

Minutes:

Historic Falls of the James State Scenic River Advisory Committee

Meeting: January 19, 2017 – City Hall – Observation Deck

Greg Velzy – Chair presiding

Called to order: 12:15 pm

Attendance:

Falls Members: Tricia Pearsall, Anne Wright, John Heerwald, John Thompson, Greg Velzy, Ralph White, John Moeser, Ralph Hambrick and Jim Hill

Falls Members Not Present: Justin Doyle, Leighton Powell, Alex Dahm, Jane Myers

Minutes: December 15, 2016 minutes approved.

Newest member Jim Hill was welcomed and introduced to the committee members.

Current Issues:

Riverfront Development Plan Update:

- **Downriver Riverfront Presentation January 11, 2017** and Proposed Schedule of Completion: Several Falls members attended and made comments at the presentation. Greg stated that this was not the forum for making suggestions to affect the entire Riverfront Plan, so he has drafted an email letter to send to Mark Olinger. It was suggested that he copy the Mayor. Greg stated that this will be sent on Monday, January 23, 2017. This email requests that the Riverfront Development Plan always refer to the James River in Richmond as a State Scenic River, as currently there is no mention of that in the entire Plan. It also gives a very brief history of this designation. The email also requests that a loading zone be added for boats near the boat ramp, a no fishing sign be placed where boaters are launching, safety devices (ladders, ropes, rings for rescue) be added to the area, and a vendor for boat rentals near the boat launch.
- **Notes from Meeting with Lynn Crump regarding importance of Scenic River Designation** and inclusion in all Riverfront related documents and presentations: Notes of January 2, 2017 meeting were amended to state that the 1972 designation of the James River by the General Assembly as the HISTORIC Falls of the James greatly added to the natural wilderness focus on the river and the eventual success and popularity of the James River Park founded in 1970. Ralph Hambrick has offered to set the historic/scenic designation record straight and that document is attached. (The James is STILL Virginia's FIRST river)
- **Meeting with Levar Stoney:** Will give Leighton 2 weeks to make that appointment as she is busy with General Assembly. The Committee needs to make certain that he understands our history as a State appointed committee; that he knows who we are and how we are different from JRA and other river groups; that we want him to appoint a liaison or Falls member from his office to insure connectivity; that the Falls Committee be consulted on proposed plans BEFORE the development/comment phase.
- **Name of Committee:** Discussion ensued about the length of the committee's title. No immediate solutions. Keep thinking through emails. (Scenic James@RVA)
- **T. Potterfield Bridge – Numbers and Dogs:** Visitor count in December 2016=35,000. Issue with dogs' nails being caught in the metal mesh surface. Caution signs have been placed at bridge ends. Signage package not

in place for Bridge, but moving forward. There was a lengthy discussion initiated by Ralph White concerning lack of directional signage to Bridge or JRP on major highways. Jim Hill suggested that the committee write to Mark Olinger asking for a directional signage update, as Olinger has taken on this project solo. Hill also suggested that we focus on signage as pertaining to the City grid first. More likely to assist locals looking for river areas and things to do. Signage for the RMA and Interstate system is much more difficult and expensive to generate.

- **Missing Link Phase** - Anne Wright and Ralph Hambrick made a proposal that the current Missing Link trail be only slightly modified and left alone as a wilderness scramble. There will, no doubt, be an effort to bridge the gap between the T.Pott Bridge and Belle Isle, but perhaps this can be done on the land-side of the railroad tracks. The committee suggested that a letter be drafted and sent to Olinger making this suggestion for the Riverfront Development Plans.

EnRichmond: Leighton Powell – Leighton was absent.

Capital Region Land Conservancy: Congratulations to Parker and the CRLC for cementing the conservation easement on the properties owned by Mark and Donna Romer and Dorothy Cleal. “Late last month, they took the ultimate act to formalize this agreement in perpetuity by recording conservation easements on their parcels at 5513 and 5517 Riverside Drive respectively.

Capital Region Land Conservancy (CRLC) facilitated the review and recordation of these two conservation easements covering 1.4 acres for the purpose of protecting the watershed and scenic views of the James River from the scenic byway Riverside Drive and the view of the surrounding landscape from the Captain John Smith Chesapeake National Historic Trail. In addition, these properties adjoin the James River Park System and portions of the park that the City of Richmond protected by a conservation easement in 2009. They thus provide a further buffer for the natural resources and recreational uses protected there.”

New Business:

- **New Mayor – Levar Stoney** – The Falls Committee’s Spring outing with Mayor Levar Stoney. Need to plan once we meet with Mayor.
- **James River Park Master Plan** – Plans are beginning to take shape concerning the JRP Masterplan. VHB (who are also working on the Invasive Species Project) have made headway with a proposal. Costs look to be in the \$170,000.00 ballpark. FOJRP is leading the funding and fundraising for this effort.

VCU-produced Economic Impact Study of the JRP Is underway with volunteers handling surveys of local companies and businesses to measure impact.

The Committee emphasized that it was very important that the Falls Committee be both part of the Plan and its infrastructure. Greg said he would send a note to that affect to Nathan and to those handling the Masterplan coordination. Anne Wright assured us that we would be part of all phases of this Masterplan.

Reports:

James River Park – Nathan Burrell not in attendance.

JRAC -

JROC - Project this weekend to make safe and secure the Belle Isle Climbing Access (over the quarry).

FoJRP - (see above)

Open discussion :

- Ralph White brought up several topics of discussion:
 - He is concerned about GRTC bus connection to the JRP. He is proposing a loop depositing people at 5th Street as part of the transit proposal. GRTC is currently leading workshops to gather info for a new transit plan: <http://www.richmondtransitnetwork.com>.

He is also concerned about the trash in the Canal currently being used by the Canal Boats between 17th Street and the Great Shiplock Park. This led to a discussion concerning the management of trash pickup for all sectors of the river and riverfront. i.e. - How to address the liter. We agreed that this would be another topic to bring to the Mayor's attention.

Next Public Meeting: - February 16, 2017
Noon at JRP – Reedy Creek Headquarters

Adjourn: The meeting was adjourned at 1:25pm.

Respectfully submitted,
Tricia Pearsall

Attachments:

Notes on Legislative History and Name of “Historic Falls of the James State Scenic River”

1970 Virginia Scenic Rivers Act adopted by the Virginia General Assembly

1972 Historic Falls of the James Act adopted by the General Assembly

This act designated the reach from Belle Isle westward to the city's corporate limit as “a historic river with noteworthy scenic and ecological qualities.” The act authorized the creation of the Falls of the James Committee with 5 members to be appointed by Richmond City Council and 4 by the Council of Outdoor Recreation. The city was designated as the administering agency.

(Note: This was a legislative act separate from the Scenic Rivers Program. The city was not willing to request designation in the state program for fear of undue restrictions and uncertainty about which agency would administer the program. The “historic” designation with the city as administering agency was an acceptable compromise.)

1975 The Rivanna River was the first river designated in the state Scenic Rivers Program. Thus, the Falls of the James was the “**first** scenic river” designated because it was **not** part of the formal state program (or it was not first because it was not a “scenic river” until 1984 – ambiguity allowing interpretation).

1984 Falls of the James designated as “a state scenic and historic river” by the General Assembly giving it full status in the state program. The area covered was extended downstream, now from Orleans Street (rather than Belle Isle) to the western 1970 corporate limit. The city continued as administering agency. Still called the Falls of the James Committee, 4 members appointed by what was by then the Department of Conservation and Economic Development and 5 by Richmond City Council. “Recreation” is added as a value to be protected.

1988 The Falls of the James Committee is changed to Falls of the James Advisory **Board** and the Governor in consultation with the director appoints 4 members along with the 5 by city council.

2003 The General Assembly consolidation action eliminated local scenic river boards (many of which had become inactive) and established one Virginia State Scenic River Board for the entire state. River designations continued and the Director of the Department of Conservation and Recreation became the appointing agent for local “committees” – no longer “boards.” City council, in the Falls case, was left out of the picture. The official designation is “Historic Falls of the James State Scenic River.”

Ralph Hambrick

1/19/2017