

**Minutes of Albemarle County Natural Heritage Committee (NHC) Meeting
November 4th, 2021 – Virtual Meeting on Zoom**

Committee Members: Christine Putnam, Peggy Cornett, Leah Jung, Emma Andrews, Kate Mallek, Michael Callahan

Absent: Lonnie Murray, Bruce Gatlin-Austin, Nancy Weiss, Kennon Williams

Other Attendees: Rod Walker, Carol Diggs

Staff: Kim Biasioli, Carolyn Schaffer, Nicole Jones

There was a quorum of seven members present, and Christine called the meeting to order at 5:33.

Welcome to guests.

Peggy moved approval of the agenda, Michael seconded. Approved by a roll call vote.

Leah moved approval of the minutes, Peggy seconded. Approved by a roll call vote.

Follow-Ups

Important Site Updates

- Biscuit Run – Christine visited; trail building has started and invasives continue to spread.

Spotted Lanternfly Efforts

- Emma finished designing the SLF flyer; Rod Walker printed and sent to approximately 500 residents in western Albemarle through USPS bulk mail (every door direct mail). If done on a larger scale each would cost approximately .30. Bulk mail moves slowly and flyers haven't been received yet.
- QR codes might be easier to use if spaced out more.
- The mailing was a test run and Rod shared information on how to do bulk mail and cost estimates.
- Farm Bureau and other organizations may help with the costs.
- Best time would be late summer; post office may need a 2 month lead time.
- **Action Item:** Christine will reach out to Carrie Swanson to see if VCE will consider funding a more wide distribution, learn their plans for more outreach, and learn about the status of positive identifications in the County.
- Mike will be the coordinator for the Master Gardeners speakers bureau and will be the presenter for the spotted lanternfly presentation.
- HOAs have newsletters to communicate with residents. **Action Item:** Mike will draft a newsletter article that can be shared.

Important Site Designation Criteria

- Policy group developed a list of criteria to categorize sites, rather than rank them.
- The Committee will revisit this.

Staff Update

- Stream Health project is going to the Board on December 1 and encourage everyone to join and learn more about the work that is proposed.
- New landowner education project started by the NHC will likely be formalized. Welcoming feedback from the NHC on the Environmental Stewardship Hub and Landowner Resources pages.
- Christine suggested including the monthly tips.

Solar ordinances and pollinator habitat

- Kim shared presentation about the status of solar in Albemarle.
- Solar facilities are currently permitted by special use permit only. If approved, a site plan is required.

- To date, two projects have received a permit but do not have site plans yet; one more under review.
- No supplemental regulations or performance regulations but conditions can and are imposed with approval of the special use permit.
- Comp plan has no direct reference to solar facilities but is generally supportive of renewable energy.
- Land under panels remains pervious; unlikely to have a negative impact on the watershed.
- Panels have a lifespan of 30 years, after which the site is decommissioned.
- Current status is that the County is holding informal discussions with different providers; staff is developing standards based on best practices in other localities. Standards will include requiring information in the site plan on different factors (visibility, sound, landscaping plan, prime soils, decommissioning plan, property value impact, etc).
- No ordinance in development at this point because there are so few applications. Advantages and disadvantages to having a policy vs. having standards and conditional approval.
- DCR has developed the pollinator-smart solar program to encourage use of native plants and reduce mowing. Certification process for proposed new and retrofitted sites.
- Concern expressed about clearing forest for solar farms; loss of farmland.
- Pollinator smart manual has research that shows cost savings associated with reduced mowing.
- Discussion about forest mitigation, decommissioning fund and requiring recycling of materials.

Work Groups and Member Reports

- Education and Outreach
 - Christine and Mike met to discuss HOA presentations and conservation mowing. Christine updated the group on the reduced mowing at Darden Towe; discussion on how to increase natives. Unmowed areas still have value by reducing carbon footprint and providing cover.
 - Christine is working with ACPR to try to identify new potential areas for reduced mowing.
 - Discussion about allowing rewilding or planting some areas back to more natural vegetation.
 - Opportunity to create a more comprehensive plan for all mowed areas on County lands.
 - Discussion of partnering with the library system to create postage stamp native gardens.
- Wildlife Corridors
 - Leah is working on applying for funding for a bobcat study. Applied for a Bamaworks grant with Brett Jesmer from Virginia Tech, who is trying to fund a graduate student to work on it.
 - Leah met with Caroline Schuyler from Wildrock and they are considering developing a program related to the bobcat study.
- Policy
 - Kate shared draft criteria for adoption of new sites, including quality, size, ownership. Discussion about the different needs: 1) Determine criteria/threshold to qualify for designation as an Important Site; and 2) Develop system for recording and tracking information over time.
 - **Action Item:** Policy group will work on developing a flowchart and/or checklist for each of the two needs. Test Emma's place with the new criteria/process.
 - Consider testing with all of the Important Sites before update of the Biodiversity Action Plan.

Other Matters

- Peggy will share resources on bird-friendly buildings and mentioned as a consideration for the Comprehensive Plan.

The meeting was adjourned at 7:28. Next meeting date is December 2nd, 2021.