

Minutes of Albemarle County Natural Heritage Committee (NHC) Meeting
June 2nd, 2022 – Virtual Meeting on Zoom

Committee Members: Christine Putnam, Peggy Cornett, Abigail Wilson, Kate Mallek, Emma Andrews, Michael Callahan, Lonnie Murray

Absent: Dan Mahon, Leah Jung, Bruce Gatling-Austin

Other Attendees: Candice Perkins

Staff: Kim Biasioli, Carolyn Schaffer, Nicole Jones

- There was a quorum of seven members present, and Christine called the meeting to order at 5:38.
- Welcome to guests.
- Peggy moved approval of the agenda, Kate seconded. Approved by a roll call vote.
- Michael moved approval of the April minutes, Peggy seconded. Approved by a roll call vote.
- Christine moved approval of the May minutes, Emma seconded. Approved by a roll call vote.

Introductions with Candice Perkins, Director of Planning

- Candice worked with Frederick County for 20 years. She has been with the County for two months and is getting familiar with the Biodiversity Action Plan and the work of the NHC.
- Discussion of the Comp Plan update and differentiation of designations in the Rural Area. Suggestion to have a maximum of 2-5 acres for divisions instead of 21 acres in the Rural Area. Candice explained that the comp plan can include policy changes but they would need to be implemented through the zoning ordinance.
- Discussion of how the committee can provide feedback on the Growth Management Policy. The NHC is generally opposed to expansion of the growth area. Surface parking runoff to streams is an issue; there is no incentive to redevelop these underutilized spaces in the growth area if it is expanded. Suggestion to provide incentives for redevelopment. Kim is working with planners to explore ways to add more depth to the Rural Area focus of the policy with respect to natural resource protection and climate. **Action Item:** The policy group will discuss growth management policy with Kim and provide recommendations.
- Discussion of 'pretend agriculture' and suggestion for more oversight. Use Valuation program is incentivizing production of poor quality hay and removal of buffers; conflicts with other County goals and initiatives.

Follow-Ups

- Important Site Updates
 - Lonnie visited Appleberry Mountain with DCR Natural Heritage Program ecologists to survey rock outcrops. **Action Item:** Lonnie will upload photos and documentation report to the drive.
- Darden Towe – Synthetic Turf & Meadow Restoration
 - Synthetic Turf – no consensus on the BOS; no action will be taken in FY24.
 - No mow area – Christine is working with ACPR staff to experiment with a strip. They mowed fescue all spring, aerated and scalped the grass, and spread the Piedmont Native mix from Ernst. The no mow area expanded to six acres and ACPR will be getting the signage out soon.
- Rural Road Protection
 - Lonnie attended a presentation about Loudoun County's gravel road protection efforts and legislation. Board members attended and decided that Albemarle will now require a majority of residents to get a road onto the paving list. **Action Item:** Lonnie will share the presentation.

- Montclair Stream
 - Developer got a permit from the Army Corps of Engineers (ACOE) to pipe a stream on the property. The disturbance was not regulated by the County because it fell under the threshold for a land disturbing activity (10,000 sq ft).
 - Frank Pohl, County Engineer, joined the meeting to explain how the stream buffer requirement in the Water Protection Ordinance only applies when a VESCP or VSMP plan is required.
 - USGS maps do not show it as a stream. ACOE does deny requests and require mitigation; there is a process for issuing of permits to impact streams.
 - The County desires to have a higher standard – Frank and Kim are working on the riparian buffer overlay district as part of the Stream Health Initiative. This would increase consistency with enforcement in the Zoning Ordinance and hopefully address some of these issues.
 - Lonnie suggested referring to the RPA language and Bay Act guidance for the overlay district (an RPA does not go away if buried or piped).
 - WPO currently only applies to ‘natural’ streams; this definition may need to change.
 - The overlay district will cover the water in addition to the buffer. The Zoning Ordinance covers the space above the water.
 - USACOE still considers it a ‘stream’, even after it is piped.
 - A stream can still be polluted when it’s underground; everything still drains to it.
 - Habitat connectivity on the landscape is another consideration.
 - County staff will have a public process and can hear the feedback/suggestions on the overlay district once the drafting is complete.
 - Lonnie shared that the mountain overlay district was killed by politics and expressed concern about ‘overlay district’ language. Staff have been looking at different options within the code.
 - The district will be defined by the text, not a fixed map, which would allow some fluidity to classify streams based on field determinations.
 - The overlay district may be political, suggestion to emphasize return to prior regs and that the current exemptions will remain.

Staff Update

- James Spiny mussel: Kim has worked with DWR on developing a resolution to support reintroduction; adopted by the Board in May. DWR may release them in the fall, and there is likely to be a public event.
- Committee meeting timing and format: This committee is not planned to have a hybrid option, will likely go back to in person meeting in September.
- Comprehensive Plan
 - Growth management policy: review of the policy is underway. Draft Buildout Analysis of the Development Area was presented recently.
 - Natural Resources Program goals: These were defined as part of a strategic 3 year plan 2017-2019; will be updated as part of the Natural Resources Chapter in the fall.
Action Item: Kim will share those goals with the group.
 - ACE Program Review: There will be a staff presentation on the BOS agenda on June 15th. A full program evaluation is happening as part of the of the comprehensive plan update.
- Spotted Lanternfly outreach: Kim met with Rod Walker and VCE. No staff/resources for the mailer. Digital outreach campaign planned through email and social media.
Action Item: Interested Education work group members should connect with Kim.

- Stream Health Initiative: Four projects are underway.
 - New Landowner Education Project – First deliverable, the Environmental Stewardship Hub, was completed. Kudos to Christine for her support and input. Future steps, including mailings to landowners, are uncertain as there is no budget for the Natural Resources Program for FY24.
 - Restoration and Mitigation Manual – Has FY24 budget support; directly related to overlay district.
 - Low Impact Development Study – A contractor has been hired with support from FES.
 - Christine suggested this group should advocate for a budget for the Natural Resources Program.
 - Christine will be representing the Master Gardeners at the Ix Market and will bring SLF materials.

Working Group and Member Reports

- Wildlife Corridors – VT has hired a graduate student with bobcat trapping experience, moving to Albemarle.
- Policy – The group has not met. Lonnie has been appointed to the Planning Commission.
- Education – Continuing to work on outreach with Instagram posts and Scottsville pollinator festival.

Other Matters

- Master Gardeners partnered with the Center at Belvedere to create a pollinator garden, and there is an upcoming presentation on pollinators.
- Master Gardeners starting the Healthy Landscape program to advise on making yards wildlife friendly (including addressing runoff, reducing mowing, native plants).
- Woodridge Solar project proposed surrounds Christine’s property. The land was previously sprayed with herbicide as part of a forestry operation.

The meeting was adjourned at 7:28. Next meeting date is July 7, 2022.