

Working Draft
Minutes from the Albemarle County
Natural Heritage Committee (NHC) Meeting, 5:45pm
June 6, 2024

Present: Meghan Sobbott, Christine Putnam, Mike Callahan, Mona El Khafif, Ph.D., Rob McGinnis, Abigail Wilson, Lonnie Murray, and Kaleb Notari

Absent: Leah Jung and Dan Mahon

Staff: Scott Clark

1. Call to Order. The meeting was in session at 5:47pm.
2. Establishment of a Quorum. Six committee members were present to open the meeting.
3. Welcome/Acknowledge Guests. None.
4. Review and Approve Meeting Agenda
 - Motion by Rob McGinnis to approve Agenda
 - Motion was seconded for approval by Lonnie Murray; Motion approved unanimously by members present
5. Review and Approve May 2, 2024 Meeting Minutes.
 - Motion by Mona El Kafif to approve Meeting Minutes. Mike asked for clarification of paragraph 11; references removed
 - Kaleb seconded Motion with modifications; Motion approved unanimously by members present
6. Matters from the Public not listed on the Agenda. None.
7. NHC Membership and election of new Chair.
 - Meghan resigned as Committee Chair and from membership for personal reasons.
 - After a brief discussion about the open leadership position, Rob volunteered to be a candidate for the Chair position, to complete Meghan's term in January 2025; Christine nominated Rob for the Chair position; Lonnie seconded the nomination. Rob to assume the Chair position at the start of the next committee meeting in July 2024.
 - Christine had previously been elected as Committee Vice-Chair. Mike continues to serve as Secretary.
 - It was noted that there are three open committee member positions. Christine encouraged committee members to help recruit new candidates for membership.
8. Staff Update (by Scott Clark).

- Scott noted that overall, [AC44](#) was being restructured; development of Action Steps are being pushed back. When known, Scott will let the committee know about changes to the amendment policy, environmental section, growth management policy, land development, and the land use chapter.
- It was suggested that committee members start reviewing the following:
 - [Environmental Stewardship chapter](#)
 - [Rural Area Land Use and Transportation chapter](#)
 - [Historic, Scenic, and Cultural Resources chapter](#)
- Lonnie highlighted his review of the [Draft Updated Growth Management Policy](#)
 - Rob asked Lonnie to send his review comments out to Scott and committee members
- It was suggested that the riparian buffer overlay ordinance, water protection, erosion protection ordinance, and storm water protection ordinances be reviewed
- Desire expressed for Conservation Management position to return to support the NHC
- Climate Action and a Holocene extinction event cited as most significant

9. Report from [draft Solar Ordinance](#) feedback session.

- *Comments*
 - Christine and Rob attended recent BoS [meeting](#); [American Farmland Trust](#) considered [pro-solar](#)
 - BoS considering allowing 21 acres or less “by right” to allow solar farm siting [post-meeting clarification by Rob: the County’s proposal is 21 acres or less behind the fence surrounding the panels; a 21-acre or less project could be located on a large parcel]
 - Propose to restrict using BAP as source for an overlay; vegetation management plan; native plants
 - Concerns about storm water mitigation, riparian buffers, and standardizing native plant installation
 - Management of weed and plant growth around photovoltaics (solar) managed by sheep is not considered by the Committee as an ultimate solution
 - Committee considers need for land use evaluation and taxation
 - Additionally, fencing and payment by energy developer to buy/lease the land for a solar farm should be considered
 - Solar farm development considered land grabbing without a process
 - Is the [Farm Bureau](#) involved in promoting [alternative energy development](#) through development of solar farms?
- *Follow-on/Next steps*
 - Feedback to public comments to be finalized, public notice announced/posted, a Planning Commission consideration and recommendations
 - Rob will work w/Christine on feedback to meeting hosts
 - What’s under VDEQ’s control?
 - Avoidance areas, forest block, and special sites should be identified

- It was suggested that there is no current guidance to regulate Special Use Permits in the Rural Area
- There is a need to clarify issues associated with the Rural Area; specifically a need to establish development standards for solar in Albemarle County (and suspect the region as a whole)
- [Recent solar legislation introduced by Virginia State Senator Creigh Deeds \(SB-567\). Reported that Senator Deeds requested his bill be carried over to 2025.](#)

10. July Meeting

- Scott will continue to establish and confirm the July meeting date, either July 8 or July 15.

11. Follow Ups:

- Ragged Mountain Natural Area - None.
- Wildlife Corridors - None.
- Work Plan (Christine) projects -
 - Christine and Rob will coordinate a meeting to finalize the Committee's Work Plan
 - Identify AC-44 lead
 - Mona to be Biophilics lead?
 - Lonnie suggested Committee action to identify high priority sites w/map overlay
- Lonnie provided info about the [Woodrat](#) after recently spotting one. (Virginia's Wildlife Action Plan, Tier 4a, *Moderate Conservation Need.*) *Virginia Department of Wildlife Resources* (formerly Department of Game & Inland Fisheries).

13. Adjournment. Christine adjourned the meeting at 7:10pm.

Note: The next NHC meeting will be held on July 8. The August committee meeting will be virtual. Information to follow.