

Virginia Soil and Water Conservation Board
Hearing on the City of Roanoke Request to join the Blue Ridge Soil and Water
Conservation District

April 13, 2004
Rocky Mount, Virginia

Hearing Officer: Linda S. Campbell
Virginia Soil and Water Conservation Board

Staff: Mark Meador
Barry Hughes
Michael Fletcher

Members of the Public: George C. Sneed
City of Roanoke

Mike McEvoy
City of Roanoke

Rupert Cutler
City of Roanoke

Daphne Jamision
Blue Ridge SWCD and VASWCD

7:00 p.m.

Opening Statement:

My name is Linda Campbell. I am a member of the Virginia Soil and Water Conservation Board and I also serve as district director and the vice chair of the Shenandoah Valley Soil and Water Conservation District. With me this evening are staff from the Department of Conservation and Recreation that are assisting with the conduct of this hearing:

Barry Hughes, Conservation District Coordinator based in DCR's Clarksville Office
Mark Meador, District Programs Manager based in Richmond
Michael Fletcher, Director of Development based in Richmond

We are here tonight to provide an opportunity for anyone with an interest in the proposed realignment of the Blue Ridge Soil and Water Conservation District to express their comments. Anyone wishing to speak should sign the clipboard by the main entrance if you have not already done so.

Currently the Blue Ridge district is comprised of Franklin, Henry and Roanoke counties. A petition of the City Council of Roanoke City has been submitted to the Virginia Soil and Water Conservation Board (which hereafter I will refer to as the Board). The petition proposes the addition of Roanoke City to the existing Blue Ridge district. Roanoke City is not presently a part of any of Virginia's 47 Soil and Water Conservation Districts. Virginia law empowers the Board to review and decide about formation of districts and resolve changes with district boundaries. The name of the realigned district will remain the Blue Ridge Soil and Water Conservation District. Copies of the petition are available; please raise your hand if you have not receive a copy and would like one to review.

The meeting tonight is one of two hearings established by the Board. Tomorrow evening (April 14th) we will hold the second hearing in Rocky Mount at the Rocky Mount Municipal Building beginning at 7:00 p.m. Following these two hearings, the Board must determine from the facts presented and from other available information, whether there is reasonable need and adequate justification for adding the City of Roanoke to the existing Blue Ridge district and thereafter be comprised of 3 counties and one city. According to Virginia law, this hearing provides public comment opportunity "...upon the question of the desirability and necessity, in the interest of the public health, safety, and the welfare, of the action proposed by the petition upon (i) the question of the appropriate boundaries to be assigned to such district, (ii) the property of the petition and other proceedings taken under this chapter, and (iii) all questions relevant to such inquiries." If the Board finds that there is such a need, then it must next determine if the operation of the realigned district is administratively practicable and feasible.

In accordance with provisions of the *Code of Virginia*, the Board has published notices of two hearings in newspapers of general circulation for the areas affected.

Concerning the petition submitted by the Roanoke City Council, the Board has determined that the petition fulfills requirements established by state law, and the Board approved the petition during their January 23rd, 2004 meeting.

At this time, for the benefit of anyone present that may not be familiar with the authorities and functions of the Commonwealth's Soil and Water Conservation Districts, I will ask Mark Meador to come forward and provide a brief overview. When that is complete, he will read the petition submitted by the Roanoke City Council."

Mr. Meador:

"Thank you Ms. Campbell."

Soil and Water Conservation Districts are political subdivisions of the state and are established through actions of local communities according to provisions of state law. Among the authorities provided through the *Code of Virginia*, districts are empowered to:

- Conduct surveys relating to soil erosion and the conservation, utilization and disposal of water; and to disseminate information.
- Conduct demonstration projects to provide soil and water conservation examples to local communities.
- Carry out preventative and control measures for the conservation control and use of water within the district.
- Enter into agreements and provide financial aid with agencies, or any occupier of land within the district.
- Accept, acquire and dispose of property – real or personal, or rights or interests therein.
- Make agricultural and engineering equipment available to assist land occupiers with soil conservation and the management of water.
- Develop comprehensive programs and plans for the conservation and management of soil and water resources.
- Serve as an agent for the Commonwealth and/or United States, by administering projects and activities and accepting gifts and contributions.

Today there are 47 Soil and Water Conservation Districts serving 98% of the land surface of the Commonwealth. Each district is administered by a board of directors comprised of citizens of the district's local community. There are over 300 district directors – the majority elected locally, serving on district boards without financial compensation and volunteering their services to their communities. Districts also employ staff to carry out the work of the district.

At this time I will read the contents of the petition from the Roanoke City Council:

**Petition of Roanoke City Council to
Virginia Soil and Water Conservation Board**

The Roanoke City Council has determined that there is a need, in the interest of public health, safety and welfare, for the addition of the City of Roanoke to the Blue Ridge Soil and Water Conservation District. The area to be added is defined as the City of Roanoke, encompassing all the area within the boundaries of the city limits. The contiguous City of Roanoke boundaries comprise 43 square miles, home to 94,911 people.

[Mr. Meador noted that the original petition by the City included City owned property known as Carvin's Cove which is outside the boundaries of the City and is at present part of another Soil and Water Conservation District. The City revised the petition to remove this parcel of land from the request.]

The grounds upon which that determination is based are as follows:

- A. The ability to participate in the rapidly expanding area of available conservation programs, which require the expertise and assistance of Conservation Districts, primarily from a water-quality standpoint. Public health, safety and welfare would be improved through the enhancement of

the water quality in storage reservoirs through the use of agricultural BMPs in the reservoir watersheds, as well as programs to reduce soil erosion, manage nutrients and pesticides, and protect plants and animals throughout the City of Roanoke.

- B. The ability to utilize and work with the Blue Ridge Soil and Water Conservation District in educational programs designed to increase the awareness and understanding of area youth in environmental issues.
- C. A need for local elected representation knowledgeable in conservation issues to serve the City of Roanoke, thus allowing a greater amount of accessibility to the directors by their constituents where local people could voice local concerns.

Accordingly, Roanoke City Council hereby petitions the Virginia Soil and Water Conservation Board as follows:

That the Soil and Water Conservation Board is hereby required to define the boundaries of the proposed district, to conduct a hearing within the territory so defined on the question of the addition to the district in such territory, and to determine that such an addition be created.

Ayes: Council Members William D. Bestpitch, M. Rupert Cutler, Alfred T. Dowe, Jr., Beverly T. Fitzpatrick, Linda F. Wyatt and Mayor Ralph K. Smith.

Nays: None

Absent: Vice-Mayor C. Nelson Harris

Mrs. Campbell:

Thank you Mark.

You have heard the reading of the petition. Anyone desiring to speak regarding the actions proposed within the petition will now have an opportunity to do so. When I call your name please go to the podium, state your name, your affiliation if applicable, and any comments pertaining to the matter at hand. All statements will be recorded on audio cassette tape and transcribed in a written format. If you have brought with you a copy of the statements you are expressing, we would like a copy for our records. All statements presented will become a part of the record and will be considered by the full membership of the Soil and Water Conservation Board in making a determination with regards to the realignment of the Blue Ridge Soil and Water Conservation District.

Before we begin, if there is anyone present that has not signed up to speak, please raise your hand so that we may add you to the list.

At this time, the floor is open for comments. We will start according to the order of those that have signed up to speak.

The floor is open for comments:

George Snead
Assistant City Manager for Operations

First and foremost I want to welcome you to Roanoke and the City Council Chambers. We are glad to have you hear and to have the opportunity to join this district. I want to talk very briefly about supporting our application that we are talking about this evening.

Our community, our citizens and the public servants that serve those citizens have over the past four years refocused on being better stewards of all the natural resources in the area. Sometimes we have gotten so close to the forest we don't care enough about the trees. I say that with the exception of Dr. Cutler.

We are trying to do a better job in using natural resources in the community. We are doing all kinds of things including a more regional approach to our water supply, the reforestation and improvement of the tree canopy in the city. We are protecting some of the real beauty in some of our older parks and many of the older homes. We are doing a much better job of stormwater runoff.

The heart and soul of why it is so logical for our community to be a part of the district is that in an urban setting we take things for granted. Every time we have the opportunity to do education and the things the Soil and Water Conservation Districts focus on we enhance our community life and make our environment more beautiful. We have a beautiful river in our community and we have developed a comprehensive plan.

Our citizens want us to protect the environment in the urban city. It is a common sense approach for us to be a member of the Blue Ridge District. I think there are some really educational opportunities for folks young and old to learn about the very nature of agriculture and how it relates to the rural, suburban and urban setting. I think the district can help that.

Rupert Cutler
Roanoke City Council

Thank you madam chairman and gentlemen, I am pleased to be here.

As a Roanoke City Council member, and on behalf of my fellow council members, I would like to express our enthusiastic support for our the City of Roanoke membership in the Blue Ridge Soil and Water Conservation District.

Conservation of the natural resources within the City of Roanoke is a high priority for the city, as is increasing environmental awareness among its citizens. As a member of the Blue Ridge Soil and Water Conservation District, the city will benefit from the Director's technical expertise and education programs, which will help us attain our soil and water conservation goals.

In addition, our membership in the District will allow the City of Roanoke to contribute to regional solutions of environmental challenges, which in turn will benefit all members of the District.

We look forward to being an active participant in all the programs of the District.

Mrs. Campbell:

Are there any other comments? Are there any questions?

If not please accept my thanks and appreciation on behalf of the Virginia Soil and Water Conservation Board, to those of you here tonight that have contributed your views towards the matter before the Board. The record will remain open until May 1st, 2004 to receive all written statements. Written statements should be mailed to the attention of David L. Moyer, Chair of the Virginia Soil and Water Conservation Board; 203 Governor Street, Suite 206, Richmond, VA 23219

I declared this hearing adjourned.