



LAND USE & ENVIRONMENT COMMITTEE

Meeting Minutes – November 29, 2011

Attendees:

Jenny Biche'	Rappahannock-Rapidan Regional Commission
John Cooley	Town of Orange
Michelle Edwards	Rappahannock-Rapidan Regional Commission
Brian Higgins	Piedmont Environmental Council
Chuck Hoysa	John Marshall Soil & Water Conservation District
Sue Ellen Johnson	Piedmont Environmental Council
Don Loocke	Piedmont Environmental Council
Kenner Love	VA Cooperative Extension
Bob Moore	Fauquier Trails Coalition
Gardiner Mulford	Culpeper Horse Owners Association
Patrick Mulhern	Town of Culpeper
Pam Owen	Old Rag Master Naturalists
Ray Pickering	Fauquier County
Chip Rice	Friends of the Rappahannock
James Sawyer	Fauquier County
Adam Shellenberger	Fauquier County
Bob Slusser	Dept. of Conservation and Recreation
Frank Wilczek	Blue Ridge Foothills Conservancy

Welcome & Introductions

Attendees were welcomed and introductions were made. Copies of the Agenda were distributed.

Sustainable Agriculture Overview

*Andy Hankins, Extension Specialist
Virginia State University- Alternative Agriculture*

Mr. Hankins provided an overview of “The Changing Landscape of Virginia’s Food & Agriculture Business Markets.” A copy of the presentation is available at <http://www.rregion.org/envcmte.html>.

Mr. Hankins discussed the need for small and mid-size farms to differentiate their products from those of large-scale farms in order to compete in flooded markets. Options include organic

farming, free-range livestock, specializing in niche markets, or using high tunnels to grow produce outside of traditional seasons. Tobacco farmers have been reinventing their farms by implementing new crops and utilizing existing resources, for example growing mushrooms in unused dairy barns. He shared successful examples of Consumer Supported Agriculture (CSA), and urban horticulture throughout Virginia. There is a greater demand than is currently being met by CSAs in the state, with long waiting lists for memberships.

After the presentation, participants discussed the challenges facing farmers and how localities could support solutions. Mr. Hankins stated that the biggest challenge for rural counties has been locating a market for farm products. While some areas such as Southwest Virginia have successful marketing cooperatives, many rural regions such as Bath and Highland counties are limited to who they can sell to and require a more organized approach to marketing. In addition, preserving individual farms is not sufficient. A threshold level of farms needs to exist in order to retain support services (i.e. tractor dealers, feed stores, veterinarians, etc.), if farms are to be productive and successful. Mr. Hankins also feels there is a need to support mid-size farmers, which as a group has been in drastic decline. Recently, Food Security has also become a growing issue that needs more public education and awareness and may have future funding opportunities. Ms. Johnson from PEC stated that the general public has been focused more on the local food movement with the marketing messaging taking a patriotic angle. One suggestion was for marketing to emphasize food security, while another was for marketing to take a more holistic view, incorporating public health.

Suggestions on how localities could support solutions to address these issues included addressing zoning policies that would address fragmentation of farms and forests, and the need for stronger state government support. Mr. Hankins said that North Carolina has more staffing and funding allotted to research programs, food hubs, with less regulation on farming and free certification testing for farmers than Virginia does.

Piedmont Environmental Council (PEC) Agricultural Activities Update

*Sue Ellen Johnson, Director of Rural and Agricultural Economy Programs
Piedmont Environmental Council*

Ms. Johnson gave an update on PEC's Agricultural activities. A copy of the presentation is available at <http://www.rrregion.org/envcmte.html>.

Ms. Johnson stated that PEC has several programs that address sustainable agriculture including farmland conservation, Buy Fresh/Buy Local, Exploring the Small Farm Dream and Farm to Institution (food hubs, central kitchens, etc.). The organization's intent is to develop practices and systems which will not adversely affect future productivity or society. Providing Processing centers creates added value by turning bruised and damaged fruits into jams, salsas, etc. that would otherwise be lost revenue.

Localities can help foster entrepreneurship through facilitation, education and organization. Farmers particularly need support with marketing and branding their products. Ms. Johnson recommended that local/regional plans should encourage agriculture livelihoods and landscapes by setting goals for food sheds (e.g., 10% of food supply will be local by 2015).

Ms. Johnson suggested that local governments can support farmers by:

- Protecting prime agricultural soils
- Minimizing parcel fragmentation through zoning
- Protecting water quality
- Distinguishing between agricultural/agricultural-related activities and non-agricultural activities
- Understanding the needs of the agricultural community and building those into local comprehensive plans
- Address roadway safety for equipment and livestock transportation
- Maintaining a reasonable and sensitive regulatory environment

Living Lands Workshop Discussion

RRRC will be hosting the next Living Lands Workshop in the spring of 2012, on the topic of “Fostering Sustainable Agriculture for Economic Development.” The primary audience will be local government staff, elected officials and community organizations, with farmers as the secondary audience. Participants discussed potential topics and speakers for the workshop.

Suggested topics include:

- Technical support/data sharing
- Agro-tourism/Recreation
- Sustainable farming strategies (taken from Andy Hankins presentation) and available resources
- Marketing
- Processing and distribution
- Developing the next-generation of farmers/supporting beginning farmers
- Farm-to-table/farm-to-school
- Ways to increase economic development through agriculture
- Benefits of agriculture on the community
- Food hubs
- Value-added/marketing (organic label, healthy waters/healthy farms labels, etc.—what makes a value-added label based on market research)
- Planning concerns (e.g., viewsheds, right-of-way, traffic, water quality, agricultural exemptions/zoning)
- Food security
- Needs/roadblocks for mid-sized farms

- Suburban farming
- Economy of agriculture—why are we only purchasing 1% locally?
- Discussion of what is “local”

Suggested speakers include:

- Jim Hankins, Virginia State University to discuss marketing
- Anthony Flaccavento, Executive Director of Appalachian Sustainable Development
- John Yarnell (owns businesses in Culpeper and grows his own fruits, vegetables and flowers for his stores)
- Ken Meeter, President, Crossroads Resource Center (food system analyst)

The suggestion was also made to conclude the workshop with a break-out session, inviting attendees to develop “Goals and Recommendations” moving forward. The new Virginia Food Systems Plan will be released soon and may also provide ideas and topics for the workshop.

Please email Michelle at medwards@rrregion.org with any additional suggestions for the Living Lands Workshop.

RRRC Initiative Updates

Chesapeake Bay TMDL Watershed Implementation Plan (WIP)

A regional Stakeholder Meeting to discuss the Phase II WIP was held on November 9, 2011. Agriculture and urban stakeholders agreed to analyze their jurisdiction’s respective 2025 BMP scenarios that DCR proposed in the Phase I WIP. Comments are requested to be submitted to Michelle Edwards by December 25, 2011. Michelle will compile the comments and share them with the stakeholders for their review when they reconvene in January of 2012. Localities may also request RRRC submit existing urban BMP data that the Culpeper SWCD compiled. The deadline for comments to be sent to DCR for incorporation into the Phase II WIP is February 1, 2012.

Green Infrastructure Mapping Project

Patrick Mauney from RRRC has updated the VA Natural Landscape Assessment (Ecological Model) GIS layer for the region using E911 points. There does not appear to be a significant difference in the ecological cores overall. There were 6,343 acres lost in the ecological cores within the region, which represents 0.86% of the total ecological cores in the region.

VA Outdoors Plan Public Meetings

DCR will be holding public meetings on January 9, 2012 at 4pm (for staff) and 7pm (for public) at the RRRC Board Room on VA Outdoors Plan. Comments will be incorporated into the 2013 plan.

Safe Routes to School

VDOT will soon be releasing the request for proposals for the Safe Routes to School Program Spring 2012 grant round. RRRC staff are available to assist schools in developing school travel plans and drafting grant applications.

Member Roundtable

Culpeper County Planning Commission Meeting - December 14, 2011 at 7pm

Culpeper County is considering a new zoning ordinance referred to as “cluster zoning” and will hold a second public hearing. You may view the draft ordinance at

<http://web.culpepercounty.gov/CountyGovernment/PlanningZoning.aspx>

Old Rag Master Naturalists Open House - February 4, 2012 at EVHS

For more information on this free even contact Pam Owen at nighthawkcomm@gmail.com

Next Land Use & Environment Committee Meeting:

February 15, 2012

10:00am – Noon

RRRC Board Room

Please email Michelle at medwards@rrregion.org with suggestions for future meeting topics