



Albemarle County

Legislation Text

File #: 15-310, **Version:** 1

AGENDA DATE: 10/7/2015

TITLE:

Water Resources Program Funding Recommendations

SUBJECT/PROPOSAL/REQUEST: Presentation of Final Report from the Water Resources Funding Advisory Committee

ITEM TYPE: Regular Information Item

STAFF CONTACT(S): Foley, Walker, Letteri, Davis, Kamptner, Shadman, Harper, Kilroy

PRESENTER (S): Greg Harper, Water Resources Manager

LEGAL REVIEW: Yes

REVIEWED BY: Thomas C. Foley

BACKGROUND: On January 8, 2014 the Board directed staff to develop a process to inform the public and seek input on preferences for alternative funding sources to support the County's water resource protection programs. On February 5, 2014 the Board approved a community engagement process, and on April 2, 2014, approved an appointment process for a Water Resources Funding Advisory Committee (the "Committee"). The Committee was appointed beginning in August 2014 and was charged with reviewing alternative funding mechanisms, taking community sentiment into consideration, and providing recommendations to the Board no later than October 30, 2015. The Committee charge and membership are included as Attachments A and B, respectively. The Committee met monthly from September 2014 to August 2015. Meeting dates, agendas, presentation slides, notes, and other supporting materials are chronicled at the program funding website: www.albemarle.org/waterfunding <<http://www.albemarle.org/waterfunding>>.

While not expressly part of the Committee's official charge, the Committee defined a program plan, or range of operational and capital programs necessary to meet state mandates and proactively manage infrastructure and ecological assets. This program plan served as the basis for estimating program costs and analyzing rate structures under various scenarios. This program plan was presented to the Board on January 7, 2015. To inform the public and receive feedback on preliminary Committee recommendations, Committee members and staff conducted two community-wide open house events and met with eight community groups during the months of June, July, and August 2015. Public outreach during this period was considerable and included County A-Mails, Engage Albemarle, web surveys, and many news stories by various media outlets, providing both the promotion of and coverage of events.

STRATEGIC PLAN: Natural Resources: Thoughtfully protect and manage Albemarle County's ecosystems and natural resources in both the rural and development areas to safeguard the quality of life of current and future generations. **Year-1 Priority:** By October 2015, establish direction and funding for a program to improve water quality.

DISCUSSION: The Committee's recommendations are detailed in its final report (Attachment C). In summary, the Committee recommends that the County support its water resource protection programs through a County-wide stormwater utility fee. The Committee proposes that the fee be based primarily on impervious area, but include a robust credit system or rate adjustments as provided by state law, based on permanent reductions in stormwater flow or pollutant loadings. The Committee recommends incentives and technical assistance to promote and reward private investments that create a public benefit.

The Committee believes that the recommended approach is the most equitable method to distribute program costs to individual property owners. While the Committee believes there is some public support for a utility, it also recognizes that there is apprehension regarding cost increases associated with the anticipated expansion of programs. There is also particular anxiety expressed by members of the public about shifting the cost burden to particular groups, such as owners of large rural properties, tax-exempt organizations, and commercial property owners. Some rural property owners expressed that the program does not serve them.

At this time, the Committee is providing broad recommendations that do not include the specificity to predict fees at the parcel level. Additional work, including the determination of a rate formula and credit and incentive program, will be required prior to the adoption of a funding mechanism. This work would require additional stakeholder input and the technical services of a consultant.

Staff recognizes that the considerations and recommendations communicated in the Committee's report are too extensive and complex to adequately review in a short work session. Staff recommends that several additional work sessions and opportunities for public input be scheduled in early 2016 to allow the Board to more fully consider and discuss the findings. If the Board then elects to proceed with the Committee's recommendations, the Board would need to engage in a process to evaluate and determine a specific rate formula and credit system. This work could take another 12 to 18 months and would require the services of a funding consultant at a level equal to or, more likely, greater than that required already. Following this additional work, the Board would be presented with the decision to adopt a proposed, detailed funding mechanism.

BUDGET IMPACT: The Board's consideration of Committee recommendations is a preliminary step in the process of determining the appropriateness of a dedicated funding mechanism. There is no budget impact at this time.

RECOMMENDATION:

Staff recommends that the Board direct staff to schedule additional Board work sessions and opportunities for public input in early 2016 to allow the Board to more fully consider and discuss the Committee's findings.

A - Committee Charge

B - Committee Membership

C - Final Recommendations Report