

**Minutes of Albemarle County Natural Heritage Committee (NHC) Meeting
August 28, 2019 – Room C, COB on 5th Street**

Committee Members: Nancy Weiss, Mary Tillman, Christine Putnam, Michael Rodemeyer, Lonnie Murray, Peggy Cornett, Emily Luebke

Absent: Kennon Williams,

Other Attendees: Rick Barnett, Ruth Douglas, Devin Floyd, David Hannah

Nancy called the meeting to order at 5:35. Brief introductions were made. An employee of NBC 29 was present with a video camera for approximately the first hour of the meeting.

Chair's Report. Nancy reviewed the action items from the 7/18/19 meeting. Minutes of the meeting were approved.

ACTION ITEM:

- Peggy, Kennon, and Repp Glaettli will meet in person to discuss possible changes to the county's plant list for site plans.

Nancy began reviewing information in Google drive about Important Sites, stressing the importance of developing relationships with landowners and being a watch dog for many of the sites. She also repeated the need to recruit new committee members.

Christine Putnam talked about the recent Conservation Roundtable meeting she attended. The meetings are organized by PEC. She mentioned email updates/newsletters by Sean Tubbs of PEC and John Cruickshank of Sierra Club that are very informative and helpful.

ACTION ITEM:

- Christine will share recent emails from Sean and John with the committee.

Nancy continued reviewing the Google drive in more detail. Naming conventions for Important Sites that contain parks or county owned land were discussed (e.g., Hedgerow). Desired files and templates within folders were reviewed. Devin suggested the site visit template could be simplified.

ACTION ITEM:

- Devin will send a form for site visits that we can modify for our use.

Many of the priority Important Sites were briefly discussed, the point being that committee members should "adopt" individual sites. The importance of landowner contact and relationships was emphasized. Some realities were also acknowledged – that it will not be possible to establish landowner relationships at every site, that the process can vary and often takes a long time. But, having a process or plan in mind is important. Several members identified sites they would begin working on. A document created by Mary, describing how four site visits were/are being arranged, was shared. A proffer by developers north of the county's new Brook Hill River Park, 65 acres for a future high school, was mentioned by Norman. The acreage could/will become county property, and perhaps it could be used for conservation purposes.

Devin shared some observations. He feels “savanna” instead of “prairie” would be a better term to use when discussing Biscuit Run projects. The Blenheim Grassland Important Site is the most biodiverse site known in Albemarle County (based on flora). It’s important to quantify biodiversity when possible. Richness alone (the number of species present) is not a good indicator, as it does not reflect the health of the plants or the site, nor the overall presence of individual species (e.g., what percent of ground cover or tree canopy of the site do they represent). Too much focus is sometimes placed on rare species. An analysis of sites should include the impacts of non-native species. Gary Fleming developed a very good metric for this.

Center for Urban Habitat data is available to the committee. If the data are used for conservation or educational purposes, it is fine to share with the public. Devin is willing to float ideas to landowners and his clientele about conservation easements and cost-share programs. Grasslands are very important, and are bombs waiting to explode. Many former grassland sites have great potential for restoration if the proper techniques are used to allow them to regenerate. Seed banks are often intact, and fire can be an excellent tool. NHC set a great precedent by identifying some grassland areas as Important Sites.

ACTION ITEM:

- Devin and Emily will meet to make sure the committee has access to CUH data.

Dark skies and light pollution were discussed near the end of the meeting. Rick Barnett discussed data from two websites. Lighting ordinances for both the city and county are in place, but have not been updated to account for LED lights.

ACTION ITEM:

- Lonnie will find the County code on lighting and review it.
- David will identify the best contact person at the County to discuss the issue with.

Possible meeting dates for September were discussed. A final decision will need to be made by email. The meeting was adjourned at 7:45.