

Minutes:

**Historic Falls of the James Scenic River Advisory Committee
Stone House-Forest Hills Park
Richmond VA**

Meeting: August 19 , 2021

Greg Velzy: Chair – Presiding

Call to Order: 12:02 PM

Attending Committee Members: Anne Wright, Tricia Pearsall, John Heerwald, Greg Velzy, Ralph Hambrick, Leighton Powell.
Community Attending: Mike Burton (Trail Superintendent, Richmond Parks & Recreation), Shawna Shade (Assistant, Friends of the James River Park), Josh Stutz (Executive Director, Friends of the James River Park), Jenn Clarke (Public Education and Outreach Coordinator, City of Richmond), Grace LeRose (Policy Advisor, DPU, City of Richmond Virginia), Eric Whitehurst (Environmental Compliance Officer, City of Richmond, VA).

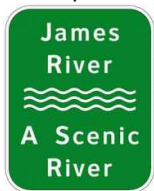
Minutes: Minutes of July 15, 2021. Motion to approve-Ralph Hambrick. Second-Leighton Powell. Approved.

Current Issues:

- **Riverfront Development Plan** (and other James River related) updates: Kevin Vonck, Acting Director, Department of Planning and Community Review, City of Richmond-not present. **Tricia:** Get information updates from Kevin or Marianne via email before next months meetings. It was also suggested to contact Maritza Pechin, Deputy Director, Office of Equitable Development Maritza.Pechin@Richmondgov.com
- **James River Safety Issues: CSX** spills-pubic notification-track repair hazards: Discussion ensued regarding the latest derailment near Dominion below the Northbank Trail along the JR & K Canal. (the 3rd derailment in 6 weeks) Mike Burton reported that repair crews have torn up the Northbank approach and parking lot west of the Belle Isle parking lot. He also reported that crews dropping nails, clamp and rail parts make it impossible to work underneath the elevated track or nearby. They have been asked to be aware of river users, walkers and DPU repair crews particularly in the area of the Pipeline and refuse to do so. The City is powerless to stop them. Bryce has had to go to the Governor of Virginia to see what can be done to make it safe for Park users in those locales. John Heerwald said that he had tried to reach out to Emily Stock, Project Manager-Virginia Department of Rail & Public Transportation, but that she has retired and he doesn't know her replacement. Lack of information and transparency was also discussed. The committee was informed by Eric Whitehurst that the sequence of events as reported in the Richmond Times-Dispatch was not as happened. It appears that CSX dumped the coal out of the cars into the water basin above Dominion(not into the canal). This was done so that they could right the derailed cars and remove them. No one seemed to know what this water is used for now as Dominion does not generate electricity here, but could be for cooling their solar operation being constructed on the parking lot. Eric reported that they have tried to retrieve most of the coal from this 'pond'. It was suggested that a letter to the editor-R T-D should be written from the Committee suggesting that CSX be a good RVA community citizen – notify community of accidents and explain exactly what happened, be more cautious of citizens and those working in and around rail facilities. **Ralph Hambrick** suggested that he could write the letter and **Josh Stutz** agreed to work with him. Also, Eric Whitehurst agreed to start coming to our monthly meetings.



- CRLC updates:** Parker Agelasto was not present. It was reported that CRLC has closed on the Dock Street property and JRA has made their presentation regarding the education center. There is a survey currently underway to start the public engagement process as to moving forward with the property and giving it (under easement) to the City. Also, Parker reported by private conversation that he was working with Norfolk -Southern to deed the rail land on the Slave Trail to the JRP or City as that track is no longer in use.
- I-95 bridge signage update:** Rick Burgess, VDOT notified us that “ the Integrated Directional Signing Program’s (IDSP) contractor Directional Signing Program (DSP) conducted Northbound and Southbound field surveys to determine if a feasible location was available for the addition of these signs and concluded:
 - Northbound** – DSP determined that no location for an additional sign is available due to the spacing between the existing sign structures and steep drop off behind the guardrail beyond the travel lanes. In lieu of this DSP proposed a modification to the existing “James River” sign that would allow for the addition of the “A Scenic River” message at the current location. This modification has been approved by me and received concurrence from VDOT’s Richmond District to be installed at the current location. DSP ordered the new sign panel this week and anticipates installation being completed in 6-8 weeks.
 - Southbound** – DSP determined that no location for an additional sign is available due to the spacing between the existing sign structures and the elevation of I-95 as it approaches the James River just south of the downtown corridor. Unfortunately, no existing southbound “James River” sign exists to modify preventing the request from being accommodated this direction.



- James River Park:** Mike Burton for Bryce Wilk:
 - Huguenot Flatwater pre-construction beginning August 31. Massey Contracting starting around mid-September.
 - Superintendent interviews update: Interviews for the JRP superintendent position were held.
 - A new Deputy Director Parks and Recreation has been hired – Shimon Young comes to RVA from Cleveland
 - No reports on other items at this time.
- DPU updates:** Grace LeRose and Jenn Clarke:
 - Pipeline rupture update: The domestic pipeline is being repaired. Wastewater has been diverted. A replacement is being considered. Working on the pipeline has been delayed because CSX is working above

it and throwing things down off the tracks. The trail and beaches are now closed. Will be reopened when leak is fixed, This is about 300 ft of pipe. If it is replaced, it will likely be rerouted and then what becomes of access to this "trail" That discussion ensued for a while with no resolution.

- There was also a freshwater leak in another pipe in the pipeline rapids area which was fixed.
- Notification of leaks classification: call 311 or text Grace's cell: 804.432.3265 and give GPS co-ordinates of leak please.
- CSO Funding and Infrastructure funding proposal update: The Interim Plan to address the CSO in Richmond is all but completed with an additional 33.3 million allocated and spent on additional stormwater holding capacity and processing. The next step is the 'Final' Plan which will cost an additional \$850 million to comply with the SB1064. This is to address 2 billion gallons of overflow. All construction must be completed by July 1, 2035 at a cost of about \$1billion. Starting in September, a stakeholder task force will be established this Fall asking 3 members from each Council District to work in tandem with city officials and employees on developing solutions to funding and new infrastructure concept. Utility bills will go up. Both Senate and General Assembly are being asked for Federal and State funds, The submitted infrastructure plan will have a 15-yr. deadline. They are looking at many kinds of retrofit systems that have been used in other locales, specifically the holding quarry pond type facility like several in Chicago (looking at Vulcan).
- A lack of information regarding the sewage leak upstream and its dissolution, the CSO emission into the river daily and other DPU river related topics which are important to river users, kayakers, etc. It was reported that the group James River Homosapiens does indeed respect the posts of both Grace and Jenn, but there is often conflicting information with no clear definitive source and that perhaps an educational session could be held. Grace explained that soon, you will be able to view cameras which will capture the first flush inside the CSO every event. (In the meantime, Jenn posted a lengthy and excellent explanation on Homosapiens group site: See addendum)
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- **BridgePark** Proposal Restructure: Jim Hill not present

New Business:

Reports:

JRA: Justin not present. No news

JRAC: 22nd Annual James River Cleanup - SATURDAY, SEPTEMBER 11, 2021 AT 9 AM EDT – 12 PM EDT

JROC: JROC is volunteering at Music at Maymont. Friday, August 27, 2021 – Cleaning up 22nd Street August 21, 2021.

FOJRP: Member event at Legends, September 23rd. Looking to bring in new land and new signs on Belle Isle

Open discussion:

- Greg Velzy suggested that with all the new happenings in the JRP that we look to celebrate the legacy of Ralph White
- Also noted that the city was looking into the Pipeline restoration. Cost would be about 14 million

Adjourn: 1:23PM

Next Public Meeting: September 16, 2021 at City Hall if it is Open or Stone House, Forest Hills Park

Meetings begin at 12:00 noon in the Conference Room on the 5th floor of Richmond City Hall. Meetings are scheduled for the THIRD Thursday of each month. All meetings are open to the public. If you are not now receiving e-mail meeting notices and wish to receive them, please provide your name and e-mail address to velzyg@verizon.net. If you would like to be removed from the list, so indicate at the above e-mail address.

Tricia Pearsall – Secretary

Addendum:

RVA-H2O: We've been asked to share more about Richmond's combined sewer system (CSS) here on the James River HomoSapiens group for those of you who aren't following along with us on Facebook (or on Twitter at <https://twitter.com/rvah2o> if that's your jam, or on Instagram at <https://www.instagram.com/rvah2o/>). So here we are, and right on time as a combined sewer overflow event occurred early this morning (we got the email notification at 3:35 am).

If you have been following along with us, this information may be familiar to you. Nonetheless, this is important stuff! Buckle up or save this post for bedtime reading because this is a LONG read, but it's worth it. ✨ The more you know! ✨

Before we jump into Richmond's CSS, we've got to be on the same page regarding stormwater. Stormwater is rain (or melted snow) that can't be absorbed through impervious surfaces like roofs, roads, parking lots, and sidewalks. This water flows into storm drains, roadside gutters, ditches, and culverts. It's all that rain running along every hard surface outside right now on this rainy night.

In two-thirds of Richmond, stormwater flows directly into the James River or one of its tributary streams and creeks. This is why we're always begging folks to pick up dog poop, be sure not to litter, refrain from washing cars in the streets, fix oil leaks, and more.

In one-third of Richmond, stormwater pipes connect with wastewater infrastructure and flow to Richmond's wastewater treatment plant. Parts of this system are more than 150 years old, and combined sewer systems are common in older cities across the nation and the globe.

In Virginia, Richmond, Lynchburg, and Alexandria all have combined sewer systems. To see exactly where in Richmond is served by the CSS, and the municipal separate storm sewer system (MS4 for short), explore our up-to-date map here: <https://cor.maps.arcgis.com/apps/Cascade/index.html?appid=f74909d9f2f44cb6ad0ca70d0eb850df<clid=b1931eb0-5da3-4e15-abc8-4b8de3ced271>

During dry weather, a combined sewer system works fine—and allows some stormwater to be treated. During heavy rains, however, the combined volume of stormwater and wastewater can overwhelm the system and excess overflows, untreated, into waterways, including the James River.

Woah, right?! Have we got your attention? Yes?! Good! Combined sewer systems are important to understand, be aware of, and, most importantly, to improve and upgrade!

Before we get to our continuing work, some more resources for awareness and information:

- First, you can learn more in video format. Our five minute film is charmingly

informative: https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=wN_T_xNINuA

- You can explore our dedicated CSS webpage and get a refresher on stormwater on our website: <https://rvah2o.org/combined-sewer-system/>

- If you'd prefer scrolling through a StoryMap to reading through a webpage, we've got you covered with ours

here: <https://cor.maps.arcgis.com/apps/Cascade/index.html?appid=f74909d9f2f44cb6ad0ca70d0eb850df<clid=b1931eb0-5da3-4e15-abc8-4b8de3ced271>

- This last resource requires action! Sign up to receive notifications for combined sewer overflow (CSO) events—you'll get an email when one occurs (like how we got an email early this morning!). The notification system prefers it when you use all lowercase letters in your email address, please: <https://apps.richmondgov.com/applications/CSOSubscription/>

Alright, folks, we're just getting to the good stuff—ongoing upgrades and improvements! Let's talk

about what we've done so far, what we're doing now, and what's coming down the pipe. We'll cover what we can all do as individual citizens too.

The way we see it, all of us Richmonders inherited the combined sewer system—none of us are 150+ years old (though it sure can feel like it some mornings, huh?). Instead, we're all clean water advocates working to fix the system. One way we've done this is by disconnecting connected pipes. We've separated 21 outfalls to date.

When we separate the pipes, it ensures that wastewater goes to the treatment plant, and stormwater flows directly to the James. We started with 46 outfall locations and we're down to 25. You can see all closed and active locations in that map we mentioned: <https://cor.maps.arcgis.com/apps/Cascade/index.html?appid=f74909d9f2f44cb6ad0ca70d0eb850df<clid=b1931eb0-5da3-4e15-abc8-4b8de3ced271>

When you're out on the James, walking (or biking, or running, or driving, or skating, or whatever it is you do when you're not paddling!) on its banks, or alongside Shockoe and Gillies creeks where combined sewer outfalls exist, each one is labeled with a sign to keep you informed of what's happening, and where.

What else have we done, you're wondering? We've created storage! Retention in the Shockoe Retention Basin on Chapel Island holds 50 million gallons of combined flow when it rains or snow melts, and the Hampton-McCloy Tunnel holds 7 million gallons.

Combined waters are held in storage when the wastewater treatment plant is at capacity, which brings us to our beloved wastewater treatment plant (WWTP). Thanks to a 65 million-gallon 2020 upgrade, our WWTP can now treat 140 million gallons per day during wet weather. Richmonders only send us about 45 million gallons of wastewater per day, so this additional expansion that almost doubled our capacity allows us to treat 95 million gallons of stormwater on rainy days (in addition to storing those 57 million aforementioned gallons)

But wait—there's more! We're installing green infrastructure in Richmond, too! Green infrastructure is a type of stormwater management practice that mimics nature to reduce and slow stormwater, which helps to keep it out of the combined (and separate) system.

Green infrastructure looks like alleys with permeable pavers or pavement, parking lots with the same, rain gardens, increased tree canopy, installing cisterns and rain barrels to harvest rain running off of rooftops, and encouraging these efforts on private property as well. Green infrastructure matters so much that we are also in the process of creating a Green Infrastructure Master Plan for the City of Richmond with our good friends at the Alliance for the Chesapeake Bay.

Another effort underway is a groovy study to monitor the flow in Richmond's sewer lines in real time, allowing us to see where there's additional capacity. Once we identify capacity, we'll be able to use valves, gates, and weirs to move flow into spaces with room to spare. This work is part of our Interim Plan, which stems from 2020's Senate Bill 1064.

Senate Bill 1064 expedites solutions for all combined sewer systems in Virginia. This requires us to first bring some interim solutions to life, then a long-term plan and course of action. Love legal language? Read up on Senate Bill 1064 here: <https://lis.virginia.gov/cgi-bin/legp604.exe?201+ful+CHAP0634>

Addressing this 150+ year old system from the 1800s takes incredible amounts of strategy, planning, funding, and support to do it right.

We are working swiftly as we've got a 14-year timeline and our Interim Plan was submitted to the

Virginia Department of Environmental Quality earlier this summer. You can read up on the 10 projects included in the Interim Plan (coming to Richmond by July 2027!)

here: <https://j3n7e4b9.stackpathcdn.com/wp-content/uploads/2021/07/Interim-Plan-Report-2021-0617-1.pdf>

These ten projects will result in an annual overflow volume reduction of 182.3 million gallons and the construction of these projects must begin by July 1st of next year (let the countdown begin!).

The Final Plan is still under *very, very preliminary* development and is due to the Virginia Department of Environmental Quality by July 1, 2024, and construction must begin by July 1, 2025 and be complete by July 1, 2035.

We're kind of in those pre-planning stages for the Final Plan, figuring out how we'll tackle this undertaking as a community together. You will hear more from us and we'll hear from you and, more importantly, hear you! We'll gather in-person! We'll have new webpages! We'll have loads of PDFs! Stay tuned for more!

Let's talk water quality and river recreation for a quick second. When a combined sewer overflow event occurs, it means it's been raining quite a bit. If it has rained upstream of Richmond, runoff also flows off of farmland into the James, which isn't desirable either. The Virginia Department of Health wisely suggests that you "avoid swimming in natural waters for a few days after a heavy rain event."

If you're still following along, first of all, thank you! And secondly, you may have realized that we have our work cut out for us. We can't do it alone, and we would love your help.

You can aid in clean water efforts in a variety of ways. Here are four of them:

- advocate for green infrastructure throughout Richmond
- plant a tree
- keep trash off Richmond's streets and sidewalks (and out of storm drains!)
- contact your elected officials and urge them to support CSS improvement funding

If you want to help reduce the pressure on the wastewater treatment plant during heavy rains, hold off on washing laundry or running the dishwasher if you can. These household chores only produce a few gallons of wastewater, but every drop counts when you're eager to help! That's right—we think you should just go ahead and skip chores!

Finally, we can't talk about all these much-needed upgrades, enhancements, and improvements for Richmond's combined sewer system without talking about finances. We've invested more than \$315 million thus far, but, as you can tell, our work isn't done.

Federal grants provided lots of funding in the '70s and '80s, but dried up in the 1990s. Thankfully, there are other funding sources. We are lucky to have wonderful partners at the Virginia Department of Environmental Quality who have invested in Richmond's improvements for nearly 40 years. Our Interim Plan will cost \$33 million, and our Final Plan to control our combined sewer system will cost \$850 million.



Clean water is worth it.



A healthy James River is worth it.



Bringing these upgrades to the communities most impacted by the CSS (Shockoe...

Manchester... Richmond's Northside... the East End...) is worth it. 

✨ Protecting the Chesapeake Bay (and all the beaches, recreation, and seafood you love) is worth it. ✨

✨ Creating better lives for those in Richmond and all of Central Virginia is worth it. ✨

Just because it's worth it doesn't mean we want to pass that cost on to Richmonders, which is why we are currently and actively seeking state and federal funding. With 23.2% of our Richmond family living below the poverty line, we are eager for this support so sewer rates are reasonable and so Richmonders avoid an extraordinary economic burden for an effort that will benefit the entire region and all downstream communities.

You're almost to the conclusion of this (seemingly endless) stream of information, but our work isn't over, and our team is working 24/7 (seriously! right now!) to treat your drinking and wastewater (separately, of course) and ensure a healthy James River.

If you're new to us, our author bio: RVA H2O is Richmond's collaborative clean water initiative. We are working to bring cleaner water faster to Richmond and the James River, and to achieve the goals (and specific strategies) of the RVA Clean Water Plan. The creation of the comprehensive RVA Clean Water Plan was driven by our stakeholders. Learn more about our wonderful partners (including, but not limited to, JROC - James River Outdoor Coalition, James River Association, James River Park, Chesapeake Bay Foundation, Alliance for the Chesapeake Bay, RVAgreen 2050, Virginia Department of Environmental Quality, Capital Region Land Conservancy, Virginia Department of Conservation and Recreation, Virginia Department of Health and Virginia American Water) in Richmond and around the region and find the RVA Clean Water Plan on our website: <https://rvah2o.org/rva-clean-water-plan/>

Thank you—so much—for reading, and for your dedication to clean water and recreation in it!

Stormwater video: https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=wN_T_xNINuA&t=1s