Alternatives floated for Jordan’s Point

When Lexington’s City Council decided to remove the dam at Jordan’s Point, they promised to revise the existing master plan for Jordan’s Point Park to provide improvements there. An initial survey of the public and an open meeting in January indicated that people want a good athletic field, better access to the Maury River, and improved trails with links to the Woods Creek Trail and the Chessie Nature Trail, both of which are segments of the Brushy Blue Trail System. Based on that information, the city published two suggested plans (A and B) drawn up by its consultant, Land Planning Design Associates (LPDA).

After reviewing those two proposals, RACC’s Land Conservation Committee is urging the city to limit artificial intrusions such as roads, parking lots, and structures on the island, minimize pedestrian-vehicle conflicts, highlight historic structures, and preserve native plants.

RACC members involved in the effort include Arthur Bartenstein and Bill Blatter, who had both helped develop the old plan, as well as Lee Merrill and Chris Wise, who chair the Land Conservation Committee.

Concerns raised about ACP yard at Goshen

A coalition that includes RACC supported a letter to Rockbridge authorities, written by Molly Petty, objecting to rapid, by-right approval of a construction yard in Goshen to support the Atlantic Coast Pipeline. Other organizations that have expressed support include the Allegheny-Blue Ridge Alliance, the Augusta County Alliance, and the Environment Committee of 50-Ways Rockbridge.

The proposed “lay-down yard” would be used by Dominion Energy to prepare materials for the ACP. The by-right review process and county ordinance rely on rolled-back FEMA flood insurance criteria and thus allow Dominion Energy to obtain county approval of the proposal without a public hearing or any opportunity for the county to set additional conditions specific to the site.

Major problems include overloading of local roads, potential flooding, and pollution of waterways including Bratton’s Run. Furthermore, the county is being asked to approve the site plan when ACP construction in neighboring Bath, Highland, and Augusta Counties lacks eight key permits, its overall justification is being challenged in court, and on-site work has been at a standstill since December of 2018.

Plan D for Jordan’s Point Park. It maximizes green space, trails and river access, separating traffic from recreational areas (courtesy of A. Bartenstein).
Conservation legislation passes
The General Assembly passed an exceptional set of conservation statutes in 2020. Successful initiatives supported by RACC include:

- **Virginia Clean Economy Act**, transitioning Virginia to renewable power by 2050
- **Solar Freedom Act 2020** supporting distributed solar energy
- **Scenic River** designation of a section of the Maury
- **Wildlife Corridor Action Plan** (story on Page 3).
- Renewed commitment to Virginia's **Chesapeake Clean Water Blueprint**
- Legislation **protecting menhaden, expanding oyster restoration, and banning oil and gas drilling off our coast**
- $240 million allocated to improve water quality and environmental education
- Adoption of a **Plastic Bag Tax** and the **Environmental Justice Act**

Legislation that did not pass this year can be reintroduced in 2021. If you are interested in helping with next year’s state policy and legislative efforts please contact RACC.

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Jordan’s Point Park  *Continued from Page 1*

They participated in an on-site inspection with city staff and LPDA personnel as well as joining in public meetings. Bartenstein, a landscape architect, has now created drawings of two further options (C and D). Pictured on Page 1 is D, the plan that leaves the greatest area of the park as green space. Both of Bartenstein’s plans can be viewed in greater detail on the RACC website.

It should be noted that, as City Council considers its options, Lexington’s five-year Capital Improvement Plan include no funding for work at Jordans Point.

Of concern to conservationists, while removing the dam and thus lowering the level of the adjacent river added more bank and cobble shore to the park, it also reduced water flow through the old mill race, thus exposing the historic timber gauge dock to air, sure to accelerate its decay and loss. It is not clear what can be done to mitigate that problem.

Goshen Pipeline yard  *Continued from Page 1*

While Dominion’s construction yard in Raphine is served by roads suitable for industrial traffic, the Goshen site is situated at the junction of rural Bratton’s Road (Rt. 780) and Rts. 39 and 42, which are ill-suited for heavy traffic and machinery.

The current site plan requires construction of two bridges, one a 50-ft timber bridge over wetlands; as is typical of Dominion projects, the final location of four other water crossings is “to be determined by ACP.” Given the location of the yard, stored items could wash away in a flood and block a bridge or culvert downstream or wash into Bratton’s Run. The letter asks how local water quality will be protected from pollution by petroleum products and toxic pipeline coatings. It also asks what is meant by Dominion’s promise that “the property shall be restored back to the original condition of the land,” when cleanup might include spilled fuel and toxic materials, removing gravel, and replanting trees. While Dominion stated that only a portion of the 700 workers scheduled to work in the area will congregate in Goshen, it is unclear whether the county will implement adequate local COVID-19 public- and worker-safety measures required by Governor Northam’s Executive Orders 61 and 62.

The letter concludes that there are many unanswered questions about health and safety, water quality and protection of scenic rivers and streams in the Maury watershed, as well as the viability of the pipeline project itself. RACC believes these questions and others should be resolved through further study and adherence to the highest standards of scrutiny recommended in the county’s Comprehensive Plan and ordinances, intended to protect “the health, safety, and general welfare of the public.”

Since the Rockbridge Board of Supervises has now approved the yard, the Virginia Department of Environmental Quality will review the site erosion and sediment plan. Watch the RACC Weekly Calendar and Facebook page for updates and opportunities for public comment.
Fencing would enhance Wildlife Corridor at Buffalo Creek

RACC’s Wildlife Corridor project is making progress. The concept is to encourage animals to cross I-81 safely by walking under bridges or through culverts instead of crossing the roadway. In a demonstration project on I-64 west of Charlottesville, game cameras documented the effectiveness of strategic fencing in guiding animals to safe crossings; the fences reduced deer crashes by 92% and caused bears and other animals to cross under the highway in a culvert that they had not previously been using. Crash prevention will likely repay the cost of fencing in a relatively short time.

A proposal to install strategic fencing at Buffalo Creek, where the Wildlife Corridor crosses under I-81, has been given top priority by the Virginia Safe Wildlife Corridors Collaborative. In February, RACC’s Mike Pelton and Barbara Walsh presented the concept to the Rockbridge Board of Supervisors, which designated Spencer Suter to continue working with RACC to further develop the concept and seek sources of funding. The legislature approved some funding, but its fate is in doubt due to revenue problems anticipated in 2021.

The photo at left shows a test section of wildlife fencing installed near mile-marker 111 on I-64 as part of a demonstration project in 2017 (photo by Virginia Transportation Research Council).

RACC and VCC seek to increase land conservation in the Valley

John Hutchinson, recently appointed Executive Director of the Valley Conservation Council, and Emily Bender, its Director of Land Protection, were guests at the April video-meeting of the RACC Board of Directors. RACC is a member of the VCC, which covers eleven counties in the Valley and prioritizes protection of watersheds and working farmland.

The visitors expressed the hope that VCC can increase conservation throughout the Valley and provided the map at right, which shows the areas that are already protected as either parkland (light green) or privately owned easements (dark green). Some 38% of Rockbridge County (outlined) is under conservation, a much higher percentage than for the other ten counties.

Of interest to Rockbridge landowners, grants are available in 2020 to reward those who undertake new conservation easements.

RACC seeks photographs of local nature scenes

Send RACC your favorite photographs of scenery from Rockbridge County for use in social media. You can share photos directly to the RACC Facebook page or DM them to RACC to post for you. You can also email submissions to racc@rockbridge.net. The best photos will be considered for future RACC notecards, an ongoing project to raise funds for the organization.

BARC announces rooftop solar program

“SolarizeBARC” will offer both homes and businesses the opportunity to install onsite solar photovoltaic systems at a discounted price and without a large upfront investment. For more information, visit barcelectric.com/gosolar.
Botetourt supervisors allow taller turbines on North Mountain

After Apex Energy found that their previous proposal for the Rocky Forge wind power plant on North Mountain was not economically viable, the Botetourt County supervisors approved their proposal to build even taller turbines that will be visible from much of Rockbridge County. Apex now plans to build 22 turbines each 680 feet tall, the height of a 50-story building. The longer blades will slice through a much greater area of the ridge-top atmosphere, and at 10 rpm will have a tip-speed estimated at close to 200 mph.

The permit was opposed by residents from Botetourt and Rockbridge concerned about plummeting property values and turbine noise, as well as wildlife scientists advocating for preservation of intact forest habitat on North Mountain and prevention of bat and bird fatalities, especially among golden eagles, ranked as a Species of Critical Conservation Need. The project would also impact the state-approved Arcadia Initiative to preserve intact landscapes in the area.

Construction and maintenance of the project will involve many of the same hazards seen with the Atlantic Coast Pipeline. RACC encourages citizens to participate in the period for public comment that is part of the state’s final approval process.

Outreach: RACC’s activities in the Rockbridge community

- Helped the Climate and Energy group of the Virginia Conservation Network set project priorities for 2021
- Organized planting of trees along the Maury River banks newly exposed by dam removal
- Continued to work with Andy McThenia on easement for the proposed Uncas Trail
- Co-sponsored with Marsha Heatwole a well-attended showing of the film, “Beaver Believers”
- Attended the legislative Conservation Lobby Day (story on Page 2)
- Met with new landfill Conservation Lobby Day (story on Page 2)
- Worked with Boxerwood and others to pursue community composting and issues in waste management