

**Minutes of Albemarle County Natural Heritage Committee (NHC) Meeting
June 18, 2020 – Virtual Meeting on Zoom**

Committee Members: Christine Putnam, Emily Luebke, Nancy Weiss, Peggy Cornett, Michael Rodemeyer, Kennon Williams

Absent: Lonnie Murray

Other Attendees: Kate Mallek, Sean Tubbs (PEC), Rod and Maggie Walker (Blue Ridge PRISM)

Staff: Kim Biasioli, Margaret Maliscewski, Scott Clark, Carolyn Shaffer

There was a quorum of six members present, and Emily called the meeting to order at 5:35. Visitors were welcomed.

Peggy moved approval of the minutes of the May 2020 meeting, and Michael seconded. The motion passed by a vote of 6:0.

Follow-ups:

- Important Site Visits and Updates
 - Nancy discussed upcoming meeting with ACPR regarding Biscuit Run and volunteers in parks.
 - Peggy visited Old Mill Trail site. Bittersweet and other invasives are taking over.
 - Peggy visited Tufton to see eagle nest; unable to confirm.
 - Christine provided an update on Blenheim Meadow. Concern about bamboo.

New Business:

- Kim provided an update on the first year of the ACAP program.
- Scott Clark gave a presentation on the history and founding principles of the Biodiversity Working Group and the Natural Heritage Committee.
 - Key takeaways:
 - NHC has a long, significant history leading to this moment, and an important charge.
 - Currently, the primary focus of the NHC is to move the county forward with protecting habitat cores and connections, and influencing the board to support conservation at the landscape level.
 - BWG and earlier NHCs provided the foundation for developing the BAP. We are now in the Implementation Phase.
 - BAP has many important goals and recommendations- task now is to find ways to do on the ground implementation.
- NHC workplan discussion
 - Discussion of Committee's availability and interests:
 - Some members prefer discrete and well-defined tasks; working together.
 - Focus on education
 - Importance of collaboration/partnering/engaging with other organizations.
 - Promote the idea of conservation zoning/differentiation in the rural area.
 - Wildlife corridors in the Piedmont (PEC study); connectivity beyond Albemarle.
 - Intersection of development, planning, policy, and goals of BAP.
 - Policy change that supports biodiversity and climate change.

- Discussion from guests and staff:
 - Sean Tubbs- PEC: Comp Plan Update is a good time for new initiatives. NHC could also tie into other efforts (e.g. Zoning Text Amendments, Climate Action Plan). Role of PEC is to provide information, alert the NHC to items.
 - Rod and Maggie Walker – Blue Ridge PRISM. Offer to help develop a set of proposals on how to address invasive plants at the county level. Request for 2 other members to work with them on that (**Action Item:** Christine to follow up).
 - Scott Clark – Conservation Zoning is a good idea, might be achievable. But Conservation Focus Areas are already defined. The BAP and Comp Plan also have many well-defined and specific recommendations. It is overwhelming to try to do everything; NHC could instead focus on specific projects that build on the Committee’s interests/strengths.

- Review of 2020 Goals:
 - Workplan – ongoing.
 - Recruiting new members – consider contacts in other organizations (tree stewards, VMN, bird club, VNPS, UVA); reach out to experts in different fields. (**Action Item:** members will follow up)
 - Build relationships with BOS/CAC - Christine
 - Water quality/stream health – Kim is working on the Stream Health Initiative in the rural areas; possible opportunities for NHC collaboration.
 - Education/outreach (website, county email list, others) – Christine, Emily
 - Opportunities in county parks, w/trail ambassadors
 - Need to define specific projects for volunteers and resources to disseminate

- Review of BAP goals and recommendations, and discussion of potential ways to address them:
 - Focus targeted outreach to landowners in Conservation Focus Areas to inform about easement programs, incentives, cost share opportunities.
 - Concerns/challenges about reaching out directly to landowners were discussed; and the need for structure.
 - Postcards can be used to identify receptive landowners. Other tools could include maps, mailings, existing contacts, webinars.
 - Menu of programs (cost-share, easements, incentives) to provide would be useful. Chesapeake Conservancy is developing this exact landowner tool (**Action Item:** Kim will provide info).
 - Potential to create a program; get press to give landowners a heads up.
 - Two main concepts identified for further exploration:
 - 1) Develop a landowner outreach program in Conservation Focus Areas, give it a name, publicity. (**Action Item:** Peggy, Kennon, Christine to have a follow up call)
 - 2) Focus on county parks (stewardship, management, education, policy). (**Action Item:** Kim will create a list of specific project ideas. Members will provide ideas to Kim). Start with parks in the Conservation Focus Areas.
 - Example is the Mill Creek Trail at Darden Towe (volunteers could pull invasives there), within the Rivanna Conservation Focus Area.
 - These projects tie into other goals (invasives, stream health)

The meeting was adjourned at 7:32. Next meeting date is July 16th.