

Minutes of Albemarle County Natural Heritage Committee (NHC) Meeting
March 3rd, 2022 – Virtual Meeting on Zoom

Committee Members: Christine Putnam, Lonnie Murray, Kate Mallek, Michael Callahan, Bruce Gatlin-Austin

Absent: Emma Andrews, Peggy Cornett, Leah Jung, Abigail Wilson, Dan Mahon

Other Attendees: Kennon Williams, Nicola McGoff

Staff: Kim Biasioli, Carolyn Schaffer, Nicole Jones

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

Welcome to guests.

Mike moved approval of the agenda, Lonnie seconded. Approved by a roll call vote.

Bruce moved approval of the minutes, Lonnie seconded. Approved by a roll call vote.

Introductions with new Parks Planner, Dan Butch

- Dan was formerly a transportation planner with Community Development and has previous experience with planning and maintenance of trails and greenways.
- He will work on volunteer coordination and invasive species management, and long-term planning.
- Discussion:
 - More community involvement for invasives control is desired (e.g. Invasive Species Task Force). Opportunity for NHC to create a list to identify and prioritize sites in parks and greenways for invasives management and identify volunteer projects vs. contractor/parks management.
Action Item: Christine will start a shared doc for NHC members work with Kim on developing a list to support ACPR efforts.
 - Rural Area greenways may be addressed with Comp Plan process – focus with Parks and Rec is more on County-owned land. Suggestion from Lonnie to identify de facto greenways for future opportunities (e.g. proffers, acquisition).
 - Proposal for mountain biking trails at Arrowhead came from a single individual – ACPR has communicated that there are no plans for public access at that property and that the current focus is on Biscuit Run.
 - Biscuit Run - Interest in creation of quail habitat. Meadow creation has been discussed, but not likely to be on the scale needed for quail habitat. Staff will follow up with more information as available. Trail and greenway planning and development of access in process. Park is still not open, public input process is underway.
 - ACPR has interest in adding natural resource management to park management plans.
 - Wavyleaf basketgrass is being controlled at Arrowhead, through a contract with Virginia Forestry and Wildlife Group and the PRISM.
 - Sugar Hollow issues, internal discussions are ongoing between parties. Study was done to look at access, improvements to visitor use, trailhead management.
 - Three notched trail – potential grant opportunity. Strong interest in the community.
 - Kennon asked how this committee might help provide suggestions for projects or operations in County Parks. Kim shared that she has joined a Team to update the County's sustainable operations policies. Very early stages but feedback from this group is welcome.
Action Item: Christine will create a shared doc for NHC members to track suggestions.
 - Dan asked about tracking and treating ash trees. Equipment, training, and partnership for treating hemlocks at Biscuit Run is useful for ash as well if locations and funding are identified.

Follow-Ups

- Important Site updates and Outreach
 - Lonnie discussed the DCR Natural Heritage Program interest in surveying rock outcrops in the County this year.
 - Lonnie discussed prescribed burning with at the paper birch site Shenandoah NP and DCR staff.

Staff Update

- Kim has also been working with DCR and helping to facilitate access to rock outcrops for survey.
- County Executive's budget was released last week. Includes funding for Phase I at Biscuit Run. Kim has been working with ACPR on LWCF grant, which will hopefully include an invasive species inventory and management plan for the park.
- The proposed budget includes support for one Stream Health Initiative proposal – development of a restoration and mitigation manual, and a small budget for this NR program.
- Discussion of stream buffer zoning district and its importance, difference from former language in WPO. Kim is bringing a resolution to the BOS to begin and will resubmit budget request for FY24.
- Lonnie moved to write a letter supporting inclusion of the zoning district staff in the budget, Christine seconded. Approved by a roll call vote. **Action Item:** Lonnie will draft a letter and share it.
- Kim is working on the teams developing Sustainable Operations Policies and Invasives Management.
- Kim and Gabe are beginning to develop some language on solar facilities for the Comprehensive Plan. **Action Item:** NHC members can share feedback and recommendations.
- Environmental Stewardship Hub for the website is underway. Christine and the education work group are providing suggestions and content, but additional feedback is welcome.

NHC Work Plan & Goals

- **Action Item:** NHC Members should add to the work plan and track progress on goals.

BAP Review of Goals and Recommendations (Goal 1)

- Purpose to review and reflect on each goal and recommendation prior to update to BAP. Has progress been made, is the goal still applicable, and are new goals/reccs needed?
- Discussion of strategies to protect conservation focus areas: stream buffers, updating ACE ordinance, review of policies to prevent “bar coding” of parcels, focus on connectivity.
- ACE Committee has no current staffing or funding in proposed County budget. NHC members are expressing support as individuals for the land conservation programs.
- Discussion of updating maps and analyses for the BAP, focusing on corridors and connectivity, especially in the face of climate change.
- Lonnie moved to write a letter from the NHC in support of the ACE Program. Christine seconded. Approved by a roll call vote. **Action Item:** Christine will draft a letter to share with the group.
- Christine suggested NHC members review BAP goal #1 and recommendations and group can resume discussion in April. **Action Item:** NHC members will review it and be prepared to discuss in April.

Other Matters

- There is currently discussion in the community about artificial turf. Christine moved to send a letter to the BOS from the NHC. Lonnie seconded. Approved by a roll call vote. **Action Item:** Kate will draft a letter to share with the group.
- Emma has designed educational Instagram posts. Christine will share the posts with the group.

The meeting was adjourned at 7:30. Next meeting date is April 7th, 2022.