

The Piedmont View

A MEMBERSHIP NEWSLETTER OF THE PIEDMONT ENVIRONMENTAL COUNCIL

WINTER 2020

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Standing with St. Louis... And Now Aldie

By Gem Bingol and Cindy Sabato

The signs at both entrances to the village of St. Louis proudly describe the hamlet as one of the oldest African American townships in Loudoun. It was built on land purchased by freed slaves for \$20 an acre after Emancipation. St. Louis residents Sharon Peterson and Marcus Howard, descendants of some of these formerly enslaved St. Louis founders, still live there.

Their family names—McQuay, Berryman, Howard and others—go back five or more generations, forever memorialized in the names of various roads and structures that remain today. The story goes that Peterson’s great uncle, Phillip McQuay, was responsible for the village name. He moved to St. Louis, Missouri after the Civil War, and when he returned to Loudoun, the community dubbed him “Little St. Louis.” The name stuck and took on a life of its own.

St. Louis was already a growing community of some 100 residents by then. Its earliest public building, the one-room Hamlin School, was built before 1877 and still stands today as a (updated)

private residence. The Howard and McQuay families were among several who joined together in 1893 to buy land for the founding of Mt. Zion Baptist Church, whose congregation remains faithful to this day. Peterson’s grandmother, Mattie McQuay Berryman, at one time owned some 300 acres, and Peterson lives in the home her great grandfather built in 1895. In 1876, Howard’s family bought 17 acres north and east of the church, along what’s now Snake Hill Road, and established the Robinson-Howard cemetery, the final resting place of more than a few dozen known and unknown Black community members.

Old Challenges and a New Threat

St. Louis and its residents have faced challenges, past and present, that echo those of African American communities across the country.

Land sold to Black residents in those days was often of poor quality for farming and largely neglected by local government; St. Louis is no exception. It is largely a



Marcus Howard (right) and Sharon Peterson (left) stand next to the historic Mt. Zion Baptist Church of St. Louis, an historic African American village originally settled by their ancestors after Emancipation. Photo by Marco Sánchez

wetlands area with poor drainage marked by the unmistakable odor of “rotten eggs” in the tap water. Many residents relied on springs for drinking water well into the mid-20th century. Septic-based indoor plumbing lagged, and once installed, high water tables often led to failed septic fields. At the same time, shallow wells are still susceptible to drying up as groundwater levels fluctuate with weather patterns and increased development.

By the end of the century, increased development became the bigger threat to St. Louis, and

the Howard family’s original 17 acres are its latest battlefield. “As urban expansion began to reach St. Louis... new, more expensive homes went up, property taxes also went up, which had the domino effect of many ancestral families selling their land and homes,” Mt. Zion Baptist Church Pastor Charles Thompson wrote in an editorial to the Middleburg Eccentric.

When a developer, Mojax LLC, bought the Howards’ ancestral land in 2017 and proposed a development of 27 homes with

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What Does 2021 Hold for Conservation? Expectations for the Upcoming General Assembly Session

By Dan Holmes

The 2020 Special Session, focused on resolving budget issues stemming from Covid and addressing police and criminal

justice reform, has ended just in time for the holidays. But as in the movie Groundhog Day, now we prepare to do it all over again. Virginia’s 2021 legislative session

opens on Jan 13 and will prove no less challenging than the special session. At this moment, details are still fluid, but here is what we know.

The Senate plans to meet in person at the Virginia Science Museum in Richmond, while the House is remaining virtual. As we saw during the special session, virtual sessions severely limit citizen interaction on important matters, and legislators are struggling to determine how to improve the process.

The Virginia Constitution dictates that odd-year legislative sessions, like 2021, be 30-day sessions, leading to these years being commonly referred to as

“short sessions.” Recognizing that the business of the Commonwealth usually requires additional time, the tradition has been to extend these sessions to 45 days with a two-thirds majority vote. This year however, Republicans are threatening to hold the session to 30 days, citing their intent to preserve the part-time nature of Virginia lawmaking. In response, Democrats are considering options such as additional weekend and late-night hearings, ignoring Republican bills, or calling a new special session entirely.

As for PEC, our focus this session will include an effort to strengthen the integrity of conservation easements, ensur-

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The General Assembly meets annually, beginning on the second Wednesday in January. Photo by Kaitlin King

Support PEC

Make a donation or get in touch with PEC at:

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Thank you for helping to protect the Piedmont!



Farm to Food Pantry Initiatives During the Pandemic

By Cindy Sabato

Since March, with the help of partners and supporters, The Piedmont Environmental Council has provided 25,000 pounds of vegetables, 25,000 gallons of milk, and more than 11,000 pounds of local beef and pork to the food-insecure in our nine-county region of the northern Piedmont. That's more than 50,000 pounds of locally-sourced products for local food banks, which has a very different impact on the local economy than shipping in 50,000 pounds of food from somewhere else.

Year 2 at the Community Farm surpassed all expectations

At PEC's Community Farm at Roundabout Meadows in Loudoun County, what was initially intended to be a slow and steady increase in production this year turned into something much more, as PEC worked to respond to local impacts of Covid-19.

"We tripled both our production area and our donation goal this year, and despite the limitations the pandemic placed on our ability to host volunteers at the height of the season, 470 volunteers still managed to donate 1,100 hours of service," said Community Farm Manager Dana Melby. Volunteers came from as far away as Winchester to the west and Washington, D.C. to the east.

Several groups throughout the region brought many hands at a time to work in the fields and the greenhouse wearing masks and keeping safe distances from one another. Among them were Frederick County's Sherando High School and Chantilly's Paul VI High School, Corpus Christi Catholic Church from South Riding, the Young Men's Service League and the National Recreation and Park Association from Ashburn, and Loudoun's American Heritage Girls and Friends Learning Together. "Our community truly stepped up in support of the farm this year; without their help, we would not have been able to soar past our expanded goals," Melby said.

Community Farm volunteers didn't let a pandemic stop them from harvesting produce for donation to Loudoun Hunger Relief. *Photo by Marco Sánchez*



In total, the Community Farm engaged with 880 community members through volunteer opportunities, tours, and educational programs, and donated 25,000 pounds of produce to Loudoun Hunger Relief. As we line up our production plans for the coming year, we are focused on increasing the health of our soils, improving crop management, and further refining planting schedules. Melby anticipates that we will harvest at least 35,000 pounds of produce for food-insecure families in 2021.

Volunteer season kicks off again in early February, with seedling plantings in PEC's Phyllis Mills Wyeth Greenhouse. Planting season begins mid-March and runs through summer. First harvests of the year are expected in early April.

Connecting Local Milk and Local Food Pantries

Not long after the pandemic broke out and many community resources closed, PEC became aware that pandemic-related closures and stay-at-home orders were affecting local dairy farms and local food pantries in unexpected ways.

Most local dairy farmers send their product to the Maryland & Virginia Milk Producers Cooperative Association (MDVA Milk), which processes and distributes the milk in half-pint containers primarily to local schools and other large institutions. When those buyers shut down to the pandemic, dairy farmers couldn't sell their milk. Meanwhile, food pantries found themselves in greater demand than ever before and unable to keep their refrigerators full.

We've told you the story of how we partnered with Cool Lawn Farm, MDVA Milk, and the PATH Foundation to raise philanthropic support to buy milk from the cooperative and donate it to local food banks. Media coverage about that initial dairy distribution to Fauquier Community Food Bank generated waves of additional philanthropic support that opened the



Matt Coyle (far right) of the Piedmont Environmental Council, Ovoka Farm owner Karen Way (second from right) and Ovoka Farm crew member Melissa McKee (far left) help deliver ground beef and ground pork to Fauquier FISH on Sunday, Nov. 22. Ovoka Farm's donation is part of PEC's Farm to Food Initiative.

Photo by Marco Sánchez

doors to get milk to even more food pantries throughout our nine-county region. PEC has raised more than \$80,000 from individuals and organizations, including the PATH Foundation, Northern Piedmont Community Foundation, Rappahannock Electric Cooperative and the Sacharuna Foundation.

In total, we've purchased and provided more than 25,000 gallons of fresh milk to approximately 20,000 families in need, while at the same time supporting 17 local dairy farms in nine counties that are members of MDVA Milk, including Fauquier's Cool Lawn Farm, the largest in the northern Piedmont; Dogwood Farm, the last remaining dairy farm in Loudoun County, and the fifth-generation Harvue Farms in Clarke County, among others.

Expanding to Beef

As the dairy initiative grew, we learned that ground beef was in short supply as well. We wondered if we could work with local beef farmers in the same way to provide locally produced ground beef to those in need. We piloted a similar beef initiative, thanks to a subsidized rate from Lakota Ranch, and donated 200 pounds of ground beef to the Fauquier Community Food Bank. And then things took off.

"Word got out and we found ourselves with new partners in the beef initiative during the fall months," PEC's Local Food Systems Coordinator Matt Coyle said. "With grant funding from American Farmland Trust, processing by Seven Hills Food Co. and delivery by 4P Foods, PEC provided 750 pounds of beef from Locust Dale Cattle Company to four food banks in Fauquier, Orange, Madison and Culpeper counties this fall."

Now, in an exciting turn of events, Karen Way, owner of Ovoka Farm in Paris, has joined the effort with a long-term commitment to donate 10,000 pounds of ground beef and pork to

support food pantries throughout our region.

"Ovoka's core values focus on sustainable farming practices and extend to ensuring that we as an organization are an active community participant. The obvious area where we can help is providing food to feed the hungry," said Way, who learned about PEC's Farm to Food Bank program through her friend and PEC board co-chair Jean Perin.

Ovoka Farm's first donation—of 2,700 pounds of ground beef and 1,000 pounds of ground pork—went to Loudoun Hunger Relief, Seven Loaves, Tree of Life Ministries, Dulles South Food Pantry, and Christ Church Cares. Later, another 1,600 pounds of Ovoka meat were delivered to Fauquier FISH, Community Touch, Rappahannock Food Pantry, and Fauquier Community Food Bank. The remaining deliveries will be scheduled through the holiday season.

Looking Ahead

Prior to the onset of Covid-19, about 843,000 Virginians lacked access to affordable, healthy food. The pandemic added an estimated 447,000 Virginians to that number. Part of PEC's core mission since 1972 is protecting working farms, and we've been additionally focused on local food systems for the past 15 years. When we saw an opportunity to help meet local food needs during the pandemic, our partners and supporters stepped up with us.

The pandemic has exposed vulnerabilities in our local food supply chain. PEC's efforts, and many others' throughout the region, during the pandemic demonstrate the power and possibility of a distributed, diversified, even localized approach. Right here in our own region lies some of the most productive farmland in the nation, and the pandemic has brought local farmers and local consumers together like never before to overcome national food shortages.

Standing with St. Louis...And Now Aldie

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individual wells, the community was understandably concerned. "As a widow and a senior citizen on a budget, the development could drive up the taxes and force me to dig a new well, which I can't afford," said Peterson. Besides the water issues and property values, residents worried about losing the historic cemetery, undiscovered graves of enslaved people, and the cultural history of the place.

The Fight for Preservation Takes Shape

The proposed development was a "by-right" development, meaning county zoning rules allow for it without approval from the Board of Supervisors. There was little hope it could be stopped, but St. Louis was worth the effort of trying. Community members formed a Friends of St. Louis group to take on Mojax.

Friends of St. Louis dotted the community with red and white signs bearing the words "Save St. Louis. Say No To Mojax." Dozens of people spoke out against the development at public meetings. Individuals filed complaints that Mojax was illegally impacting wetlands on the property. Protection of the historic burial grounds became a point of controversy.

"Everyone came together regardless of race or class. The demographics of the community have changed over the last 20 years, but the sense of community remains. The developer's disregard for the community and our feelings was very upsetting," Howard said.

Friends of St. Louis leaders Job Woodill, Sally Fletcher, and Jeff Jackson also turned to The Piedmont Environmental Council for help. "Our land use and historic preservation staff researched the St. Louis property in detail. The developer disturbed the wetlands on the property three times to drill wells without the proper state permits. We have provided input on orders to mitigate

their violations and their federal permit," said Gem Bingol, PEC's Loudoun County field representative.

PEC successfully petitioned the Virginia Department of Historic Resources to add the former Howard property to the boundaries of the St. Louis Historic District and requested a Section 106 review under the National Historic Preservation Act of 1966. "Making a case that the development would destroy historic assets was our most likely way to reduce the impacts of the development on the community. At best it could reduce the number of houses; at worst, there might be some nominal recognition of the historic assets that were being destroyed," Bingol said.

A Positive Outcome Turns Cloudy

In October 2020, following some two-and-a-half years of work and outcry by Friends of St. Louis, individual residents, PEC and others, Loudoun County's Board of Supervisors took the unprecedented step of negotiating behind the scenes to buy the property at three times its assessed value. Local news media reported that a conservation easement would preserve the land in perpetuity and the county would work with the community to create a public park.

Supervisor Phyllis J. Randall said, in a Loudoun Now article, that the Board of Supervisors was motivated by "the county's obligation to care for a community it has neglected over the decades as the rest of the county has developed and become part of Loudoun's 'well-to-do' culture."

"Protecting villages like St. Louis, historically treated as second-class communities and imperiled by inadequate land use protections, is critically important to understand past injustices and document the contributions of these communities in our historical records," said Kristie Kendall, PEC's Historic Preservation Coordinator. For two short months, PEC, along with all who



This aerial photo of Aldie shows the land, outlined in red, that Loudoun County might give to the Mojax developer as part of its land acquisition in St. Louis. Adjacent land already owned by one of the Mojax developers is outlined in white. Photo by Hugh Kenny

care about St. Louis, celebrated the county's bold decision to step in.

But on Dec 1, the Board of Supervisors announced a much different purchase agreement, one initiated by the developer and that clearly serves its interests well. Under the new agreement, the County would still pay Mojax \$1.5 million for the St. Louis property, but it would also give Mojax 6.31 acres of county-owned land in the village of Aldie, with frontage along Route 50 and wrapping around the back of the old fire station, and another \$600,000 for improvements to that property, which happens to be adjacent to another property owned by one of the Mojax developers and currently lacks Route 50 access. The question on everyone's mind is: Why?

"This developer has already shown disregard for both the Aldie and St. Louis communities in developing his various properties without the proper permits," Bingol said. "What had been a seemingly noble and just act by the Loudoun Board of Supervisors is now a deal that potentially pits the two communities against one another and rewards a developer known to repeatedly disregard federal, state, and local regula-

tions and ignore the concerns of residents."

The new deal raises a whole new crop of questions and concerns that leave residents in both St. Louis and Aldie feeling vulnerable. Neither village has had the benefit of a county-led comprehensive planning process to determine their specific needs and consider their unique environmental and historic features. The fact that current zoning allows relatively high density development in both villages without consideration of these resources only magnifies the need for those steps.

"Shifting the negative impacts of ill-conceived development from one village to another is mystifying. Instead of an elegant solution, the new agreement has opened a hornets' nest of angry frustration in both villages that we expect will be expressed during the public hearing currently set for January 13," Bingol said.

A key aspect of PEC's work is encouraging residents to actively engage in community decisions that directly impact their lives. PEC will continue to work with these communities for a fair and equitable resolution that preserves both villages' history, culture and sense of place.

MEET PEC

Kendra Atkins

Development Assistant

Kendra Atkins joined The Piedmont Environmental Council staff in December 2019. Born and raised in the Shenandoah Valley, she grew up with a deep appreciation for the mountains, rivers and wildlife around her. As a member of PEC's development team, Kendra supports our membership program and other fundraising initiatives. Her superb organizational skills and keen attention to detail helped PEC flawlessly transition from in-person to virtual events in 2020 (we couldn't have done it without you, Kendra!). Kendra says she is thrilled to be at PEC where she can help preserve the natural landscapes and farms throughout Virginia's Piedmont region.



Photo by Marco Sánchez

Prior to joining PEC, Kendra earned a degree in Mass Communications from Shenandoah University in 2014 and holds a background in event marketing. She often describes the shift from corporate life to PEC as a breath of fresh air (clean air pun intended!).

Kendra is a newlywed and resides in her hometown of Front Royal with her husband, their energetic chocolate lab Atlas, and their moody cat Jules. In her free time, Kendra enjoys learning how to paint, cooking comfort food, and kayaking in the Shenandoah River, which runs alongside her quaint neighborhood.

MEET PEC

Adam Gillenwater

Senior Policy Manager & Field Representative

After nearly a decade working in our nation's capital, Adam Gillenwater relocated with his partner to Charlottesville and joined the staff of the Piedmont Environmental Council in October 2020. Originally from Baltimore, Adam is excited to be back in a community and region that he developed a deep affinity for during five years in college and graduate school at the University of Virginia.



Courtesy of Adam Gillenwater

With a background in government relations and advocacy, Adam works on both state and local policy issues for PEC, focusing at the local level on land use projects in Culpeper, Madison and Greene counties. Adam comes to PEC from the American Battlefield Trust—a national nonprofit dedicated to the preservation of battlefield land from the Revolutionary War, War of 1812, and Civil War—where he was responsible for directing the organization's state legislative efforts and grassroots engagement with battlefield communities across the country. Prior to the Trust, Adam spent several years working for a management consulting firm, where he led workforce development and poverty alleviation projects.

A strong believer in the importance and efficacy of PEC's community-centered approach to land conservation and land use projects, Adam is grateful for the chance to join such a passionate staff and dedicated membership in those efforts.

On the Ground

Albemarle & Charlottesville

> Charlottesville Safe Streets

When the COVID-19 pandemic struck last spring, PEC led a coalition of organizations and advocates recommending that underutilized parking and travel lanes be closed to vehicles and used instead for safe, socially-distanced walking and biking. This fall, the City of Charlottesville began a pilot on 9th Street NE and the Belmont Bridge. A popular success, this Safe Streets initiative doubled the bridge's sidewalk space and created a separate bike lane without significant impact on vehicle congestion. Now the City is exploring ways to replicate the project in other parts of Charlottesville.

> New Albemarle Land Use Representative

PEC Field Representative Chris Hawk has been with PEC since February 2018, focusing on land use issues in Orange, Madison, and Culpeper. As a resident of Charlottesville, Chris is shifting his attention to Albemarle and Orange counties, filling a vacant position left by our colleague Sean Tubbs. As an avid runner, biker, and outdoorsman, Chris is ecstatic to work on protecting the resources he loves in his own backyard.

Clarke

> 40th Anniversary of Sliding Scale

This year marks the 40th anniversary of sliding scale zoning, which helps keep large parcels of land intact by allocating building rights based upon the size of the tract of land. Sliding scale zoning has resulted in keeping development focused around appropriate town centers, while protecting the county's rural lands and environment.

> Open Cabin to Public

Clarke County is leasing a vacant mountain cabin, on a 50-acre property donated by Melvin Kohn for the purpose of a passive park, to the Potomac Appalachian Trail Club. The lease marks the first time this property will be public. The cabin will be available to rent through PATC's website after club staff and volunteers restore it.

> Zoning Ordinance Update

The county continues to update the Zoning Ordinance and is awaiting legal review of its revisions to date. The Planning Commission will welcome public input after the review is complete and the update is shared.

Culpeper

> Water quality feedback needed

Calling all Mountain Run, Muddy Run, and Lower Hazel River watershed residents! The VA Dept. of Environmental Quality and partners are working to improve water quality through the development of a Total Maximum Daily Load Implementation Plan. This plan will identify the maximum amount of pollutants that can be present in the water to meet water quality standards. Impairment in this area is often bacterial (fecal coliform), with a major source being livestock; failing septic systems and wildlife can

also contribute to the problem. To learn more and to become involved, contact Dave Evans, Virginia Department of Environmental Quality, at David.Evans@deq.virginia.gov or (703) 583-3835.

> Utility-Scale Solar

The BOS is discussing the creation of an Energy Generation District that would allow utility-scale solar via conditional use permit, limiting applications to 300 acres. PEC is concerned that the proposed district could result in the rezoning of agricultural land.

Greenwood Solar's conditional use permit expired on Oct 2. The applicant has requested a one-year extension, discussed in closed session during the Oct 4 BOS meeting. To add another layer of confusion, Senate Bill 5106, passed in 2020 General Assembly Special Session, extends statewide land use permit deadlines for two years as a result of COVID-19. Maroon Solar received a unanimous recommendation of denial from the Planning Commission on Nov 12 and the applicant withdrew the project a week later. PEC opposed this project due to its numerous impacts to natural resources.

Fauquier

> Waterloo Bridge Rehabilitation

A major milestone in the rehabilitation of the historic Waterloo Bridge has been reached. On Nov 5, the repaired and repainted metal truss over the Rappahannock River on Rt. 613 between Culpeper and Fauquier was put back on its stone abutments. PEC has been advocating for Waterloo Bridge rehabilitation, rather than removal, for nearly seven years. Thanks to community support and a generous donation from Joan and Russell Hitt, our vision has been realized, and this historic bridge will likely reopen this winter.

> Greenway Extension

The county has awarded a contract for the construction of the Warrenton Branch Greenway Extension. The 10-foot wide, asphalt, shared-use path will be constructed between the end of the current Greenway and the Stafford property. PEC donated \$3,000 for right-of-way acquisition to help make this extension possible.

> Large-Scale Solar

In October, the county adopted a Utility Scale Solar Ordinance that sets reasonable standards for these proposals. Each application will require a special exception process allowing the county to look at impacts on a site-specific basis and to hear public comment.

Greene

> Comprehensive Plan Review

In November, Greene County began a state-mandated, five-year review of its current comprehensive plan, adopted in 2016. An initial public hearing, during which county staff will present an overview of the current comprehensive plan, is planned for January. Public engagement and input is a critical part of the year-long review process, and we hope you will get involved. PEC will continue to monitor Greene's review as it proceeds into 2021 and will provide feedback to the county as appropriate.

Loudoun

> Village of St. Louis preservation

PEC has been actively involved in a community-wide effort to protect the historic village of St. Louis from the negative impacts of the proposed Middleburg Preserve development. See full story on Page 1.

> Transportation and Trails

PEC is participating in focus groups for the county's Safety and Operations Studies for Rt. 9 and Rt. 15 south of Leesburg. So far, each study has included two focus group meetings and a public input session. Initial concept plans have been provided for focus group input in November.

In June, the county hired a consultant to create a plan for establishing the Linear Parks and Trails System, also known as Emerald Ribbons. Over the next six months, the consultant will work closely with the Linear Parks and Trails Committee to develop a plan for community outreach and design.

> Conservation

In October, the BOS voted to reestablish the Purchase of Development Rights program. This conservation tool allows the county to buy development rights from landowners and then extinguish those rights and protect the land with a conservation easement. County staff was directed to begin developing the logistics of the program. As a member of the Loudoun County Preservation and Conservation Coalition's Conservation Easement Committee, PEC is working with partners to research and recommend tried and true practices for the county.

Madison

> Conservation

In September, PEC received federal funding from the Natural Resources Conservation Service to conserve two cattle farms that collectively encompass more than 1,000 acres in Madison County. These awards continue PEC's momentum in building our farmland protection efforts in the Upper Rappahannock Basin. In 2018 and 2019, we received federal and state funding to conserve the 382-acre Glenmary Farm in Orange County and another farm in Culpeper County.

> Route 231 Communication Tower

A special use permit for a 179-foot communications tower on Route 231 near the Rapidan River was approved by the BOS on Nov 4. PEC raised concerns about the impacts of this cell tower on several national historic register sites and other important cultural, natural, and historical viewsheds, requesting further changes to diminish those impacts.

Orange

> Gordonsville Park Network

As part of our Town to Trail initiative, PEC purchased a piece of property on Market Street, across from Verling Park, that supplements a neighboring property we secured last summer and two additional parcels acquired by Gordonsville to expand the park to an entire town block.

PEC's acquisitions link Verling Park with Fireman's Fairgrounds, owned by the Gordonsville Volunteer Fire Company. Collectively, these properties encompass 10 acres of open space in the center of town.

PEC plans to work with the town, Fire Company and broader community to create a park design for the connector parcels, develop and convey a public access easement on those parcels to the Virginia Outdoors Foundation, and transfer ownership of the two sites to the town in the coming year. The Town to Trail initiative is making tangible progress in expanding open space in town, an invaluable asset for overall quality of life, especially during the pandemic.

> **Germanna Wilderness Area Rezoning Request**

Signature Series Development has requested rezoning for an approximately 75-acre Planned Development Mixed Use on the Route 3 corridor. Although previously rezoned by the same applicant in 2013, the newest request would allow for 230 townhomes and 100 apartment/condominium units without any requirements for commercial development. PEC has requested that the rezoning request be denied and that commercial requirements be phased into this project, along with other concerns. The Planning Commission has tabled its public hearing and any recommendation until its December meeting.

.....
Rappahannock

> **SNP Digitization Project**

In partnership with James Madison University, and with funding from supporters, PEC has completed the digitization of thousands of legal documents related to the Commonwealth's 1930s-era condemnation of private lands in

Rappahannock County for the creation of Shenandoah National Park. The digitization project has made all of the deed book records, court proceedings and individual case files for Rappahannock County properties that are now part of Shenandoah National Park publicly accessible and searchable for the first time. The online database is hosted by JMU and accessible from the PEC's webpage on the project: pecva.org/snp-digital-records.

> **2020 Comprehensive Plan Update**

The 2020 updates to Rappahannock County's Comprehensive Plan, which has not been updated since 2004, includes new sections for natural and cultural resources, but misses important historical descriptions for villages and crossroads that are the foundation of many African American and Appalachian communities. Recent Planning Commission and Board of Supervisors discussions have explored displaying the villages of Sperryville, Flint Hill, Washington, Amisville and Chester Gap as a series of maps that depict existing zoning. Many community members and PEC have advised against a broad-brush approach to these maps, as there are implications for future development.

> **Fish population surveys**

As part of a regular monitoring effort with Virginia Department of Wildlife Resources fish biologists, PEC last month counted fish populations for stream restoration sites in Rappahannock and Madison counties. At Bolton Branch, PEC's largest restoration project to date, Eastern brook trout counts have grown some 32-38 percent throughout the stream's restoration area, including a newly formed population of 11 brook trout in the downstream restoration area, with a healthy amount of adults and juvenile trout.

PEC

By the Numbers

2020 has been busy with the unexpected challenge of a global pandemic that forced us to pivot and adapt quickly. Still, with as much enthusiasm for our work as ever, we managed to pull off plenty of great outreach in support of our mission to promote and protect the Piedmont's natural resources, rural economy, history and beauty!

.....
Outreach Events: 40

.....
Landowner Meetings: 125+

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Volunteers Engaged: 550+

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Press Mentions: 175+

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New Facebook Followers: 1,074

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Advocacy Letters Generated: 1,055

Why I Give

Thanks to a temporary provision in the CARES Act, donors who take the standard deduction on their 2020 tax return may claim up to \$300 for charitable deductions, even though they are not itemizing. Donors who itemize can elect to receive a federal income tax deduction for qualifying charitable cash contributions of up to 100% of their adjusted gross income. Consult your tax advisor before finalizing your giving for the 2020 year.



"We really appreciate all that PEC does, and their focus on our local area is important to us. We particularly think all the work done to get conservation easements, to improve stream health, and to increase greenways and bike/trail connectivity in our area is wonderful."

— Dave and Emily Luebke, Charlottesville



"My husband and I looked at many places to retire to, but chose the Piedmont region! Was truly the right choice. We both believe strongly in protecting the land, environment, farms, water – all

the work that PEC does!"

— Anna Fanning, Barboursville



"I find myself coming back to my childhood roots in beautiful Virginia, time and again, with my husband and our growing family. It is in large part because of PEC's work to protect these lands that the Piedmont remains such a special place."

— Liese Dart Hodges, Warrenton



Without supporters like you, PEC wouldn't be able to carry out the holistic mix of conservation, planning and advocacy that we are known for. Make a secure, tax-deductible donation online at pecva.org/donate. You can also send a check made payable to PEC to **P.O. Box 460, Warrenton VA, 20188** or call Kendra Atkins at **(540) 347-2334 ext. 7005**. Or consider a gift of stock. Please go to our website at www.pecva.org for instructions. Thank you and Happy Holidays!

The Year's Winning Photos

This was another spectacular year for PEC's Photo Contest! We're happy the public decides who the winners are, because it would have been too difficult for us to choose. Thank you to everyone who submitted images and who voted!

Entries to our photo contest help us build a gallery that enables PEC to tell the visual stories of the Virginia Piedmont. We are thankful for your participation and also for so many talented photographers in our region!

We also want to give a big shout out and thank you to our guest judges, local photographers Ken Garrett and Callie Broaddus, who helped us select the finalists. By public vote, the winners of this year's contest are:

BEAUTIFUL LANDSCAPES & STREETSCAPES WINNER

▼ **Brambleton Barn Sunset**, Loudoun County, by Chris Hamilton



WONDERFUL WATERS WINNER

▼ **Beaver Creek Nuclear Sunset**, Albemarle County, by Cass Girvin



NATIVE PLANTS AND WILDLIFE WINNER

▼ **ZZZ**, Shenandoah National Park in Madison County, by Matt Huntley



YOUTH CATEGORY WINNER

▼ **Two Fox Kits**, Loudoun County, by Alana Mauritzen



What Does 2021 Hold for Conservation? Expectations for the Upcoming General Assembly Session

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ing that disputes over terms are decided in favor of the conservation purpose of the easement. A 2016 Virginia Supreme Court ruling made clear this legislation is needed, particularly for older easements.

We also expect to see a 25-percent state tax credit proposed for landowners who install small-scale solar systems and remain hopeful that the federal tax credit will be reauthorized. Utility-scale solar will play a large role in meeting Virginia's future energy needs. But we believe incentivizing homeowners and businesses, empowering them in the climate solution, will help reduce the amount of agricultural and forestal lands potentially lost for solar energy production.

We hope to see funding for the

Department of Historic Resources for the purpose of surveying untold/untold histories. Our analysis of previously listed National Register historic districts makes clear that resources related to historically marginalized communities are woefully underrepresented in the state database. If successful, survey priority should go to areas that have little representation in the Virginia Cultural Resources Inventory System, so that the historic fabric of these communities can be better understood and protected.

Lastly, we are joining with other conservation organizations in an education effort on the need for dedicated sources of revenue to fund land conservation and water quality objectives. Natural resources are often overlooked in

state budgets, and Virginia is no different, historically underfunding agencies and associated programs. We hope to build broader support for dedicated funding and look forward to working with the legislature to identify the best and most ethical tools to meet the significant need.

In short, this "short session" is sure to have many surprises related to the process and bills filed. This preview represents only a snapshot of some of the issues PEC will be following. From land use and transportation to water quality and conservation, we will be tracking and weighing in on many issues. And, as always, we will do our best to keep you informed during the session through our email action alerts and at pecva.org/richmond.

Pop Quiz

QUESTION

Which of the following favorite landscape plants is actually an invasive species in the Virginia Piedmont?



Photo: Creative Commons

ANSWER

Butterfly Bush!

Also known as Summer Lilac, this ornamental shrub was introduced from its native range in China in the early 1900s. Although sometimes recommended for butterfly gardens, it does not serve as a host plant for their larvae; however, it is a host for the destructive pest, brown marmorated stink bug. It is planted so extensively that it commonly escapes from gardens and is invasive through much of the U.S., including Arlington and Alexandria in Northern Virginia and many areas in the northern Piedmont.

Source: Master Gardeners of Northern Virginia.

Fauquier Habitat goes native around Haiti house

By Lou Emerson, reprinted with permission by *FauquierNow*

Fauquier Habitat for Humanity has gone “green” with construction and landscaping of its 55th home.

Last week, 15 volunteers and staff members transformed the Warrenton home’s small yard into vibrant, low-maintenance landscape with 217 native plants.

The two-level house at 116 Haiti St. represents Habitat’s new focus on building structures that pay homage to traditional architecture in the community. The 2,000-square-foot house has a standing-seam metal roof, HardiePlank cement board siding and exterior walls framed in 6-inch lumber.

Warrenton architect Jim Hricko designed the four-bedroom, two-bath house to squeeze every energy dollar with high-performance windows, doors, appliances and heating/cooling.

In keeping with the structure’s EarthCraft standards, Habitat Community Development Director Mary Correia approached the Piedmont Environmental Council to help with landscaping. The new house stands just across part of the town’s Eva Walker Park from the PEC headquarters on Horner Street. The environmental organization two years ago established the

Larson Native Plant Garden there.

Dan Holmes, PEC’s director of state policy, used his background in horticulture and master’s degree in landscape design on that project.

Mr. Holmes volunteered to design the Haiti Street landscape for Habitat and specified the plants that cover much of the one-tenth-acre lot.

The plants range from dogwood, redbud and holly trees to cardinal flowers, sedge and Joe Pye weed.

Thirsty species line a very wet area behind the house, along the park’s concrete fence.

“We’re trying to keep everything as low-maintenance as possible,” said Habitat Director of Operations and Planning Melanie Burch, who helped with the planting and mulching that took 10 hours on Thursday, Sept. 17.

The native plants will stand up better to drought and other extremes, according to Mr. Holmes.

Habitat has yet to select the partner family that will buy the new home. Its program requires buyers invest significant volunteer hours with the program and to complete an education regimen.

The new home represents part of an ongoing Habitat project, including new construction and rehabilitation, in the Haiti neighborhood. The PATH Foundation provided a \$1-million grant that allowed the organization to buy nine properties there.



Volunteers and staff members landscape the home. Photo by Lou Emerson



PEC’s Dan Holmes (right), who designed the landscape, digs in the soggy backyard. Photo by Lou Emerson

Native Plants at 116 Haiti Street

Native plants are trees, shrubs, flowers and grasses that occur naturally in Virginia’s northern Piedmont and have evolved with our ecosystem. Because they are perfectly adapted to the soil, light, temperature and other climate conditions of our region, they offer great benefits to both people and wildlife, while also helping the environment.

PEC is excited that the native landscape design we produced for 116 Haiti Street will serve as a model for other Habitat for Humanity projects throughout the region. We designed the landscaping using Earthcraft House standards, aimed at a positive impact on both the resident’s quality of life and on the environment.

Trees

- Flowering Dogwood
- Redbud
- Serviceberry
- American Holly

- Fothergilla
- Virginia Sweetspire
- Arrowwood Viburnum
- Sumac ‘GroLow’
- Steeplebush
- Ninebark

Shrubs

- RedTwig Dogwood
- Blackhaw Viburnum
- Clethra Summersweet
- Inkberry Holly
- Highbush Blueberry
- Witch Hazel
- Spicebush
- Chokecherry
- Flame Azalea
- Winterberry ‘Southern Gentleman’
- Winterberry ‘Winter Red’
- Great Laurel (Rhododendron)

Grasses Sedges and Perennials

- Narrowleaf Mountain Mint
- Threadleaf Coreopsis
- Moss Phlox
- New England Aster
- Cardinal Flower
- Joe Pye Weed
- Sallow Sedge
- Frank’s Sedge
- Little Bluestem
- Rose Mallow (Hibiscus)

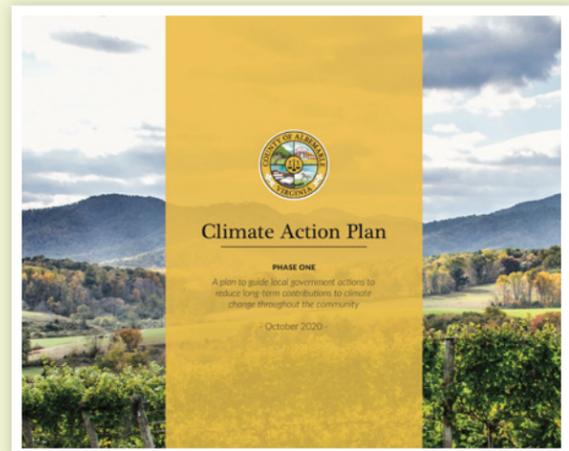
Albemarle Moves Forward with Climate Action Plan

On Oct 7, 2020, the Albemarle County Board of Supervisors voted unanimously to adopt its Climate Action Plan (CAP) Phase One. Their adoption of this plan marks an important and ambitious first step toward planning for climate change by creating a broad “to do” list that aims to address climate change. The real planning starts now, as the County begins CAP Phase Two, which outlines the implementation necessary to meet two key goals of CAP Phase One:

1. By 2030, reduce greenhouse gas emissions by 45% from 2008 levels; and
2. By 2050, achieve zero net greenhouse gas emissions.

This first phase of the plan is the result of significant input from local individuals and advocacy organizations including the Piedmont Environmental Council. According to Greg Harper, the County’s chief of environmental services, “the list of strategies and actions that make up the heart of the plan were developed from ideas suggested by the community.”

PEC staff provided comments and suggestions during CAP Phase One development. Rex Linville, PEC’s Albemarle Land Conservation Officer, encouraged the County to immediately begin CAP Phase Two, in order to “move swiftly and set clear timelines, specific targets, and interim benchmarks.” He went on to add that, “we live in



a community that recognizes the severity of the [climate change] problem and is committed to working with you on solutions.”

In addition to a focus on implementation of strategies that will mitigate and reduce greenhouse gas emission, CAP Phase Two will look at adaptation and resilience planning.

For the past 50 years, PEC’s work at the local level has in many ways led the way in climate resilience, including:

- working with private landowners to protect forest and farm lands;
- efforts to protect stream corridors and local drinking water supply areas;
- encouraging planning to direct growth and development into compact urban centers; and
- focusing on building a strong local food network.

PEC is deeply invested in the work of local land use planning and will be working diligently on these issues for the next 50 years.

Dear Friends,

Over the past year, I have re-learned the value of health, access to clean air, clean water, local food, and to the outdoors, but also the importance of understanding how decisions are made in our communities—decisions that affect all of these important elements of life. This, I think, is the work of conservation and the work of the PEC.

To an extent, there is broad recognition of these values in the Virginia Constitution, Article XI, Conservation, which states:

To the end that the people have clean air, pure water and the use and enjoyment of public lands, waters and other natural resources, it shall be the policy of the Commonwealth to conserve, develop and utilize its natural resources, its public lands and historical sites and buildings. Further, it shall be the Commonwealth's policy to protect its atmosphere, lands, and waters from pollution, impairment or destruction, for the benefit, enjoyment and general welfare of the people of the Commonwealth.

In this time of the global impacts of a pandemic, climate change, and associated social and economic changes, the simplest acts of living have to be evaluated for the risk they pose to ourselves, our family and our communities. But in the same spirit, the simplest acts to conserve, restore and improve can bring about much broader, positive change.

Certainly, we have all learned how much we value each other and our ability to meet in person. Something as simple as a hug or a smile is precious. At PEC, we spent time creating safe spaces and practices at our office so we could continue essential functions and benefit from seeing each other from time to time. We are so grateful to the staff and



The buck stops here, in PEC President Chris Miller's backyard, for a rest over Thanksgiving weekend. Photo by Chris Miller

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volunteers who made the effort at the Community Farm at Roundabout Meadows, planted native plants and trees as part of the Headwater Stream Initiative, and improved public access at PEC's properties. We are thankful to see the enjoyment of each visitor responding to the views from the Piedmont Memorial Overlook, knowing that moment was hopeful and restorative.

We have also learned that the investment in technology that allows us to hear and see each other

online can help break down barriers of time and distance. More people can access our programs and information than ever before, and we have invested in new technologies to keep building on that widening of participation. We have worked hard to keep you informed by webinar, video, social media and email.

In this tough year, when there has been so much loss and such prolonged suffering, we have also had moments of great accomplishment. The Waterloo Bridge restoration and return to its place of crossing above the Rappahannock, all captured on video, was a testament to the creativity and commitment of engineers, local and state officials and generous donors. Many partners and supporters have come together to ensure the food-insecure throughout our region have milk and ground beef, supporting our local farmers at the same time. And our annual fish count with the Virginia Department of Wildlife Resources revealed the presence of new trout populations at several of our stream restoration project locations.

While there are certainly broader forces of change operating, each individual action, whether it is the planting of a native plant garden, the donation of a conservation easement, the investment in soil health, or simply the act of participating in a local meeting, is necessary for good things to happen. When all of us act within our capacity, great things are possible.

Sincerely,

Chris Miller, President



INSIDE

2020 Photo Contest Winners, 2021 General Assembly Preview, Food & Farm Initiatives during Covid-19, Native Landscaping for Habitat for Humanity, Why I Give, and more!

Photo by Hugh Kenny

Pop Quiz

Which of the following favorite landscape plants is actually an invasive species in the Virginia Piedmont?

- a) Butterfly Bush
- b) Coral Honeysuckle Vine
- c) Red Chokeberry
- d) Wild Columbine

ANSWER ON PAGE 6



Photo by Forest Starr



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