



**ADVISORY COUNCIL MEETING MINUTES**  
**NATIONAL RAILWAY HISTORICAL SOCIETY**

May 30<sup>th</sup>, 2026  
Little America Hotel, Salt Lake City, Utah

*AC Members:* Chairman **Richard Shulby** (Baltimore / Piedmont-Carolinas), Secretary **Elizabeth Guenzler** (Central Coast), **Doug Scott** (Cape Cod / Potomac / Western Connecticut), **Cliff Kierstead** (St. Louis), **Dawn Holmberg** (Northstar), **Jim Perry** (Washington, DC), **Ted Itchon** (Promontory), **Ken Eddy** (Arkansas-Boston Mountains), **Bob Brewster** (Intermountain), **Cora Sowa** (New York), **John Wright** (North Carolina Railway Museum), **Skip Waters** (North Texas)

*AC Members Joining Remotely:* **Robert Leslie** (Blue Ridge), **Marlin Taylor** (Delaware Valley), **John Simanton** (Inland Empire), **Bob St. John** (Topeka), **Wesley Ross** (Kentucky Central), **Regan Rickson** (Atlanta), **Ed Berntsen** (Pacific Northwest / Tacoma), **Ken Katta** (Long Island-Sunrise Trail), **Patti Webb** (Harrisburg), **David Foster** (Roanoke), **Richard King** (Tri-State), **Jerry Hardwich** (Central New York), **William Welk** (Philadelphia), **John DeRoo** (Kansas City), **Tom Posatko** (Wilmington), **Marvin Rogers** (Samuel Spencer), **Andrew Wartman** (Cincinnati-Northern Kentucky), **Julia Eriksen** (Wichita Valley), **David Foster** (Roanoke), **Ed Fortuna** (Lackawanna-Wyoming Valley)

*Others Joining Remotely:* Bob Bitzer, Harold Shaak, Charlie Webb, Walter Zullig, Ward Wells, Scott Andes, Jerry Pyfer, Mitch Dakelman, Ken Mosby, Tom Gallagher

*Others In Person:* Dan Meyer, Al Weber, Tony White, Mike Yuhas, Bob Ernst, Ellen Scott, John Fiorilla, Jon Baake, Christopher Guenzler, Stephen Sievert, Larry Pearlman, Keith Osojinak, Jon Baake, John Fiorilla, John Barbier, Mark Reynolds, David McGowan, David Minnerly.

\*\*\*\*\*

The morning started with the plenary session and highlights/overview of the previously-submitted reports, which were sent via e-mail to the Advisory Council and are also on the Documents (Admin) site of the NRHS website.

Tony welcomed everyone to the conference at 9:08 and recognized Ted Itchon as the President of the host Promontory Chapter. He then asked for a moment of silence for those members we lost since the last conference in October.

After Larry's safety briefing, the review of the reports commenced.

**Conventions** -- Mike Yuhas, as the Convention Chairman, reported that we had a great event last year and it was a large success. This year's convention is in Cleveland from September 21<sup>st</sup> to 25<sup>th</sup>. Contracts with the hotel have not been signed and the only event that can be announced at this time is a visit to the Age of Steam Roundhouse in Sugarcreek.

It is hoped to have everything complete in the next three or four weeks and details will be announced once all is fully finalized. There will be an early bird pricing structure as there was last year, although registration will occur later.

The Advisory Council, Board and Membership meetings will take place on Monday, September 21<sup>st</sup> and the convention will open with a reception on Sunday, September 20<sup>th</sup>, the same day the welcome centre opens. There will be four days of field trips.

**2027 --** The site will be Baltimore, Maryland, as it is the 200<sup>th</sup> anniversary of railroading in America, but no other information is known at this time. Mike asked that chapters in the Philadelphia, Washington and Baltimore areas provide some ideas to *convention@nrhs.com*

Tony reported that for 2027 and beyond, Barton Jennings and his wife Sarah would be joining the committee. They are returning to convention planning after organizing the rail operations for 2012 through 2015.

**Conferences --** Bob Bitzer noted that chapters have not been forthcoming in offering to host these events. The September convention will also serve as the autumn conference. Nothing is planned for next year and chapters need to step forward.

Tony noted that serious discussions about the future of conferences are starting since the current situation is not sustainable. National provides assistance with the communications, audio-visual equipment and will work with the hotels.

**Heritage Grants --** Charlie summarized there were 46 applications totaling \$334,168. The budget was \$175,000. Once the reviews were complete, \$187,000 was awarded to 34 applicants and a press release would be announced this day. The reason for the difference in budget and final total was the return of some monies from a prior awardee as the full amount was unused.

**Historic Films/Archives --** Mitch Dakelman reported there had been about half a dozen donations to the film archives. There are currently 4,150 prints in the photo library which can be found on the NRHS website.

**Membership Awards --** Doug Scott noted there were 96 awards this year - 51 members who had achieved 25 years of consecutive membership, 32 members with 50 years and 13 members with 60 years.

**Membership -** Mike Yuhas noted the features of the Neon database which includes fundraising, donations membership, events and registrations. The Membership Committee is exploring on-site payments, including for merchandise.

Mike also heralded the efforts of Steve Seigerist of the St. Louis Chapter for all his work with incoming cheques for donations and membership. Mike encouraged everyone to make sure that members' e-mail addresses are current. The e-mail addresses of family members who share the same e-mail address as the primary member are removed so they are not duplicated.

A few chapters still collect National dues and send them to National. Mike asked that an e-mail be sent to *membership@nrhs.com* if a chapter wishes to collect National dues for its members.

When a member passes, the records are updated accordingly.

Jon Baake asked that the next membership report include statistics on where new members are coming from, as it is tracked from the membership brochure.

It was noted that membership renewals done online are recorded immediately and a confirmation e-mail is sent to the member. Those renewals by mail, which are sent to St. Louis can take four to six months to be received and processed. The USPS does not know the reason for this large delay.

**Membership Brochures** -- Jon Baake reported that he mailed 5,000 brochures to 100 organizations and a new order is currently being printed. If a chapter needs any, please send him an e-mail to *jbaake@outlook.com*

Jon asked that anyone visiting a rail attraction or museum looks for our brochures and if they don't see them, enquire if the organization is interested and give them Jon's name and e-mail address and he will send.

That applies to chapter events as well, since a rubber stamp with the chapter information can be added to the brochure.

**RailCamp** -- Tony announced that per Becky Gerstung's report, any chapter which sponsors a camper receives a \$575 discount in tuition. Money donated with dues renewals and from individuals is making up the difference.

**Historic Preservation Award** -- Mike Yuhas announced that the 2026 honouree will be presented with the award on June 2<sup>nd</sup> at the Railway Interchange Conference. An e-mail would be sent to all members. The recipient has been notified. [Secretary's note: the winner was CPKC's Final Spike Anniversary Steam tour].

**Historic Plaques** -- Walter Zullig reviewed his report and asked that any chapter interested in a plaque contact him at *zullignrhsmail@aol.com*.

**Chapter Development** -- Skip Waters received enquiries from Mid-Michigan Railway Society, a group in Marion, North Carolina and the Temple Railroad Heritage Park. He sent information but has not heard back at this time.

Wichita Valley, Cincinnati-Northern Kentucky and the Hub City Chapters have been very active since becoming chapters.

**Treasurer** -- Bob Bitzer referred to his report and the unaudited financial statements. Ward Wells, Assistant Treasure, gave an update and highlights.

**NRHS Fund** -- Bob Ernst reported that there was a 5.75% gain year-to-date. As of May 8<sup>th</sup>, the total of the portfolio was \$1,474,157. A further (unexpected) donation from the Winkler estate had been received.

Bob mentioned legacy giving and future discussions surrounding long-term fundraising and bequests, wondering about promotion. John Fiorilla noted that bequests go to the Fund and are invested. If there are questions regarding this, please contact him at [gc@nrhs.com](mailto:gc@nrhs.com).

That ended the reports section.

\*\*\*\*\*

Richard called the Advisory Council meeting to order at 10:35. It was noted that Tony, Mike and Jon were the three Board members in attendance.

Elizabeth reviewed the agenda then asked for a motion to approve the minutes of the last meeting, October 4<sup>th</sup>, 2025. John Simanton noted that his chapter's name was listed as Inland Northwest when it should have been Inland Empire. With that amendment, Doug motioned and Ted seconded that the minutes be accepted. Carried.

### **Business Arising From Previous Minutes**

1. ***At-Large Committee Report*** - Richard gave a brief background on the committee and reported the results of a survey, sent to 888 At-Large members. 193, or 21.5% responded. He provided the percentages of responses for the main questions and showed an map overview with the chapter locations and the At-Large member locations. This was a work in progress and more results will be shared at the next meeting in September.

Since chapters cannot contact the At-Large members directly due to personally-identifiable information, National can send an e-mail to At-Large members within a certain radius of a chapter's location. Such a message could be informing them of an event or recruitment to join the chapter.

Doug reported that an e-mail had been sent to 65 At-Large members within eastern Massachusetts and Rhode Island informing them of the Cape Cod Chapter's existence.

2. ***Chapter Engagement Committee*** - Elizabeth highlighted the Fireside Chat initiative, designed to improve communications between chapters and National. Skip Waters is the host, supported by Jon Baake as the Committee liaison and they join a chapter meeting via Zoom and answer questions on any aspect of the NRHS. Champlain Valley, George L. Carter and Kansas City Chapters have been the subject of Fireside Chats since October.

Julia Eriksen of the Wichita Valley Chapter expressed interest and follow-up will be made.

3. ***Advertising on Virtual Railfan*** - Robert Leslie summarized his suggestion to garner potential new members and Tony suggested that he write a proposal, include a budget and present to the Board.

## **New Business**

1. ***Setting Up Railcamp in the Central Part of The Country.*** Julia Erikson of the Wichita Valley Chapter noted that their area stretches from Abilene, Kansas to Oklahoma City. She has visited Farmrail in Clinton and made connection with President Eric Betke and Director of Operations Devon Martin.

The NRHS is greatly under-represented in the area when it comes to RailCamp and she would like to explore setting up a RailCamp.

Tony provided some context, including the necessity of background checks and initial steps, and recommended that she e-mail himself and Becky Gerstung. Julie noted that initial discussions had already taken place with both of them, so the next step is to start the interview process.

2. ***Develop Best Practices Methodology for Chapters*** Jerry Hardwich of the Central New York Chapter introduced the topic to document/highlight what successful chapters do to grow their membership, member retention, member participation and activities.

Elizabeth noted that Jerry had expressed interest in spearheading such a project and follow-up would be made.

Skip noted that activities are key and suggested an all-time list be compiled of what chapters do for activities. Jon mentioned the marketing side - are the booths at the railway shows? Is social media being used?

3. ***Mission Statement and Strategic Planning*** Richard explained that this question arose from a meeting of the At-Large Committee and referred to the fact that two different versions of a mission statement exists in the latest Bylaws and as a separate document on the Admin site, as well as three documents sent with the agenda that supported this item.

Wesley Ross remarked that the documents were part of a proposal presented to the Board in 2014, which was defeated in a vote. Al Weber added that they were part of a “new vision” of the Board which was made during our insolvency period and John Fiorilla further explained that the defeated changes would have removed chapters.

Larry noted there are four major challenges we face -- aging out, not attracting youth, the digital age and tension between chapters and At-Large.

Richard suggested that the Board set up a committee (himself being part, but not the lead) to further look at creating and simplifying the mission statement,-and that the updated mission statement be available on the primary NRHS website page.

**Doug made the motion that the Board set up a committee (Richard being a member) to further look at creating and simplifying the mission statement,, to which Wesley seconded. All were in favour. Carried.**

### **Open Mic**

Bob Brewster announced Stadler, the streetcar builder which is headquartered in Salt Lake City, was having an open house between the hours of 08:00 and 16:00 hrs today. [It was later learned that no photography was allowed.]

Patti Webb noted that the second floor windows of Harris Tower need to be replaced and that a capital campaign was underway.

Ed Fortuna noted that in the last three years, the Lackawanna-Wyoming Valley Chapter sent two campers in 2023, two in 2025 and to for this year. After the Camp, the students present a program to the chapter members and the chapter has a 50/50 raffle to raise money to assist.

Jon Baake suggested inviting Richard Hafer, President of the Perryville Chapter, to host a convention seminar regarding their ability in attracting new and young members.

Bob Brewster noted that Amtrak was retiring their Amfleet cars and a Request for Proposals was released for scrapping them. He wondered if the NRHS should act in some way.

### **Review of Items to Report to Board**

Richard reviewed the Mission Statement item noted on Page 5 of these minutes.

### **Announcements**

None

### **Adjournment**

The meeting was adjourned at 11:53 am.

\*\*\*\*\*