



Minutes of Albemarle County Natural Heritage Committee (NHC) Meeting August 4th, 2022 – Virtual Meeting on Zoom

Committee Members: Christine Putnam, Peggy Cornett, Abigail Wilson, Kate Mallek, Michael Callahan, Lonnie Murray, Bruce Gatling-Austin, Leah Jung

Absent: Emma Andrews, Dan Mahon

Other Attendees: Phyllis Johansen, Sean Tubbs

Staff: Kim Biasioli, Nicole Jones

- There was a quorum of eight members present, and Christine called the meeting to order at 5:33.
- Welcome to guests.
- Michael moved approval of the agenda, Peggy seconded. Approved by a roll call vote.
- Abigail moved approval of the July minutes, Michael seconded. Approved by a roll call vote.

Follow-Ups

- Important Site Updates
 - No site visits have been made this month.
 - The group would still like to gather to do a site visit together to develop familiarity and consistency with the process. Discussion of what level of information gathering and complexity is necessary for site visits. Lonnie suggested members can gather as much information as possible. Contacting landowners is another important role.
 - Christine reminded the group that each member can volunteer to steward one or more sites.
 - Lonnie suggested looking at the online GIS to research the current status of the sites.
 - **Action Items:** NHC Members should respond to the poll Christine sent to set a date for the group Important Site visit. NHC Members should choose a site or more to be responsible for stewarding.

Staff Update

- Meetings will be in person starting in September in Room 235. There will be no virtual participation for members or the public. The County does not currently have the staff capacity or enough meeting room space for all committees to have hybrid meetings at this time. Calling in to meetings prior to the pandemic was not legal; according to the County attorneys and state law, we need to have a physical quorum.
Action Items: Members need to let Christine know if they will attend. Christine will send out a recurring calendar invitation to members.
- DWR is releasing the endangered James Spiny mussel to the James later in August. Several thousand will be released at four different locations.
- Kim has been working on a coordinated outreach effort about spotted lanternfly with CAPE and VCE. She did a community conversation on NBC29 and has created a county webpage with links to report sightings and info on the quarantine.
- Kim presented update on the Stream Health Initiative to the Board of Supervisors on 8/3.

NHC Annual Report

- Christine presented the draft annual report, due to the Board of Supervisors. The Committee discussed updates to accomplishments and challenges listed in the draft report.
- Leah brought up the challenge of access to internet connections and adequate technology.
- Some members feel the County is overly restrictive in applying the FOIA requirements for virtual meetings.
- There is broad interest in continuing to have a virtual option to join, for both members and the public.
- Abigail reported that the meeting requirements have made collaboration and joining the committee as a new member difficult, as well as frustration at not being able to get work done.



- Lonnie is concerned that the committee's role in terms of when and how to provide input to staff is not clearly articulated. The group would like to establish a better process to provide input on natural resource protection.
- Bruce shared that the members of a committee are not staff so can provide input as individuals anytime but are required to follow the established structures of local government to provide input on behalf of the committee.
- Abigail suggested the group can vote to authorize a member to speak on its behalf on a particular project or planning process, and that having a formal approval by the committee would provide a record of whether the decision is aligned with the BAP.
- Michael suggested the group should vote and provide a majority vote on a decision to leadership, which would carry more weight than participating as individuals.
- Kim shared that the group can vote to designate a member to participate in a working group like the Stream Health Initiative or Comprehensive Plan. The County has an engagement department and strongly encourages the community to be involved and providing input. Committee members can also coordinate with Kim to bring in staff to discuss and receive input on a particular issue, as we have in the past.
- Christine encouraged all members to participate and engage in the Comprehensive Plan and other engagement processes provided by the County.
- Lonnie suggested that the committee should have a standing seat on any committee or work group that carries more weight than joining as a member of the public.
- Michael suggested bringing statements on committee votes, which would become part of the public record.
- The group reviewed the NHC charter and confirmed that the NHC is designated to advise the Board of Supervisors and the Planning Commission on natural resources issues.
- Lonnie moved to accept the annual report with the addition of minor final revisions. Michael seconded. Approved by a roll call vote.

BAP Review of Goals & Recommendations (Goals 4 & 5)

- Goal 4: Promote management of county-owned and other public lands in a manner that conserves and enhances biodiversity and other natural resources.
 - Christine suggested adding more specificity for management on school grounds (e.g. use of natives, tree canopy), and to include a recommendation to explore opportunities for training staff for landscaping and grounds maintenance (e.g. Chesapeake Bay Landscape Professionals), which could provide opportunities for career advancement.
 - Lonnie noted that acquire lands (recommendation 2) might fit better in a different section of the BAP.
 - **Action Item:** Christine will send the google docs for committee members to provide input for the Sustainable Operations Policy.

Working Group & Member Reports

- There was no time left for working group and member reports.

Other Matters

- A member of the public, Phyllis Johansen, is concerned about a solar field proposed in Scottsville. She noticed we discussed solar project guidelines and is interested in seeing them. The manager of the project is planning to drain a six-acre pond within the Totier Creek Watershed. It is not the Woodridge project.
- Staff are not familiar with the project that is described and will follow up to determine where it is located.

The meeting was adjourned at 7:39 pm. Next meeting date is September 1, 2022.