

Summary of the Natural Resources Advisory Work Group for Albemarle County
9/30/16

The Albemarle County Comprehensive Plan (approved June 2015) and Fiscal Year 2015-2017 Strategic Plan demonstrate the desire of the Board of Supervisors to conserve and protect the County's natural resources.

To begin work toward many of the stated objectives in the plans, an advisory work group representing eight organizations was assembled to advise and assist County staff in developing priorities for a Natural Resources Program. The group met seven times from May through September of 2016. David Hannah, Natural Resources Manager, organized and facilitated the meetings. Other county staff participated in most meetings. The eight group members are:

Alyson Sappington, Thomas Jefferson Soil and Water Conservation District
David Powell, Virginia Department of Forestry
Paul Coleman, Albemarle County Farm Bureau
Nancy Weiss, Albemarle County Natural Heritage Committee
Kristel Riddervold, City of Charlottesville
Keith Lancaster, Southern Development Homes
Rex Linville, Piedmont Environmental Council
Ann Mallek, Albemarle County Board of Supervisors

During the course of the meetings, the group went through a SWOT process - an analysis of the Strengths, Weaknesses, Opportunities, and Threats relative to the status and management of the County's natural resources. A prioritized list for each of the four qualities was developed through the group process. The following pages provide those lists plus a brief summary of the "take home" messages that emerged from group discussions.

Prioritized List of STRENGTHS

- **7 votes** - Existence of high quality and valued natural resources.
- **5 votes** - Community support for natural resource protection/engaged, supportive community.
- **4 votes** - Political will to support Rural Area/Development Areas and implementing Growth Management Policy.
- **2 votes** - Size of Rural Area, area of natural resources.
- **2 votes** - Self-contained public drinking watersheds.
- **1 vote** - Generational ownership of land.
- **1 vote** - Number and quality of non-government organizations (NGO), presence of UVA, and related partnerships.
- **1 vote** - Precedent in County for voluntary efforts (by County)/strong reputation.
- **1 vote** - Investment in easement programs.
- Current attainment area (good air quality).
- Current interest of Board of Supervisors.
- Natural beauty (including Shenandoah National Park).
- Tourism because of natural beauty.
- Affluent community provides opportunities.
- Available resource information (Rivanna Conservation Alliance, etc.).
- Water Protection Ordinance (WPO).
- City of Charlottesville as partner.
- High quality of Rivanna River watershed.
- Significant number of environmental staff that are forward thinking.

Take Home Messages:

- We are blessed to have an abundance of natural resources here, and community support for conserving/managing them.
- The Growth Management policy and size of the Rural Area are significant strengths.
- There are community resources that facilitate caring for our natural resources (Charlottesville as a partner, large environmental nonprofit community, presence of UVA, affluence).
- We have established some programs to steward our resources (e.g., easement programs, WPO).

Prioritized List of WEAKNESSES

- **8 votes** - Lack of funding for implementation.
- **6 votes** - Urban-rural split creates conflicts in balancing different needs/expectations (conflicts are geographical/generational/political).
- **3 votes** - Gaps in stream buffer ordinance – enforcement and what it covers.
- **2 votes** - Lack of focus, wanting to do too much (as related to regulations/programs).
- **2 votes** - Cyclical/inconsistent political will.
- **2 votes** - Abandonment of groundwater analysis.
- **1 vote** - Fragmentation from small lots in Rural Area (21 acre lots) (Past land use decision – Rural Area subdivision of land).
- **1 vote** - Climate change not well addressed/understood.
- **1 vote** - Confusion about roles and responsibilities regarding regulations (staff, landowners, everyone).
- **1 vote** - Limited ability to protect important natural resources from the impacts of development.
- **1 vote** - Lack of comprehensive/cohesive/coordinated education program and information.
- Under-utilizing existing regulatory tools.
- Dillon Rule State – limits local options or adds to process of approval.
- Lack of regulatory authority for grading/clearing on “recreational” farms, those established primarily to qualify for the land use taxation program (e.g., clearing land to the edge of streams or other water bodies for aesthetic purposes, a good view, etc.).
- No density limit on farm animals.
- No mountain protection.
- Need to protect groundwater.
- Training of staff/available resources.
- Limited enforcement of existing regulations.

Take Home Messages:

- Funding and overextended staff are limitations in managing natural resources.
- There are conflicts and differing needs and expectations due to our urban-rural split (geographic, generational, political). A lack of investing or implementation funding in Development Areas creates a threat to the Rural Area.
- There is a lack of understanding (by the public) and sometimes ambiguity in the roles and responsibilities for addressing resource issues (e.g., WPO, groundwater).
- There is a lack of authority and limited ability to manage resources.

Prioritized List of OPPORTUNITIES

- **5 votes** - Investment in the combined City/County urban area to ensure that it continues to offer a high quality of life for residents as a way of influencing development and growth outside that region.
- **4 votes** - Invest in the protection of our natural resources now through direct investment (e.g., ACE) and strengthening of land protection regulation (e.g., zoning changes).
- **4 votes** - Develop a comprehensive/cohesive/coordinated education program and information.
- **4 votes** - Promote a sustainable agricultural and forestry economy (e.g., local food production).
- **3 votes** - Natural resources are important to the population. Leverage this support into more effective management/protection of resources.
- **1 vote** - Overcome, remove barriers to assistance and support for landowners.
- **1 vote** - Survey the service community to determine gaps in public information/education.
- **1 vote** - More cooperative work with the City of Charlottesville to protect land and natural resources in the drinking water supply watershed.
- **1 vote** - Improve energy performance – generation, distribution, eliminate waste, improve efficiency - among the general public.
- Create strong incentives for landowners to create and maintain pollinator and other types of native habitat.
- Pursue amending Open Space Land Use qualifications to create and maintain pollinator and other types of native habitat on parcels as small as five acres.
- Adopt the full Chesapeake Bay Preservation Act.
- Strengthen our working partnerships with other localities, NGOs, etc.
- Review/assess the Green Infrastructure Center grant products.

Take Home Messages:

- We should look for opportunities to improve conditions and quality of life in Development Areas, to make them more desirable places to live. This includes conserving resources within the DAs (e.g., streams, riparian buffers, tree canopy, trails & greenways, etc.) while helping reduce impacts to resources in the Rural Area (drinking watersheds, wildlife habitat, open space, etc.).
- We should take actions – invest in programs and strengthen regulations.
- We should promote a sustainable rural economy (agriculture, forestry).
- We need to improve education, provide information, and provide more support and assistance to land owners and the public.

Prioritized List of THREATS

- **8 votes** - Loss of functional habitat and natural resources through fragmentation of ownership due to sprawl and subdivision in the Rural Area.
- **5 votes** - Desirability of area may lead to rapid population growth, which has the potential for undesirable (unmanaged) effects on natural resources.
- **3 votes** - Proliferation of recreational event venues threatens traditional uses of the Rural Area (agriculture, forestry).
- **2 votes** - Fragmentation of land is potential detriment to rural economy.
- **2 votes** - Non-native invasive species.
- **1 vote** - Climate change - difficult to deal with and manage but a potential problem.
- **1 vote** - Insufficient incentives to limit by-right development.
- **1 vote** - Knowledge gaps, lack of awareness, and financial inability of landowners to maintain BMPs, infrastructure.
- **1 vote** - General fear and lack of trust, fear of repercussions if questions are asked, angst in asking for advice, help. Distrust of government.
- State taking away control of local issues such as limits on regulating farm wineries.

Take Home Messages:

- Habitat fragmentation in the Rural Area threatens our resources and the rural economy.
- Rapid population growth (due to the desirability of the area) has the potential to harm our resources.
- Expanding recreational event venues in the Rural Area threaten traditional uses of the Rural Area.
- There are numerous threats to our natural resources, and more will develop over time. Non-native invasive species and climate change are two of the largest known threats today. Both mitigation and adaptation should be addressed in dealing with climate change.