



RIDGE AND RIVER NEWS

Newsletter of the Rockbridge Area Conservation Council (RACC)

October 2020

Annual Meeting planned on line Nov. 8 using Zoom

The unique aspects of 2020 continue as RACC holds its Annual Meeting via Zoom on Sunday, Nov. 8, 4:00-5:00 p.m. Instead of coming together for the traditional potluck, RACC members and supporters will gather their favorite drinks and snacks and connect to the meeting from the comfort of home. To join the meeting, simply click on the link in the forthcoming email invitation or register on RACC's website, rockbridgeconservation.org.

In light of the virtual format, the meeting will be shorter than usual. The agenda includes welcoming remarks, a photo-tour of important 2020 RACC trail projects, awards to three organizations for extraordinary conservation accomplishments, and the election of board members and officers for 2021. Even with time for questions and answers, the meeting will conclude by 5:00. Anyone can join the meeting a few minutes early or stay on after the conclusion to do a little socializing with fellow RACC members.

If you have not yet used Zoom, it is easy. You can join with video or simply phone in, and the software supports voting and typed submission of comments or questions. Check it out at zoom.us; those who need technical help installing Zoom can contact jmanley@isi-infosys.com before the meeting or call the RACC office at 540-463-2330 on the day.

New nominees to the Board of Directors include The Rev. McKinley Williams and Melody Tennant, while current members Bob Biersack, Cliff Kiracofe, Sally Nunneley, Charles Winder, and Chris Wise have agreed to serve additional terms. Nominations from the floor will be welcome. If you cannot attend the meeting but wish to volunteer or nominate someone else to serve on the board, please confirm their interest in serving, then email RACC@rockbridge.net by Nov. 5.

RACC contributes to Lexington's Comprehensive Plan

Numerous RACC members and Executive Director Barbara Walsh assisted the Lexington Planning Commission in its work to update the city's Comprehensive Land Use Plan. They served on task forces, participated in public meetings and logged in to virtual meetings. The Planning Commission and the city's planning staff were very open to RACC's involvement and the suggestions made by RACC's Land Conservation Committee. RACC used its widely distributed email and web calendar to highlight many of the meetings and encourage the public to participate in the process.

The Lexington Planning Commission embarked on the long process of revising the city's plan two years ago. Since then, during regular and special meetings of the Commission, the commission's members and consultants looked at the current plan and began the revision process. As part of the information-gathering, they attempted to elicit public input in the development of the plan by forming citizen task-forces, holding public workshops, developing on-line surveys, and listening to public comments during Planning Commission meetings. The commission recently approved the proposed new plan after a public hearing on the draft version. The Planning Commission and City Council then held a joint meeting on October 1. The Council may ask for more information or direction from city staff or set a date for a final public hearing.

See Comprehensive Plan, Page 2

Another way to give



RACC members James and Skip Gercke generously donated their BMW to RACC. Shown are RACC Co-President Gregg Amonette (right) and the gentleman from Charlottesville who purchased the car. All of the proceeds went to the organization. Consider donating your used car to RACC!

Why am I getting a print newsletter?

We thought our publication might be a pleasant change from the junk that has taken over our mailboxes, and might therefore get more attention. If you are interested in the included links (sometimes quite long), the newsletter on the RACC website will offer hot links.

Something good: The Great American Outdoors Act

The Great American Outdoors Act was recently passed by Congress on a bipartisan basis and signed into law.

This legislation is the first serious attempt in 50 years to remedy the gradual deterioration of National Park Service facilities due to more than \$11 billion in deferred maintenance with respect to visitor facilities, roads and trails, and general infrastructure. The bill also fully funds the Land and Water Conservation Fund, which is used to purchase and protect additional public lands.

The act has been praised by The League of Conservation Voters, The Nature Conservancy, The Wilderness Society, and hundreds of other conservation organizations.

Look on the RACC website for a longer opinion piece about this legislation, penned by RACC board member Bruce Bytnar, retired from a career with the National Park Service.

Celebrating cancellation of the ACP

RACC is pleased to note the recent cancellation of the Atlantic Coast Pipeline thanks to the efforts of many activist citizens and regional organizations. In the end, Dominion Energy and Duke Energy, ACP owners, finally bowed to the realization that this was a lose-lose situation for them.

RACC benefits from PPP legislation

RACC applied for and received a federal loan that covers 2 1/2 months salary for our two part time employees and will most likely be forgiven, converting the loan into a grant. These funds were available as part of the Paycheck Protection Program (PPP) approved by congress under the CARES act.

Spencer fund vested at Foundation

RACC is pleased to announce that its endowment fund with the Community Foundation has met the level required for vesting and so will become a permanent resource for RACC's work. The fund is named for Edgar W Spencer, a founding member of RACC. Thanks to everyone who donated to the fund.

Comprehensive Plan

Continued from Page 1

The text of the plan approved by the Planning Commission can be viewed at lexingtonva.gov/civicax/filebank/blobdload.aspx?t=64388.9&BlobID=28429

The plan features a new chapter, Green Infrastructure, that was developed with the assistance of RACC's Land Conservation Committee and others. Green infrastructure may include a wide range of topics such as water quality, stormwater management, biodiversity, air quality, climate adaptation, sustainable energy use, public plantings, and parks and recreational facilities, as well as transportation infrastructure such as walking trails, sidewalks, and bike lanes. RACC sponsored a well-attended presentation by Karen Firehock of the Green Infrastructure Center to promote citizen interest in infrastructure issues.

RACC asked the Planning Commission to establish an ongoing green infrastructure technical advisory group and also to upgrade the city's geographical information system maps to include layers to help in the development of the plan. The RACC Energy and Environmental Committee asked that the green infrastructure plan include the development of a county-wide or regional environmental and climate action plan.

A remaining concern for RACC is language in the plan that signals the city's willingness to consider further encroachment of W&L into City neighborhoods.

RACC stands ready to help the city to implement the goals of the new Comprehensive Plan.

Rocky Forge looms on our horizon

Botetort County authorities have approved construction of multiple giant wind turbines on North Mountain, visible from all over Rockbridge. Volunteers are needed to help monitor construction and adherence to conservation-related aspects of the project, much as was done for the recent pipeline projects. To participate, contact the RACC office.

Ridge & River News

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and edited by Sally Nunneley.

Send suggestions, articles or letters to racc@rockbridge.net or mail them to the address shown on the cover.

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RACC educational programs continue in 2020-2021

With the able leadership of board member Cliff Kiracofe, RACC is sponsoring a monthly series of educational presentations on conservation topics of local interest. Given the pandemic, the programs will be made available using Zoom software. The first program was Oct 14, “Regenerative Agriculture: Good for soil and water, farmers and consumers,” presented by David Harbor; video of that presentation will later be available through a link on the RACC website. Below are details of the next program; future topics will be community composting and plastics recycling.

Joe DiNardo: What’s in Your Water: The Impact of Chemical Pollution

Wed Nov 18 at 7 p.m.

Consumer products such as cosmetics, pharmaceuticals, packaged foods and household goods expose humans daily to potentially harmful chemicals that all eventually find their way into our water resources, including tap water, wastewater, streams and the seas. Many of these chemicals, such as preservatives, flame retardants, plasticizers, and agricultural chemicals, are known to adversely affect the environment as well as the health of all living things.

How can we deal with the presence of these chemicals? For that matter, how do we identify them when few are listed on an ingredient label? We must learn to limit the impact of man-made chemicals on our bodies and the environment so that we can again have clean water.

News from Friends of Brushy Hills, a RACC affiliate

Brushy Hills is a 560-acre natural woodland owned by Lexington just west of the city, now with fifteen miles of trails good for hiking, mountain biking, trail-running, birdwatching, and enjoying the peaceful natural surroundings.

The Friends’ mission is to preserve the natural integrity of the Brushy Hills for the benefit of the public. Volunteers maintain the trails, produce educational materials, and sponsor hikes and nature walks open to the public.

The pandemic has brought many more people to the Brushy trails, including families looking for outdoor activities all members can enjoy together. And the pandemic brought about some interesting changes: the Virginia Native Plant Society’s annual Spring Flower Walk wasn’t a guided group experience this year; instead, numbered flags marked the plants, and a written guide allowed visitors to see and learn on their own—a popular activity over several weeks. The Friends are planning a tree walk in the same style for later this year.

To learn more about Brushy Hills or the Friends, or to help with projects, please call Alexia Smith at 460-0854, email friendsofbrushyhills@gmail.com, or visit friendsofbrushyhills.org.



RACC board meetings go remote

Shown at right is a screen shot of the Oct 8 meeting of the RACC board using Zoom software. Starting top left, attendees are Barbara Walsh, Sally Nunneley, Fred Fevrier, Bob Biersack, David Harbor, Gregg Amonette, Larry Evans, Julie Youngman, Charles Winder, Bruce Bytnar, Kit Huffman, and Lee Merrill. Not shown (excused) are David Agnor, Brian Jenkins, Brian Steffel, Jane Stewart, and Chris Wise.

OUTREACH

Recent RACC activities in the Rockbridge community include:

- Sending representatives to the meetings of the Virginia Conservation Council and the Farm Bureau
- Organizing write-in campaign to restore recycling to the City of Lexington
- Cooperating with W&L students for Public Relations Writing and Environmental Service Learning classes
- Continuing watershed-monitoring activities despite covid limitations
- Pursuing arrangements for public access to the Uncas Trail along the Maury River
- Developing the Sunnyside Trail in cooperation with Kendal
- Revising its website to achieve better public communication
- Monitoring protection of House Mountain, now under management by Virginia Outdoors Foundation
- Following Lexington city discussions with W&L regarding university planning

Telephone: 540-463-2330 * Website: rockbridgeconservation.org * Facebook page: Rockbridge-Conservation

RACC BOARD MEMBERS
Co-President, Gregg Amonette
Co-President, Julie Youngman
Co-President, Julie Youngman
Vice President, Bob Biersack
Co-Treasurer, Larry Evans
Co-Treasurer, Bruce Byrnat
Secretary, Sally Nummley
David Agnor
Fred Fevriar
David Harbor
Kit Huffman
Brian Jenkins
Cliff Kiracofe
Lee Merrill
Brian Steffel
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Charles Winder
Chris Wise

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