

**State Trails Advisory Committee In-Person Meeting Notes
Thursday, April 28, 2022 8:30 AM -11:30 AM (EDT)**

Hilton Richmond Downtown

Miller Room

501 E Broad St, Richmond, VA 23219•(804) 344-4300

*Attendees and **Speakers:***

Sally Aungier, VA Horse Council

John Kirk, VA Dept. of Wildlife Resources

Matthew Helt, U.S. Forest Service

David Whitmore, U.S. Forest Service

Lara Brown, Tri-Way Trail

Jimmie Carter, Tri-Way Trail

Adrienne Kotula, Chesapeake Bay Commission

Jeff Monroe, Potomac Appalachian Trail Club

Shane Sawyer, VDOT

Kirk Millikan, VDOT-Environmental

Zachary Sheldon, The Nature Conservancy

Mona Burwell, VA Dept. of Health

Melicent Miller, VA Dept. of Health

Asha Solanky retired, VCU Health Systems

Ruth Babylon, VA Outdoors Foundation

Justin Doyle, James River Association

Sandra Tanner, VA Tourism Corporation

Kindra Greene, Elizabeth River Trail

Frank Maguire, Roanoke Valley Greenways

Elliott Caldwell, East Coast Greenway Alliance

Alister Perkinson, James City County Parks and Recreation

Paul Gilbert, NOVA Parks

Charlie Westbrook, First Earth 2030

Heather Barrar, Friends of the Lower Appomattox River (FOLAR)

Eddie Golden, Friends of the Lower Appomattox River

Champe Burnley, past president, Virginia Bicycling Federation

Ursula Lemanski, NPS Rivers, Trails and Conservation Assistance Program

Cat Anthony, Virginia Capital Trail and Virginia Trails Alliance

Phil Riggan, PlanRVA

Chet Parsons, PlanRVA

Jill Kaneff, Northern VA Regional Commission

Michelle Neuenschwander, Hispanic Access Foundation

DCR Staff Present:

Matthew Wells, Director

Frank Stovall, Deputy Director of Operations

Jennifer Wampler, Trails Coordinator

Kristal McKelvey, Recreation Grants Manager

Kellie Seaton, Recreation Grants Coordinator
Kelly McClary, Planning and Recreation Resources Director
David Bryan, State Parks Planner
Gretchen Gorecki, State Parks Natural and Cultural Resource Manager
Joshua Ellington, State Parks Chief of Resource Management

Jennifer Wampler welcomed the group and acknowledged new members:

- Melicent Miller, Consultant for the Virginia Dept. of Health
- Mona Burwell, Arthritis Program Coordinator for the VA Dept. of Health
- Joshua Ellington, VA State Parks Chief of Resource Management
- Timothy Hupp, Great Eastern Trail
- Frank McGuire, Roanoke Valley Greenways
- Elliot Caldwell, East Coast Greenway Alliance
- Melissa Rose, Spearhead Trails
- Jeff Monroe – Potomac Appalachian Trail Club

Kelly McClary, DCR's Planning and Recreation Resources Director, introduced herself and welcomed new DCR leadership and PRR staff:

- Matt Wells, DCR Director
- Frank Stovall, DCR Deputy Director
- Samantha Wangsgard, DCR PRR Chief Planner

Hispanic Access Foundation

Noting a change in the agenda, Jennifer welcomed Michelle Neuenschwander, Project Director of the MANO Project, a program provided by the Hispanic Access Foundation. Founded in 2010, this non-profit connects Latinos with partners and opportunities to improve lives and create an equitable society. The core purpose for the [MANO Project](#) (My Access to Network Opportunities) is to connect, build and develop young leaders of color who share a passion for serving and strengthening their communities. They work with federal and state agencies to provide professional development and training opportunities for people of color through paid internship and fellowship programs. They have partnered on internships with the US Fish and Wildlife Service in region.

[Latino Conservation Week](#) (Disfrutando y Conservando Nuestra Tierra) is an initiative created to support the Latino community getting into the outdoors and participating in activities to protect natural resources. This year, the event is scheduled July 16 – 24.

[Por la Creacion](#) Faith Based Alliance motivates young people to be responsible stewards of God's creation to ensure its existence for future generations, and encourages religious leaders to speak up for conservation.

[Latino Advocacy Week](#) seeks to build the capacity of Latinos to advocate for themselves, their families, and their community.

If you are interested in connecting with Hispanic Access Foundation or any of the programs, reach out to [Michelle](#).

Kelly McClary introduced DCR's new director, Matthew Wells, who provided some information on his former work with Virginia Forever and said it was the agency's priority to enhance and expand outdoor opportunities for all Virginians, with the goal to make Virginia's offerings best in class.

The Regional Government's Role: Fall Line, A Case Study

Chet Parsons, Director of Transportation for PlanRVA provided some background on the regional government's role in trail development as exemplified by the Fall Line, a shared use path under development from Ashland to Petersburg.

Plan RVA is the acting administrator of the [Central Virginia Transportation Authority](#). Established in 2020, the Authority administers funds collected from the gas tax and sales tax specifically for transportation purposes. The Board includes agencies, local governments, and state elected officials. The Authority dedicates funds for regionally significant transportation projects according to these percentages: 50% funds to local projects, 35% to regional projects, and 15% to transit. Local fund uses are determined by local priorities for significant transportation projects. In FY21 & 22, revenues totaled \$113.9M and are forecasted to be \$276.4M in FY23-26. These funds have been used to plan and develop the Fall Line Trail. Although there is a funding gap remaining, \$104M has been committed to the project that can be used to leverage federal funding. PlanRVA is working with localities to connect the Fall Line to the Virginia Capital Trail. [Chet](#) encouraged STAC members to support the project; as there is still work left to do.

Tracking long-distance trails through interactive maps

Three planners working at the regional level shared their interactive maps used to track/promote a long-distance trail. Since the [Fall Line](#) crosses several PDCs and localities (Ashland, Henrico County, City of Richmond, Chesterfield County) PlanRVA developed this map to help partners track progress. Phil Riggan with PlanRVA shared a [Trail Progress Map](#) that tracks the funding for each trail segment along with other attributes. They also use [story maps](#), especially during the pandemic, to update people on their work and progress. These maps and other information are available at [Falllineva.org](#).

Since it is not eligible for funding through the CVTA, the Appomattox River Trail interactive map was developed by a volunteer working with the Friends of the Lower Appomattox River, a regional non-profit working with PlanRVA and Crater planning districts (representing six localities and three cities). Heather Barrar, FOLAR's Regional Trail Program Director, said they initially developed a paper map working with localities to get the information on their outdoor recreation resources. They also developed a Google Map to track their funding and progress (internally). With the ArcGIS online platform provided by Chesterfield County, they have also developed a public facing map. Volunteer Edie Golden introduced their [Interactive Mobile Map](#), which combines information from all the trail's different localities to make trip planning easier.

Although the map was created by a volunteer, staff time was needed for the data collection. The map utilizes ESRI's Web AppBuilder software, which is being replaced by [ArcGIS Experience Builder](#). There was limited ability to customize using Web AppBuilder, and there were some issues (like having to double tap with an iPhone 12) so some bugs may be worked out with an update. The ESRI Story Map template they used was recently removed, so will also have to update this feature. A few options for updates include ESRI Experience Builder, or using Chesterfield's in-house GIS expertise, or perhaps an ESRI customized programmer option.

Jill Kaneff, demographer with the Northern Virginia Regional Commission shared information on the [Potomac Heritage National Scenic Trail of Northern Virginia interactive map](#) along with their [Equity and Economic Impact Study](#), which includes [dashboards](#) and infographics on the four pillars of the study:

- 1) Detailed information about the health impacts of the trail on local residents;
- 2) The role of the trail in economic development in the region;
- 3) An analysis of the equity of health, economic, and safety outcomes for residents along the trail;
- 4) A review of the transportation benefits provided by the trail.

The study utilized trail counters, Strava and Streetlight data to estimate trail usage. Strava and Streetlight data provide results in indexes, which need to be combined with counter data to translate into number of users.

The methodology used for the study is also explained in presentations available at this [link](#) (scroll to bottom and view presentations).

NVRC serves as the coordinator for the Potomac Heritage National Scenic Trail Coordinator in Northern Virginia (with support from the National Park Service), and works with over 20 partners including the State, NoVA's local jurisdictions, park authorities and federal partners. The Trail was designated as a National Scenic Trail in 1983 and connects 710 planned and existing miles in the Potomac and Ohio river basins. In Northern Virginia, the trail network spans 140 miles through the Town of Dumfries, the Town of Occoquan, the Town of Leesburg, the City of Alexandria and counties of Loudoun, Fairfax, Arlington, and Prince William. There are 35 miles to go to finish the trail in Virginia, but some sections do not have a route planned yet. Gaps are identified with dots on the interactive map. Links are provided to more information on the planning underway to complete those gaps.

In addition to the interactive map, Jill had newly printed copies of the Potomac Heritage Trail provided by the National Park Service.

Trails and Public Health Panel

This panel discussed the importance of walking and walkability to address equity, chronic disease and mental health issues. Panelists included Melicent Miller and Mona Burwell, both representing the Virginia Dept. of Health, and Asha Solanky, who specialized in Outpatient Psychiatry before she retired from the VCU Health System.

Melicient defined health as a state of complete physical, social, and financial well-being. Health equity is achieved when health, wellness, and well-being are accessible and attainable for all. She introduced PATHS – a program **P**rioritizing **A**ctive **T**ransportation, **H**ealth, and **S**afety. PATHS seeks to enhance multi-sector collaboration to further develop active community environments, walkability and active transportation to advance health equity and create a healthier Virginia.

The [Virginia Walkability Action Institute](#) (VWAI) is a statewide initiative by the Virginia Department of Health (VDH), in partnership with the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention (CDC) and Equitable Cities LLC (consultant), to enhance walking and walkability across the Commonwealth by providing training and technical assistance to state and municipal staff in multidisciplinary fields such as health, transportation, planning, parks and recreation, and public works departments. She encouraged STAC members to apply for this training and provided a list of opportunities for those who want to support PATH.

- Fund and support joint initiatives including walking, physical activity, social connectedness, and mental health programs
- Collaborate on webinars
- Include health, equity, and inclusive language and goals in trail plans/planning processes
- Include more public health professionals on boards and committees
- Join as a PATHS member or a VWAI team member.
- Contact Melicient.miller@vdh.virginia.gov

Mona Burwell discussed her partnership with DCR to develop an app promoting arthritis friendly parks and trails for walking in Virginia. This partnership began in 2020 with a walking initiative for state employees. As partners discussed the lack of information on trails, the idea developed for mapping trails and paths that meet certain criteria for people with arthritis and other chronic conditions.

To build the database, Jennifer reached out to parks and recreation directors, the Virginia Trails Alliance and VDOT bike-ped coordinators. The link to a Google Sheet with only nine fields was circulated among these partners to populate the pertinent data. Mona provide the criteria for Walk with Ease (disability parking available, safe, lighting, surface is firm stable slip resistant, grade is mostly level, access to restroom, accessible by transit if possible, walking aids can be used, etc.)

The information received was used to develop an [app](#) that is hosted on DCR's website. Attributes show details of locations, but we hope to include images in the update. Currently images are only available for the rail trails featured on the app. If you know about additional trails that would be candidates for the Walk with Ease program, please contact [Jennifer](#). And please share this resource.

Asha Solanky described the difference between mental health and mental illness, and said that access to the outdoors/greenspace can support mental health. Simple things, like sleeping well and eating well, can make a huge difference—and physical activity helps. We have outdoor

recreation resources, and we have people who need these resources--our task is to find ways to connect these. As an example, Asha described how her neighbors join her for a walk once a day, which contributes to their mental health.

[Cat Anthony](#), president of the Virginia Trails Alliance (VTA), provided an update on this statewide trail advocacy group's efforts. The VTA has been around for 3 years, and arose out of a realization that STAC could not provide the advocacy arm that was needed for trails. The group's big focus has been the state budget and advocating for trail funding. Meetings are mostly virtual, but a VTA Google Group provides almost daily updates on resources and funding announcements. There is still a need for a central office for trails, trail information, and funding. Cat said that most of the current budget's trail funding will come through VDOT and she stressed the importance of getting to know your [Commonwealth Transportation Board](#) member. As part of the [Cap2Cap](#) event on May 7th, legislators will visit Dorey Park in Henrico around 1 p.m. Cat invited STAC members to engage their legislators there. She also encouraged attendees to reach out to her if they would like to be added to the VTA Google Group.

Jimmie Carter provided information on the [TriWay](#) trail in Lancaster and Northumberland County. He said that retirees are moving into the area and young people are moving out due to a lack of jobs. The TriWay Trail will help improve the economics for the community by creating a tourism opportunity that will attract young people from urban areas on the weekends. This will act as a gateway by attracting young people first to the trail, then to the community—and eventually as future residents. The Northern Neck is one area of the state that is deficient in trail mileage, particularly lacking in multiuse trail opportunities.

DCR Grant Update and 2023 VOP

Kristal McKelvey provided an update on DCR's active grant round, the [Recreational Trails Program](#), currently accepting grants until May 26th. Motorized, non-motorized single use, and diverse use trails are eligible under this program. Although the Land and Water Conservation Fund grant round closed recently, DCR typically holds a grant round each year. The Virginia Land Conservation Foundation 2022 grant round will be announced after the General Assembly budget is finalized. The contact is [Suzan Bulbukaya](#).

Work is underway for the 2023 Virginia Outdoors Plan update. There were a series of regional meetings last fall, and a contract with VCU for the Virginia Outdoors Demand Survey is final. Coordination with partners who will be helping develop the content is underway.

Jennifer asked STAC for feedback on three items in the VOP Trails Chapter, the State Trails Map, the State Connecting Trails Map and the Trails Chapter Recommendations. The 2018 VOP recommendations (at least those specific to DCR) were provided in a handout, and STAC members were asked to rank them to help DCR prioritize future work. They were also asked to include any new recommendations. The compiled results of the filled in handouts are attached.

Attendees circulated between other stations before they left for lunch. The comments on the two maps and suggested topics for our next meeting follow.

State Trails Map

- Consider regional networks over cross state trails. More likely to be completed, more impact on state residents
- Is the Upper James included in the James River Heritage Trail (for example, Jackson River Scenic Trail is not on the map)
- Three Notched Trail (Richmond/Charlottesville/Staunton)
- Tuscarora Trail (connects Mathews Arm, Shenandoah National Park, Great Eastern Trail and the Appalachian Trail north of Harrisburg, PA)

Connecting Trails Map

- Change name of 7d to Shenandoah Rail Trail
- Change name of 10b to Rivanna River Greenway/Old Mills Trail
- Change name of 10e to Northtown Trail
- Add Greensprings Interpretive Trail
- Add Powhatan Creek Trail
- Add Beaverdam Trail (8 miles in Loudoun)
- Add Rockfish Gateway Trail (Waynesboro to Shenandoah National Park)

Suggested Topics for Next Meeting

- Understanding the Commonwealth Transportation Board (planned for this meeting)
- Statewide Road Crossing Safety Initiative
- Economic Development- Cisco presence in Raleigh Triangle, NC
- Chesapeake National Recreation Area