



Shenandoah County Conservation Easement Authority

Office of Community Development
600 North Main Street, Suite 107
Woodstock, VA 22664

www.shenandoahcountyva.us/committees/cea

MEETING MINUTES

April 3 2013; 4:00-6:00 PM

Board Conference Room

CEA Members present: Supervisor Dennis Morris, Planning Commissioner Leon Smith, Cindy Dellinger, Dee Hockman, Kelly Watkinson, Bud Griswold and Doug French

Others Present: Patrick Felling, George & Barbara Hawkins, Wade & Jessi Hawkins, Laura Thurman, Faye Cooper and Crystal Copenhaver

Call to Order

The meeting was brought to order by Chairperson Kelly Watkinson at 4:00 p.m. with an overview of the agenda.

Approve Prior Meeting Minutes

The minutes of the CEA meeting on March 13, 2013 were approved as presented.

Proposal from Valley Conservation Council for Collaboration on Outreach to Ag & Forestal District Landowners

Faye Cooper, Executive Director of Valley Conservation Council (VCC), presented a proposal to the CEA regarding collaborating on outreach to landowners in the agricultural & forestal districts (AFD). VCC has submitted a grant request to educate county landowners nearing AFD re-enrollment about placing their land under easement prior to AFD renewal. Landowners with few years left in the AFD program could benefit from higher easement valuations. VCC would like to pursue partnering with CEA on this effort even if their grant funding request is not approved.

Discussion of the Hawkins Farm Easement Proposal

A. Q&A with the Hawkins Family

Wade Hawkins explained their family's efforts to preserve and protect land. The land was purchased in 1940 by their grandfather, and has been farmed by three generations. The family wants to put the farm into an easement to ensure the land will continue to be used as a farm, maintain the integrity of the farm as a whole, and ensure it will never be developed. Their farm is a start to finish cattle operation; beginning with calves raised all the way until slaughter. They grow crops to supply the feed; and the farm is certified natural. His grandfather was one of the first farmers in area to introduce

contour farming, he implemented an erosion control plan, and received numerous conservation awards. The finishing lot is now 100% confined, and a nutrient management plan and conservation plans are all directed to protect the property. They are full time farmers. There will be two separate easements so that two heirs can each have a family farm, allowing a home site on each property.

According to USGS, the stream on the property is intermittent, not perennial. The stream area and pond will be fenced out to protect the waterways. The Hawkins indicated that the spring-fed stream used to run, until houses were built across the street. State water quality data show that stream to be in good condition, while nearby streams to the north and south are considered polluted.

Any building to be constructed over 10,000 sq. ft. would need prior approval. There will be no fee charged when the family makes requests to make changes. Enforcement of the easement stipulations will be divided between co-holders of the easement. Enforcement will be divided but both holders will share files and what each party will be responsible for will be specifically listed in the deeds. Typically one site visit will be performed annually unless a family makes a request for changes or if there are complaints about the property.

B. Review Scores Sheets for North and South Easements

The easement program score sheets were reviewed and discussed. A question arose regarding the development rights reported for the easement tracts, and amount of road frontage for each property. Easement scoring reflects potential development rights, as opposed to the actual amount of development that would be achieved after taking into account the need for well and septic, etc. The actual amount of development may very well be lower than the potential amount. Supervisor Morris suggested including the word "*Potential*" to the scoring sheet. Mr. Felling reported that he has already added the following note to the score sheet, "This score sheet is intended for Conservation Easement Program use only, and does not constitute a County land use determination."

Regarding the funding for this easement proposal, Supervisor Morris pointed out that even though the contribution from the County is less than a tenth of the total easement value, the County's contribution is critical because without it the easement project would fall through. The landowner is already donating a higher percent of the value than normally allowed by the NRCS, and the County portion brings an equal amount in state funding. Should the County not match the state funding by the end of 2013, the state funds would have to be returned.

C. Plan a Tour of Pleasantdale Farm

Dennis would like to set up a site date for Hawkins farm with the BOS, suggesting it be a joint tour with CEA members. CEA members settled on May 2nd for the proposed tour date, with April 23rd being a back-up date.

D. Easement Review Process Timeline

The Virginia Outdoors Foundation has already given its initial approval for the project. That leaves the County (CEA & BOS) to finish their reviews, and the NRCS. The CEA could complete its review in May, and the BOS in June. The timing for NRCS is uncertain.

Update On Board of Supervisors Role in Easement Enforcement

A draft ordinance has been submitted which will change the BOS' role from co-holder to 3rd party enforcer. A public hearing on the amendment will be held on April 23rd, and the BOS could vote on it that night or at one of the meetings in May. Supervisor Morris indicated his sense that BOS members seem to favor the proposal, but any public comment could have an impact on their decision.

CEA Funding Update

The planned request for easement funding was delayed in consultation with the budget director and members of the CEA. The BOS was made aware that the CEA will be asking for additional funds at a later date, probably after the expenditure of the existing funds. Chairperson Watkinson suggested that CEA look for other sources of funding besides the County. Supervisor Morris recommended an outreach effort informing citizens of the option to include donations to the easement programs in their wills.

Other Business

There was general discussion about whether a purchase of development rights (PDR) program will be a boon for non-conservation landowners looking for easy money. It was concluded that the easement process is complex enough and restrictive enough to dissuade anyone lacking the commitment to conserve their land.

Land in a conservation easement tends to be more affordable to future farmers. Easements cannot be placed on land in designated growth areas. Residential development away from the towns cost the County more in services than keeping land in farming.

Meeting Adjourned