MINUTES OF
CITIZENS ADVISORY COUNCIL
January 13, 2026

CALL TO ORDER:
Timothy Weston called the meeting to order at 12:35 PM. Tim Weston is serving as interim chairperson for this CAC meeting because of scheduling conflicts of the Council's Chairperson and Vice-Chairperson, Robert Barkanic and Trisha Salvia, respectively.

CITIZENS ADVISORY COUNCIL (CAC) MEMBERS PRESENT:

George Ambrose
Jacquelyn Bonomo
Carol Collier
William Fink
Jason Foster
Katherine Heatherington Cunfer
Dwayne Mowry
John St Clair
Jerome Shabazz
Thaddeus Stevens
John Walliser
James Welty
Timothy Weston

DEP STAFF PRESENT:
Ian Irvin, Executive Director
Casey Damicantonio, Policy Office
Seth Pelepko, Acting Deputy Secretary, Oil and Gas
Laura Griffin, Regulatory Coordinator, Policy Office
Robert Reiley, Deputy Chief Counsel, Bureau of Regulatory Council

APPROVAL OF MEETING MINUTES:
Tim Weston solicited additions or corrections to the October and November CAC Meeting Minutes. Hearing none,

> **Jacquelyn Bonomo moved to approve the October and November CAC Meeting Minutes with no corrections. George Ambrose seconded the motion, which was unanimously approved.**

DEP UPDATE:
Seth Pelepko - Acting Deputy Secretary for the Office of Oil and Gas, Department of Environmental Protection

Acting Deputy Pelepko provided updates on oil and gas activities here in the Commonwealth and setting the strategic framework in place for Secretary Shirley's vision for the agency, including a workforce ready to take on future challenges and elevating customer experience. Additionally, the Office of Oil and Gas is considering rulemaking and policies that consider the current state of the industry while touching base with regulatory contacts and peers. The Office utilizes the

Interstate Oil & Gas Compact Commission membership to identify gaps in the regulatory process.

Act 87 of 2024 establishes a framework for carbon sequestration and includes provisions that envision future rulemakings.

Acting Deputy Secretary Pelepko has been in the field to review legacy well issues, challenges, and opportunities and had occasions to meet the Oil & Gas workforce. About 90 percent of the staff are new to the program and are energized about the opportunity to make a difference. The Office could access millions of dollars in Federal Infrastructure Investment and Jobs Act, allowing the Office to address critical issues that it has not had the opportunity to address before.

The Office is tackling ongoing gas migration investigations, where gas is getting away from the well and getting into water supplies, especially as streams change course, erosion takes place, and old infrastructures found. With that, plugging a well may cost more.

Looking at 2025 data, including the spatial distribution of costs, the Office has decreased invoice processing time, which gets money back to private sector partners. The Office is also looking at well plugging cost as a function of the number of wells per contract. An important question for the Office is "how do we become more efficient and plug more wells with the opportunity of using hundreds of millions of dollars?" The Office does this by engaging key stakeholders and focusing on optimization and continuous improvement. University of Pittsburgh is looking at how AI may help DEP solve complex plugging problems, and Harrisburg University (IUP) is digitizing old maps.

The Office is working with several groups to solve different challenges like managing waste streams, engaging in both conventional and unconventional industry regarding carbon management, and continuous improvements. Finally, approximately 99 percent of permits are processed withing the allotted time frames.

Questions:

- What is the best estimate we have of cost per well of plugging on a volume basis.

The current average estimate is $45,000 per well per 2025 data. Compared to historical data, the average estimate has come down significantly because the initial grant of $25 million obligated within a year. Looking at lump sum projects, bid prices may rise because operators must mitigate their risks. In developing data sets, the Department can see what other variables are controlling these costs, like spatial distributions.

- What are some of the technological advances in well plugging

There is a balance of using technology and their advancement (e.g., cements and polymers that may be lower in costs and/or have better mechanical integrity properties over the long-term) vis-

à-vis experience (e.g., hundreds of hand-crafted tools fabricated based on what experts can glean from down a well). The other major advancement is prioritizing problematic wells.

- One of the Council members has a well on his property that needs plugged. He is looking for a second bidder, as required by the MERP Program, but is having difficulty due to a lack of a definition of attainable bottom. Is there a way to get an interim rule that allows movement ahead without trying to work out the unknown first?

There are challenges with the MERP program and growing pains. When it comes to attainable bottom, this is an issue DEP has been working on, and it will be a big step for both agency and industry to move forward.

PRESENTATIONS:
Lauren Griffin - Regulatory Coordinator, DEP Policy Office
Robert Reiley – Deputy Chief Counsel, Bureau of Regulatory Council
Review of the Environmental Quality Board's Petition Process

This presentation was on the Environmental Quality Board's policy for processing rule making positions. Part of this discussion is to solicit the Council's feedback on updates to the policy.

The Environmental Quality Board (EQB) is the board with legal authority to adopt the DEP regulations and consider requests from the public to change DEP's regulations. The Administrative Code of 1929, as amended, allows any person to petition the EQB to initiate a rulemaking to create, repeal, or amend regulations. Once the process has been accepted, the department prepares a report evaluating the petition and submits a notice of the acceptance to the Pennsylvania Bulletin.

It has been 26 years since the Department and the EQB have updated the policy; therefore, issues with timing have arisen. Some of the timelines were workable before but, with more complex and sophisticated rulemaking process and regulatory world, need an update. The Department is looking to review the current rulemaking process to be more reasonable. For example, 60 days is not typically long enough for the Department to generate a broad and large, in-depth report evaluating a petition. Next steps after would be to come back to the Citizens Advisory Council with draft proposed changes and obtain more feedback before progressing to the EQB.

There needs to be adjustments to the times limits of the process, how to prioritize petitions, and ways to track for more pressing items as not all petitions are alike and deserve different attentions.

Questions-

- Given that EQB is rulemaking body, what is the plan for how the Department is working with EQB to manage these petitions and provide input to that policy.

The Department is doing the same thing as it is doing here, seeking suggestions and input, especially as the CAC is a natural place for input.

- An online, publicly accessible location where there could be a list of the current open rulemaking petitions. The Policy Office has a running spreadsheet, and the EQB does a great job of posting materials online; however, they quickly get buried. Having one identified place would be helpful.
- Can someone petition for a new regulation or does it always have to be an amendment to an existing regulation?
  Yes - anyone can ask for a new, repeal or amend an existing regulation.
- Is there a rule somewhere in the process that the petitioner needs to be a resident of Pennsylvania?
  No

Andy Yenscha, Water Resource Educator, Penn State Extension
Presentation on water resources and data centers in Pennsylvania

Andy Yenscha is a Water Resource Educator with Penn State Extension based in Cumberland County. In this role, Mr. Yenscha is trying to get ahead of the curve on data center water use because Penn State Extension is receiving several inquiries and concern statewide about data center water use.

While Pennsylvania has not yet seen many large-scale data centers being built, there are many other types of data centers in Pennsylvania, which have really grown in importance and size over the last few years. There are different types of data centers based on the usage, but a common thought is to build a data center on the edge of a geographic area where there is going to be high demand. The centers need HVAC equipment for cooling as the computers generate a lot of heat.

Middlesex Township has approved a data center that will withdrawal 400,000 gallons of water per day. However, there is indirect water use that is not often addressed in news media. Water is used mostly for power generation to provide electricity for data centers, and indirect water use can be much larger scale than direct use. Direct use is for cooling as the computers generate a lot of heat, so they prefer to keep certain temperatures and humidity range. Indirect is related to producing power that goes to the data center, which could run cooling systems in some data centers and power equipment. The heat from the computers in the air comes to the outside and goes to a cooling tower and it is evaporative so when it is released it is sprayed out, however some of the heat and water is lost in evaporation. The question then becomes why they can't use air conditioning to chill the water. They would need more energy, but less water and evaporative cooling is more energy efficient.

Pennsylvania has been home to Iron Mountain Run data center, Boyer's data center in Redding for some time now, which is located underground in an abandoned mine. Several companies are exploring geothermal for data centers, and the major factor is the costs to drill the wells to take advantage of the underground ambient temperatures. Data centers are not required to report water numbers and there is a lack of standardization when it comes to how it is measured. Hypotheticals suggest that, with 40 possible data centers usings 500,000 gpd, 7.3 billion gallons of water will need to be withdrawn for direct use. in the next few years, water use will be about 500,000 gallons per day for direct water needs. This amount of water would represent less than 1 percent of annual water withdrawals for the major water-using sectors.

Pennsylvania has 80 trillion gallons of groundwater at any given moment, and Pennsylvania currently consumes about 2 trillion gallons of water a year. Pennsylvania does not have many rules when it comes to large water withdrawals. Water Resources Planning Act requires water registration is at least required for major withdrawals that exceed 10,000 gallons per day over any 30-day time frame. These requirements could be a way for us to track how much data centers use.

Finally, data centers can reduce water demand. If you look at literature, they are interested in increasing efficiency and water is a cost for them they would like to go down. Increasing efficiency with indirect use would demand more power from providers but they can use technologies that do not use as much water, such as dry and hybrid cooling and develop green energy options that would not require water.

Questions-

- Have there been studies on the wastewater, from potential thermal impacts and possible metals and toxins getting concentrated into that wastewater? Would municipal wastewater plants be able to handle that?

  Unfortunately, this question is outside the scope of Mr. Yencha. However, colleagues have stated that, at a certain point, the water gets hard in natural minerals, and data centers discharge this water to the wastewater treatment plant. Mr. Yencha is not sure if this issue is considered enough of a concern that additional permits would be required. Nevertheless, it should be investigated. There are also chemicals that the cooling towers and HVAC add to their systems to prevent a variety of conditions or bacteria and do not want algae growing in pipes, so they add chemicals that prohibit biological growth.

- Thermal pollution – the GPUs and CPUs in data centers typically operate within the 65º - 80º F range. When over 80º F, there are concerns about the computer chips not being as efficient or even failing. Thermal discharge of water is something that is considered under the requirements of an NPDES permit.

Public Participation

The following individuals provide public comment during the meeting. Written versions of their comments are available at 2026 Citizens Advisory Council Meeting Schedule | Department of Environmental Protection | Commonwealth of Pennsylvania

Anne Vinatieri
Sherry Homenko- Hazel Township in Luzerne County
Dean Drunkenmiller

CAC Committee Reports

The Strategic Issues Committee met in December and continued to deliberate on the format of a report to DEP on the issue of Data Centers. The presentations have been helpful in articulating the lanes the DEP will occupy on these issues. Also, how the CAC will fit into and provide important feedback to DEP moving forward.

Th Public Participation Committee will be looking at defining some initiatives including updates to CAC brochure used at public events like the Farm Show. The brochure is 10 years old and in need of upgrading. Also, using this rulemaking petition as something people would be able to use to contact us.

Legislative Committee met in December. Because the meeting was only a week or two after budget was passed, the Committee discussed the recently passed budget. Upcoming meetings will be discussing the upcoming budget proposal and final legislative initiatives that the General Assembly will have in the upcoming year.

The Act 54 Committee met in early January and discussed the scope and focus of CAC's response to the Act 54 report.

Discussion to put council members on a subcommittee to present concerns to the agency and contact legislature. Putting a note out to the council members to see who all will volunteer.

ADJOURNMENT:

Next meeting will be February 10th 2026, at 12:30 in Room 105 at RCSOB or online.

> **George Ambrose moved to adjourn the meeting. Jerome Shabazz second the motion, which was unanimously approved.**

The January 2026, meeting of the CAC was adjourned at 4:00pm.