

**Minutes of Albemarle County Natural Heritage Committee (NHC) Meeting  
April 7th, 2022 – Virtual Meeting on Zoom**

Committee Members: Christine Putnam, Peggy Cornett, Kate Mallek, Bruce Gatlin-Austin, Emma Andrews, Abigail Wilson, Dan Mahon

Absent: Leah Jung, Lonnie Murray, Michael Callahan

Other Attendees:

Staff: Scott Clark, 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.
- Introductions and welcome to new members Dan Mahon and Abigail Wilson.
- Emma moved approval of the agenda, Peggy seconded. Approved by a roll call vote.
- Bruce moved approval of the minutes, Emma seconded. Approved by a roll call vote.
- Peggy moved to appoint Emma the Vice-Chair. Approved by a roll call vote.

Important Site Updates and Outreach

- Abigail is planning to visit the Lickinghole Basin bald eagle site and update info on the google drive.

Follow-Ups

- Three letters were sent to this Board of Supervisors this month. Christine has received a response to all the letters from Supervisor Mallek.
  - Synthetic turf – Board had a presentation and discussion from ACPR, consultants, and a former athletic director in March. NHC members continue to have concerns about climate impacts, materials used, and lighting.
  - ACE Program – Scott provided background on conservation easements and the County's programs, and an update on ACE. The Program Coordinator recently retired. The Board put the program on hold to review its history and progress before deciding how to continue and/or update the program. Staff will give a presentation in June to the Board on review of the program. That would be the earliest Staff might have more info/direction from the Board on the program and if/when it might be funded and reactivated. The Comprehensive Plan review will also be an opportunity to review the land conservation programs, receive public feedback, and potentially incorporate some additional conservation goals. The ACE coordinator position currently remains unfilled.
  - Stream Health – Kim brought a Resolution of Intent to the Board in March to begin working on the Stream Buffer Overlay District. Her team is moving forward on developing draft regulations.
  - Kennon is working on a project with UVA students to track changes along buffers using imagery.

Staff Update

- The Board and Planning Commission are back to in person meetings. Committees and advisory groups will be phased in later. There is no timeline yet or confirmation if hybrid options might remain available.

Solar Conditions for approval – Midway example

- General new information - DEQ is now considering solar panels as impervious cover for the purposes of stormwater management.
- The County currently permits commercial solar facility projects by Special Use Permit, with extensive review. Additional requirements specific to solar facilities have not been developed.

- There are three solar projects in the County so far. These range in size from 15 acres (capped landfill) to a couple hundred acres (Midway). Midway is in the Batesville area.
- Conditions for approval at Midway included:
  - Agreement to follow the approved concept plan, including location of panels, retention of wooded areas, landscaping and screening, etc.;
  - Setbacks of at least 100' from property lines and ROWs;
  - Decommissioning and site rehabilitation plan;
  - Outdoor lighting only during maintenance; and others.
- Questions and discussion about recyclability, multi-use (establishing grassland/grazing/herbs), concern about continued success/management with any future requirements.
- Scott is working on solar facility review guidelines. These are not regulations, but to help planners identify what to specifically look for on these types of projects.
- **Action Item:** Abigail will do some research on establishing natural options and other uses on solar facilities in other locations.
- **Action Item:** Scott will share the conceptual plan and approval letter/conditions.

#### Working Group and Member Reports

- Education Work Group
  - Christine has been working with County Staff on conservation mowing. This will expand at Darden Towe to 6 acres and they are working to identify locations in other County Parks. Peabody School/CUH made a proposal and presentation for Piedmont Prairie at Darden Towe.
  - Emma worked on the Instagram Tip of the Month and has created beautiful conservation mowing signs in Spanish/English.
  - The NHC will have a table at the upcoming Scottsville Center for Arts and the Natural Environment (SCAN) Earth Day Festival. There are many other upcoming Earth Day events (e.g. Rivanna Riverfest, Flow Festival, and others).
  - Bruce would like to add a new recommendation to the BAP focused on educating children and has added this to the rolling work plan.
  - Christine gave a talk to the White Hall Ruritans about the BAP, the NHC, and the native plant campaign. Plant Northern Piedmont Natives group is stickering natives at local nurseries.
- Wildlife Corridors
  - Leah was interviewed on public radio and is garnering support for the bobcat study.
- Policy
  - Policy group did not meet.

#### Other Matters

- **Action Item:** Members will continue to reach out to Board members on synthetic turf, ACE, and other issues individually. Speaking at Board Meetings can be a very impactful option.
- **Action Item:** Christine will resend links to Sustainable Operations Policy brainstorming and list of priority sites for invasive species management. NHC members will contribute to both documents.
- **Action Item:** Peggy will try to check on the eagle nest at Tufton.
- The group will continue BAP review and discussion in May.

The meeting was adjourned at 7:20. Next meeting date is May 5, 2022.