



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 August 2, 2017

5:00 - 6:30 PM

MEETING MINUTES

CEA Members present: Chair Dee Hockman, Steve Baker, Cindy Dellinger, Doug French, Leon Smith, Bill Wine, and Jill Jefferson, County Planner.

Others Present: Supervisor Richard Walker, District 3 representative; Taylor Cole, Conservation Partners, LLC; Mark Botkin, BotkinRose PLC; Gene Keller, Farm Bureau; John Hutchinson, SVBF; Joan Comanor and Kim Sandum, Shenandoah Forum; Alex Bridges, Northern Virginia Daily; Mr. and Mrs. Crisman; and Bob Crum.

Meeting was called to order at 5:02 PM

Approve Meeting Minutes

Doug French made a motion to approve the June 2017 meeting minutes; the motion was seconded by Leon Smith, all in favor. **Motion carried.**

County Easement Activity

Taylor Cole and attorney Mark Botkin provided an overview of the Crisman's proposed conservation easement. Taylor Cole will be preparing the Crisman conservation easement application for the County to consider being a holder. He explained the Crisman property has inherent values for conservation including being a micro setting for water protection, buffers along creeks, woodland habitat, open space, farming, views, and forestry.

The Crisman parcel is 32.5 acres. With 1.5 acres of improvements, the remaining 31 acres are open space for protection. The challenge with parcels this size is that the traditional holders, both public and private, focus on the larger land owners. Public or quasi-public holders such as Department of Forestry

(DOF) and Virginia Outdoors Foundation (VOF), are so large that a 32.5-acre easement does not qualify for degree of effort. Private land trusts or charitable entities are also organizations that function as holders and are committed to preserving these conservation values. However, the private land trusts do not have legislature support and have to raise money that gets transferred to the conservation applicants. The costs assigned through a charitable land trust do not discriminate for parcel size; therefore, an owner of a 32.5-acre property is assigned the same costs as that for a large property. This makes it difficult for property owners like the Crisman's to find a suitable holder. The Crisman's represent a niche market that is not met through the traditional public or private holders. Consequently, they are planning to request the County be the holder of their parcel. The costs of an easement for the private land trusts are still costly, even when a parcel is donated.

The possibility that Shenandoah County might be the holder of an easement allows for donations and preservation of lands that do not fit with state agencies or private land trusts. The Crisman property would be a charitable donation, allowed under the State Code. If the County agrees, this could be a service to landowners to serve as a locally-focused holder flexible to support land owners' preservation when they cannot qualify for the traditional holder scenarios due to size limits.

The costs to the County for a donated easement include the annual site inspections and reporting of annual inspection to the State. The annual site review and reporting could be performed by County staff such as GIS, planning, or building inspection. There is no fund raising for the County to support the conservation easement activities, so there are a lot of advantages for the Crisman's for land that does not fall neatly under traditional easements.

Discussions followed regarding questions about the County and CEA as the designated holder and timing of when to bring this application formally to both the Board and CEA. Jill Jefferson indicated she would clarify the steps of the holder and timing to bring this formally to the Board and the CEA for consideration. [Note – after the meeting, Jill Jefferson confirmed that per the County Code, both the County Board and the CEA are to separately review and consider adopting any motion for the CEA to be the holder for the County. Jill Jefferson will present the proposed easement to the Board during a work session to garner any concerns before the Crisman's expend funds to finalize their application.]

Other County easement activity discussed included the following:

Doug gave an update on the Hottel Keller easement. Jill Jefferson discussed the proposed easement in Mount Jackson and next steps to draft an MOU for the County attorney to review to redraw the growth area out of the floodplain, where the Tisinger parcel lies.

Next meeting: October 4, 2017

Meeting adjourned at 6:24 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".