



Shenandoah County

Conservation Easement Authority

Office of Community Development

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Shenandoah County Conservation Easement Authority

Board Conference Room

Shenandoah County Government Center

Woodstock, Virginia

Wednesday October 4, 2017

5:00 - 6:30 PM

MEETING MINUTES

CEA Members present: Chair Dee Hockman, Steve Baker, Cynthia Dellinger, Doug French, Leon Smith, Kelly Watkinson, and Jill Jefferson, County Planner.

Others Present: Andrew Sorrell, Virginia Department of Agriculture and Consumer Services; Heather Williams, The Conservation Fund; Kim Woodwell, Shenandoah Forum; Alex Bridges, Northern Virginia Daily; and Mr. and Mrs. Crisman.

Meeting was called to order at 5:00 PM

Approve Meeting Minutes

Doug French made a motion to approve the August 2017 meeting minutes; the motion was seconded by Cynthia Dellinger, all in favor. **Motion carried.**

Motion to Amend the Agenda

Doug French made a motion to amend the agenda to include a presentation from Andrew Sorrell from Virginia Department of Agriculture and Consumer Services (VDACS), Office of Farmland Preservation. The motion was seconded by Kelly Watkinson, and all were in favor. **Motion carried.**

1. Farmland Preservation VDACS Programs

Andrew Sorrell discussed the funding programs available to local governments to encourage preservation of farmlands along with other services from VDACS. State funding could help Shenandoah County further a Purchase of Development Rights (PDR) program, agritourism advancement, planning support, or for conservation easements including purchase price, transactional costs, and appraisal fees. Shenandoah County is one of 22 Counties in Virginia with a PDR program on the books. In order to

implement such a program, funding is necessary. VDACS has funding for localities, like Shenandoah, to help develop the PDR program. Grant funding could also finance a cost analysis of community services to residential versus agricultural taxpayers.

a. VDACS AFID Grant:

Match requirement is 50%. No local money in Shenandoah County budget is currently available for match. Andrew mentioned other localities obtain their match money for grant funds through rollback taxes, a portion of rollback taxes, a percentage of real estate taxes, transient lodging tax, and / or private funding. Some localities have a trickle fund, where a small portion of the rollback taxes can be set aside and in 3 years, there is adequate funding for use as match in grants.

The AFID planning grant cap is \$20,000 and 25% can be cash and other 25% can be staff time as in-kind match. Therefore, to an application of \$5,000 would qualify for a \$20,000 planning grant. A facility grant for farm or forestry is also available with a cap of \$250,000, also requiring a 50% match. If awarded the state's match money must be spent in two years. The CEA discussed the desire to have some funds to use as a match in order to take advantage of these state funding streams.

b. Virginia Land Conservation Foundation (VLCF):

The foundation provides state funding to conserve open spaces/parks, natural areas, historic areas, and farmland/forest preservation. This is a 50% match for local governments and ranked at the state level based on soils and size. Doug requested prime soils not be weighted so heavily in conservation criteria since cattle will not graze well on vegetation in prime soils areas.

Federal version of VLCF:

Protect working agricultural lands and limit non-agricultural uses of the land, or wetlands and their benefits, through Land Easements (Agricultural Conservation Easement Program) or preserving private lands with forests through the Healthy Forest Reserve Program.

c. Other VDACS programs include the Century Farm and Century Forest programs, the FarmLink Program to match farm seekers to farm owners; and farm transition workshops.

2. The Knob

Heather Williams from The Conservation Fund discussed protecting the Knob in Mount Jackson as it currently is the only privately held property in a contiguous area protected by the George Washington National Forest. The parcel is currently being considered to place on the market and the family would prefer it be preserved. The Conservation Fund is seeking funding and written support to be the interim holder of this property on the ridge, until the U.S. George Washington National Forest (GWNF) can acquire it. The Knob is the #2 priority for the GWNF. The Conservation Fund has raised \$335,000 of the needed \$385,000 to be the holder.

Cynthia Dellinger made a motion the CEA write a letter of support to the U.S. Forest Service for The Conservation Fund's purchase of "The Knob" parcel for conservation. Kelly Watkinson

seconded the motion; all in favor. **Motion carried.** Jill Jefferson will draft the letter of support for Dee Hockman's signature.

A discussion followed inquiring if the County could provide some funding to help defray the costs for The Conservation Fund to close their \$50,000 funding gap in the interim purchase of The Knob, until the U.S. Forest Service purchases it in FY2019. Cynthia Dellinger made a motion the CEA recommend the Board write a letter of support and consider providing financial endorsement to The Conservation Fund for this project. The motion was seconded by Doug French; all in favor. **Motion carried.**

Jill will write a letter to the U.S. Forest Service supporting the Conservation Fund's purchase, and the Forest Service's ultimate preservation, of The Knob parcel from the CEA. Kim Woodwell of Shenandoah Forum and Heather Williams of Conservation Fund will approach County Admin in order to request of the Board consideration of a letter of support to the GWNF for their purchase and preservation of the Knob, as well as requesting the Board consider partial funding to help with the interim purchase of the Knob, by Conservation Fund.

3. The Strategic Plan discussion was postponed due to time constraints.
4. The Crismans discussed their easement application and the legal status. The CEA would like to review a draft easement by next meeting, if available.

Next meeting: December 6, 2017

Meeting adjourned at 6:44 PM

Minutes recorded by Jill Jefferson

Mission statement of the CEA:

"To retain the rural character, ensure agricultural sustainability, and protect historic and natural resources in Shenandoah County by promoting, holding/co-holding and purchasing Voluntary Conservation Easements".