



LAND USE & ENVIRONMENT COMMITTEE

Meeting Minutes – May 21, 2020

Attendees:

Maggi Blomstrom	Piedmont Environmental Council
Eugenia Degano	Smithsonian Conservation Biology Institute
Michelle Edwards	Rappahannock-Rapidan Regional Commission
October Greenfield	Friends of the Rappahannock
Bryan Hofmann	Friends of the Rappahannock
Andrew Hopewell	Fauquier County
John McCarthy	Piedmont Environmental Council
Emily Melton	Fauquier County
Gary Rzepecki	Fauquier County
Joe Rossetti	Virginia Department of Forestry
Michael Trop	John Marshall Soil and Water Conservation District

The meeting was held via Zoom and a call-in number provided for those without web access. Michelle Edwards welcomed attendees and introductions were made.

Upper Rappahannock River Watershed Plan Update

Michelle Edwards, Rappahannock-Rapidan Regional Commission (RRRC)

Michelle Edwards provided an update on RRRC's development of the GIS-based Upper Rappahannock Watershed Plan. RRRC submitted an application for National Fish and Foundation's (NFWF) Small Watershed – Implementation Grant on April 28, 2020. It includes work on the Watershed Plan as well as stormwater best management practice (BMP) implementation and education in Fauquier County. Friends of the Rappahannock (FOR), Fauquier County, the Town of Warrenton, and John Marshall Soil and Water Conservation District (SWCD) are project partners.

The proposed project would contract the Chesapeake Conservancy to develop a custom GIS-based prioritization of urban and agriculture BMPs for the region, based upon new land cover and stream data the Conservancy is currently developing for the federal Chesapeake Bay Program. The prioritization would guide future BMP implementation, as part of the Watershed Plan, and could also be used for site-level conservation planning. Additionally, RRRC would contract FOR to conduct ground-truthing and targeted water quality monitoring, to inform the Watershed Plan. FOR would also digitize the region's existing livestock exclusion fencing data, using aerial photography and stream corridor data from the Conservancy.

Ms. Edwards noted that the project will also include construction of converted wetlands at Fauquier High School and Garret St near Warrenton Middle School, and a bioswale at the 5th Street parking lot adjacent to the Warrenton dog park. These projects were identified as high priorities by the Center for Watershed Protection in an assessment of Fauquier County and Warrenton's potential stormwater BMP projects, as well as this Committee's list of priority projects for WIP implementation. FOR will provide stormwater education and outreach assistance to the two localities in public schools and the larger community.

Bryan Hofmann added that the project will also provide additional resources to John Marshall SWCD to further incentivize the installation of Virginia Conservation Assistance Program (VCAP) projects in Fauquier County by providing additional cost share. FOR will provide assistance to John Marshall SWCD as needed, host two VCAP workshops, and promote the VCAP program at local events.

Grant awards are to be announced in September. If funded, the project would begin in January 2021 and conclude in December 2022 with the final Watershed Plan.

Additionally, Ms. Edwards stated that Joe Rossetti relayed to her that Virginia Department of Forestry (DOF) has declined RRRC's request for its BMP data, due to land owner privacy concerns and potential conflicts with the agency's data sharing agreement with the US Natural Resource Conservation Service and Farm Service Agency. Joe Rossetti provided additional details. Ms. Edwards stated that she will contact DEQ to inform them of the situation and determine if DEQ can assist in obtaining the data, potentially through a data sharing agreement.

Ms. Edwards stated that collection of other data sets are either complete or progressing. RRRC's new regional planner, who will be handling GIS for the Watershed Plan, will be starting after Memorial Day.

For additional questions and comments regarding the Upper Rappahannock Watershed Plan or RRRC's other Chesapeake Bay TMDL efforts, please contact Michelle Edwards at (540) 829-7450 or medwards@rrregion.org.

Member Roundtable

- **October Greenfield and Bryan Hofmann, Friends of the Rappahannock (FOR)**– The organization will be opening an office near Culpeper High School to focus on the Upper Rappahannock Basin. FOR is looking for new urban tree planting sites with municipal partners for this fall. They are working with Fauquier County on a tree planting project in Monroe Park. FOR is also looking for partners on tree giveaways this fall, and are beginning a Mountain Run Initiative to focus on urban nutrient management plans, urban tree planting and residential stormwater BMPs. They will be reaching out to SWCD Managers in the Rappahannock Watershed to offer assistance with targeted outreach for the VCAP program to increase enrollment. FOR and PEC will be discussing what incentives they can provide for urban BMP implementation to make them more attractive. FOR will also be providing support and incentives to MS4s to assist with their programs.

- **Maggi Blomstrom and John McCarthy, Piedmont Environmental Council (PEC)**– The Council recently sent out their 2020 Land Conservation Update to landowners with 50 acres or more not under conservation easement. It highlighted available agricultural BMP cost-share and potential funding sources. PEC and the Fauquier County Agricultural Development Department held a farm and land conservation webinar directed at Fauquier County landowners on May 12th. 52 people attended. They will be holding a green infrastructure webinar on June 11 targeting homeowners associations mainly in Fauquier County, but others are welcome to attend. PEC held an online meeting for the Rappahannock Conservation Partnership a few weeks ago and is working to pull together a steering committee. PEC is assisting food banks in Rappahannock and Fauquier Counties with accessing milk from a local dairy cooperative, supplying several hundred gallons of milk per week. Finally, the Council is working with the American Farmland Trust and RRRC on a USDA Local Food Promotion Program grant proposal to conduct research to gain capacity in production, processing and storage of animal protein.
- **Michael Trop, John Marshall Soil and Water Conservation District**– The District conducted four tree planting projects this spring in partnership with DOF, FOR and Goose Creek Association. Since school student participation was not an option, these partners graciously stepped up. The \$2.1 million in cost-share the SWCD has received has all been allocated.
- **Andrew Hopewell and Emily Melton, Fauquier County Community Development**– The webinar Ms. Blomstrom mentioned is phase one of the project. The County is planning additional webinars, which will all be recorded and posted on the County and partner websites. The County is beginning to work with Eldon James of the Rappahannock River Basin Commission on the Healthy Watershed Forest Initiative pilot to assist forest landowners by aggregating carbon credits. Ms. Melton noted that a lot of wetland mitigation banks are currently being constructed in Fauquier County.
- **Joe Rossetti, Department of Forestry**– Over the last couple of months, Department staff have been busy with fire season, which is now over, and tree plantings with FOR and John Marshall SWCD. Operations have been fairly normal. The timber market for hardwoods has been very poor. They will be down a staff person in Madison County for a little while. [Edited to add: DOF’s Turf to Trees Program is expected to roll out in July. Its purpose is to improve water quality through planting trees in turf, focusing on lower income areas and public lands.]
- **Gary Rzepecki, Fauquier County Parks and Recreation**– The Department had to cut back to only essential spending, absorbing a \$285,000 revenue hit in addition to a hiring freeze. The Department started a virtual history program at its parks. The Warrenton Branch Greenway extension trail project will be bid out in June, the Woods of Warrenton trail project is under construction, and the Central Sports Complex is due to open in August. They are updating their Master Plan for the Department. A virtual public survey for the Plan will be released tomorrow or next week and will be open for a month. Joe Costello will be working to update the County’s Connections Plan to make it more definitive and realistic. The Riverside Preserve project is waiting for a site visit from VOF to finalize the easement. Then VDGIF will need to approve the MOU to build the canoe and kayak launch. He anticipates construction this fall.

- **Eugenia Degano, Smithsonian Conservation Biology Institute**– The Institute finished their data calibration with USGS for the Changing Landscapes Initiative and has results for the growth/planning scenarios on nitrogen, pollinators and carbon sequestration.

Next Land Use & Environment Committee Meeting:

The Committee meets quarterly on the third Thursday of the month. The next Land Use and Environment Committee meeting is scheduled for August 20, 2020, at 10:00 am – 12:00 noon in the RRRC conference room. RRRC will assess the pandemic situation prior to the meeting to determine whether to hold the meeting online. Please provide any additional suggestions for future meeting topics to Michelle Edwards at medwards@rrregion.org.