information and promote examples of agricultural progress. Both William Fink and Amanda Barber noted that the PSC's response was positive, asking for more specifics on all the requested items, which they believe the subcommittees are already working toward.

- Discussion Notes:
 - Followup in Technical Subcommittee- What does Ag viability mean to each of the members?
 - Recommendations in PSC's draft response lays out a good "punch list" of activities for the subcommittees to tackle.

Timeline to update Governance and Management Strategies for the Chesapeake Bay Agreement

- Lead: Eric Hughes, with Doug Bell and Sarah Brzezinski
- Decisions: None
- Actions: None

Doug Bell shared the process and timeline for updating the Chesapeake Bay Program's Governance and Structure documentation, to align with the revised Chesapeake Bay Agreement. Sarah Brzezinski discussed the revisions to management strategies in the agreement, including the process and timeline following the establishment of new governance and structure.

William Fink highlighted that advisory committees are involved in the governance process, and Marty Qually (Local Government Advisory Committee Chair) has been selected as the liaison between the PSC and advisory committees.

The approved new structure involves a Program Leadership layer with an Executive Council and a Policy Steering Committee, which takes on some responsibilities previously held by the Management Board. There is also a Program Implementation box that includes Goal Teams, Program Support, and Advisory Committees, aimed at eliminating some of the vertical structure. The final changes are due by July 1, 2026, with drafts of proposed revisions scheduled to go before the PSC starting in February, March, and April 2026.

The management strategies are intended to be implemented in six-year cycles, with an 18-month development period through 2027, followed by a period of evaluation and course correction. Shorter-term check-ins every one to three years are planned to focus on implementation progress. The overarching strategic plan will be composed of four management strategies, one for each goal, to encourage coordination across outcomes.

- Discussion Notes
 - AB emphasized the importance that agriculture's voice should be prominently represented across all components of the new structure.
 - DB noted that AAC members should review key outcomes in the new agreement to see where they have specific interests to "sign on to". AC agreed.
 - BF offered storyboards as an example of effective communication and outreach.
 - EH voiced concern that the group's impact could be diluted by trying to take on too much and suggested focusing efforts on four or five key outcomes identified in the response letter from the PSC as a 'tier one' priority.

Wrap Up and Next Steps

- Lead: Jen Nelson, AAC Coordinator
 - Share PSC response once it's finalized
 - Convene Technical, Communications and Governance Subcommittees
 - Keep communication with Marty Qually on Governance and Structure development to ensure that AAC priorities are reflected in the collective feedback of the ACs; Share Chesapeake Bay Agreement that has a list of outcomes for members to review; Make sure we're plugged in to management strategies as those are developed.
 - Plan an information presentation at May Meeting- options include LEEF, Soil Health Partnerships, NM Program in New York

Adjourn

Move to adjourn 12:15 pm- AB 1st; MY 2nd

- Next Meetings:
 - May 6, 2026 @ 10:00 am (virtual)
 - August 5, 2026 (in person, location TBD)