

DRAFT

Minutes from the Albemarle County Natural Heritage (NHC) Committee Meeting

May 4, 2023, 5:30pm

Albemarle County Office Building (Room 250)

401 McIntire Rd., Charlottesville, VA 22902

Committee Members Present: Christine Putnam, *Chair*, Meghan Sobbott, *Vice-Chair*, Mike Callahan, *Secretary*, Leah Jung, Lonnie Murray, Peggy Cornett, Abigail Wilson, and Mona El Kahafif (newest appointed member)

Members Absent: Dan Mahon

Other Guests & Attendees:

- James Fulcher, Community Development, Natural Resources, Albemarle County
- Rob McGinnis, Senior Land Use Field Representative for Albemarle & Greene Counties, Piedmont Environmental Council (PEC)
- Tom Olivier, former Natural Heritage Committee member
- Kim Swanson, Charlotte Yancey Humphries Park (“advocate/champion”)

Staff: Scott Clark

1. Call to Order. Christine called the meeting to order at 5:33pm.
2. Establish a Quorum. There was a quorum present.
3. Welcome/Acknowledge Guests.
 - A. New Committee member Mona El Kahafif was introduced. [Mona is Associate Professor](#), Architecture and Urban + Environmental Planning and Graduate Urban Design Program Director for the School of Architecture at UVA. Mona shared a vision for finding a scalable habitable design with solar collection sites being developed.
 - B. Other attendees included Neal Williamson and Kim Swanson.
4. Approval of Agenda. Leah motioned to approve the meeting Agenda and Peggy seconded the motion. Committee members present voted unanimously to approve the Agenda.
5. Approval of Minutes. Meghan motioned to approve the final version of Meeting Minutes from the April 6, 2023 meeting, and Leah seconded the motion. Committee members voted unanimously to approve the Minutes.
6. Follow-Ups:
 - A. Important Sites updates and outreach
 - a. Site update - Lonnie spoke about the Rivanna River Moorman Corridor, the local corridor considered in [City Nature Challenge](#) which is along the trail opposite [Beaver](#)

[Creek Park](#). Lonnie also mentioned that there is a new road encroaching on the [silvery glade fern](#) (*location, same area?*).

b. Peggy mentioned that a Bald Eagle nest had two young eaglets; a platform has been constructed and the birds are nesting on the platform along the Rivanna River.

B. Summer NHC meetings format

a. Christine asked Scott to confirm the number of virtual meetings the Committee is permitted to have so that some meetings can be conducted remotely.

b. Christine expressed concern about water temperature differentials when water is released from local reservoirs ([Sugar Hollow](#)) and the potential impacts on species habitat (e.g., hemlocks).

c. Christine and Meghan met to discuss conservation mowing, working with the [Charlottesville Area Tree Stewards \(CATS\)](#); a reminder about [Old Mills Trail](#) Workshop on 5/4/2023; the prevalence of oriental bittersweet; and engaging the public about invasives at [Walnut Creek Park](#).

7. Staff Update: Scott Clark

A. Scott shared that there has been no response yet to the inputs made to the Comprehensive Plan by the Committee. The question of the relationship between the Comp Plan review and the Zoning Modernization review was voiced. Lonnie clarified that the [Albemarle Zoning Modernization Project](#) is separate from the [Albemarle County Comprehensive Plan](#) review and that the zoning review is a 2-3 year process.

B. Scott mentioned that there had been a recent [Two-day 2023 Greenway Conference in Virginia](#).

C. Scott shared that the County would post a draft of the updated Plant List, used for site development, in May, with release of the final official list effective July 1. The County's list has not been officially updated since 2003. Abigail suggested asking developers to comply with the new plant list if able, even if their site developments have already been approved.

8. Future Budget Proposals

A. Committee members have been advocating for budget priorities to be developed for natural resource protections in the 2025 budget.

B. There was discussion about creating budget priorities and the need for feedback from staff for the 2025 budget process. Some potential Committee priorities included:

a. Adding staff for the Parks & Recreation Department

b. An invasive weed management plan (maybe by PRISM) (reminder - there is a [state working group](#))

c. A work plan based on Committee's budget priorities

d. Creation of natural resources overlays/layers in GIS

Action Item: *Develop goals for 2025 budget that include County parks.*

9. BAP Review of Goals & Recommendations - GOAL 14: Improve county stream and river buffers to improve aquatic ecosystem health, water quality, and riparian habitat quality.
 - A. Christine encouraged committee members to continue contributing directly to the [BAP Goals review](#).

Remaining action from April 6 meeting - Making Michelle Mrdeza's (Piedmont Master Gardeners) presentation "Conservation Landscaping" to committee members separately.

10. Working Group & member reports
 - A. Wildlife Corridors – Leah presented a short slide update highlighting aspects of the Bobcat Study and identified working corridors (*are the slides available to link to the minutes?*). Leah shared that the Bobcat (*Lynx rufus*) is considered an "umbrella species". Leah shared that the [National Zoological Park - VA Smithsonian Conservation Biological Institute](#), located in Front Royal, is doing research on the species. Video footage of bobcats in the Charlottesville/Albemarle County area is desired. Nicole Borman is the VTech graduate student performing the field study. Why NW Albemarle? The study provides an opportunity to engage landowners about conservation easements and potential trap placements. There is also the opportunity to educate the public about the uniqueness of studying the Bobcat in the surrounding area.
 - B. Mona asked about the availability of a publically accessible mobile application (app). She shared that one was developed for the Appalachian Trail Corridor. Mike suggested a workshop might be held and hosted by a local non-profit, possibly Friends of Moorman River.

11. Other Matters not listed on the Agenda.

- Friendly reminder - PRISM's upcoming [Invasives Plant Workshop](#)
<https://blueridgeprism.org/>

12. Adjournment.

- Christine adjourned the meeting at 7:14pm.
- The next meeting of the Natural Heritage Committee will be held on June 1, 2023, at 5:30pm, in room 250, at the Albemarle County Office Building, 1600 5th St., Charlottesville, VA 22902.

The minutes were prepared by Michael Callahan, Secretary for the Natural Heritage Committee.