

Minutes:

**Historic Falls of the James Scenic River Advisory Committee
Zoom
Richmond VA**

Meeting: March 17, 2022

Greg Velzy: Chair – Presiding

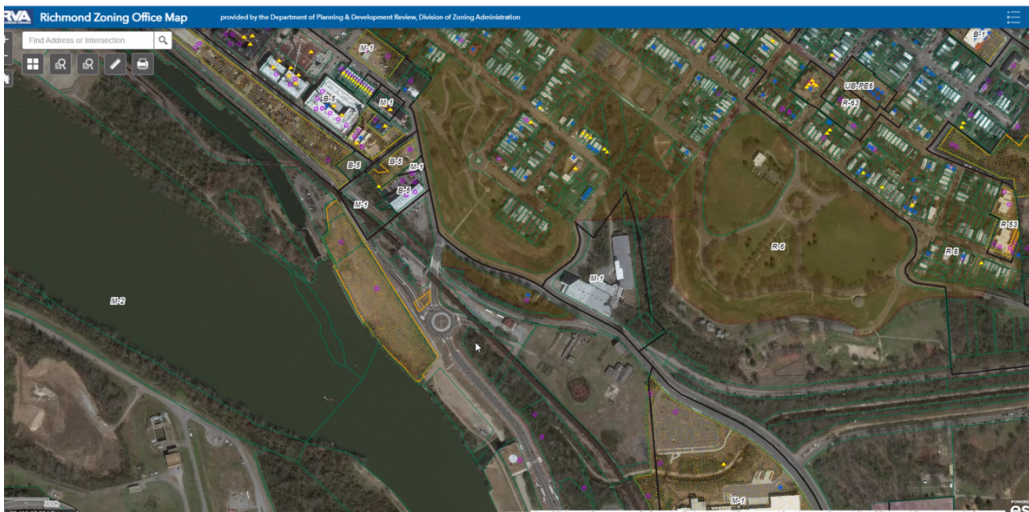
Call to Order: 12:06 PM

Attending Committee Members: Ralph Hambrick, Leighton Powell, Justin Doyle, Anne Wright, Greg Velzy, Tricia Pearsall, Jim Hill. Community attending: Kevin Vonck(Director, Department of Planning and Development Review, City of Richmond), Shawna Shade(Office Administrator, Friends of the James River Park), James Vonesh, PhD(VCU Center for Environmental Studies and Director, [River Studies and Leadership Certificate](#) program), Samantha Wangsgard, (Environmental Manager II, Planning & Recreation, Virginia Department of Conservation and Recreation), Jenn Clarke (Public Education and Outreach Coordinator, City of Richmond).

Minutes: Minutes of January 20, 2021. Motion to approve-Ralph Hambrick, Second-Leighton Powell. Approved.

Current Issues:

- **Riverfront Development Plan** (and other James River related) updates: Kevin Vonck, (Director, Department of Planning and Community Review, City of Richmond.)
 - Kevin applauded the hybrid zoom/in person meetings for their ability to reach more participants and indicated that the 5th floor conference room will have technology to make this happen and this practice will be the new norm. At present it's undergoing repair for a leak. (we will have our April 2022 meeting there if repairs are completed).
 - **2022 Funding for Riverfront Projects:** No new funding for Capital Improvements for Riverfront Projects for the next budget year. For Capital Projects as a whole, this will be a transitional year. He would like to see
 - Better discussions of what's being proposed and how it dovetails with Richmond 300 Plan
 - See that the Planning Commission have a role in preparing the CIP
 - Focus on a practical list of projects such that there is no design without proper funding, and that funding needs to include all aspects.
 - Look at the current development and the possibility of projects with public/private involvement which can be less expensive and provide more timely completion
 - Need to focus on realistically what can be nest in the pipeline.
 - Greg Velzy asked about the development in Manchester curtailing access to the River. It seems that the challenges concerning transportation, improvements were not thought out fully. Kevin indicated that the extension of Decatur Street depends on the development of the Silos. Greg also asked where the Greenway along the Manchester Canal (which Mark Olinger said would be developed with the building of the Hydro block) stood. Kevin said he would look into this and bring DPW into the conversation to answer questions about this, traffic, parking and what's happening at Diversity Park. (The Falls Committee would like to do an onsite meeting at the Diversity park area with Kevin in the next month to observe what's happening there and seek solutions to public access).
 - **Missing Link:** PDR is working to bring the Missing Link design conception to the Urban Design Committee (UDC) sometime this spring.
 - **Libby Hill Viewshed Update:** Kevin indicated that he and Planning Department were working to tie this project into the Richmond 300 Plan and to see how to best prioritize the concept in order to insure the results. There may be legal and practical issues. They don't want to set up a designation only to have it meaningless if countermanded by City Council or in a court. Leighton asked about the rumor of the size and scope being downsized. Kevin showed a screenshot of the affected parcels downstream from Libby Hill:



He indicated that the focus of regulations would be on only a handful of parcels and that perhaps regulations could affect those parcels. He stated that the cone is set and hasn't been changed, but that there may be other ways to insure height restrictions or other regulations on parcels within that cone. Do we enforce per parcel or by overlay? Kevin indicated that the new FEMA floodplain maps may be very helpful in curbing certain development in this area. Restrictions could come in the form of a new zoning district or regulating each parcel's height instead of a height overlay. He is looking at other examples to see how this was accomplished (airport, Albemarle County, etc.) Property rights superseded by intrinsic vista and cultural values. Leighton stated that this effort had been a 20-year fight to preserve this viewshed and inquired about zones or designations regarding the Pulse Corridor and the Shockoe Small Area Plan.

- **CRLC-** Parker Agelasto not present:
- **Virginia Scenic Rivers:**
 - **Introduction of Samantha Wangsgard:** Samantha is the new Environmental Planner with DCR and as such will be supervising the Virginia Scenic Rivers Program. She was able to join the conversation briefly and stated that she was new to Richmond and was from Fairfax, VA. She promised to get back to us at a later date when she has settled in. She indicated she would be seeking information from James Vonesh's program and Lynn Crump on how to grow the Scenic Rivers Program.(We need to get Samantha and Kevin on a raft trip).
 - To date there are three new Scenic River designations which passed the General Assembly. Also **note** the status of DWR to **NOT** charge ramp fees on ramps it manages but does not own. Thanks to Jennifer Wampler, DCR, for providing this list:
 - [HB28](#), [SB292](#), Scenic river designation; Maury River. Extends the portion of the Maury River previously designated as a state scenic river by an additional 23.2 miles. Status: HB28 passed 87-12 and Senate 36-3. Status: SB 292 passed Senate 37-3 and passed House 84-15. Both bills to the Governor for his signature.
 - [HB49](#), James State Scenic River. Designates an additional 44-mile portion of the James River running through Nelson, Appomattox, and Cumberland Counties as a component of the Virginia Scenic Rivers System. Status: Passed 85-13 with amendments and passed Senate 36-2.
 - [HB463](#), [SB141](#), Department of Wildlife Resources; boat ramp fees. Removes authorization to charge a fee for the use of facilities that DWR manages but does not own. Status: HB463: Passed 92-7 and passed Senate 39-0. Status: SB141 Passed Senate 40-0 and passed House 97-2. Both bills to the Governor for his signature.
 - [HB1223](#), Scenic river designation; North Fork of the Shenandoah River. Designates an 8.8-mile portion of the North Fork of the Shenandoah River as the North Fork of the Shenandoah State Scenic River. Status: Passed 85-14 and passed Senate 35-3. To the Governor for his signature.
- **JRA:** Justin Doyle had to leave to return to planting trees at Richmond public libraries, but sent this update: "JRA closed on the .85-acre Dock Street property this week! We are working on finalizing the site plan, design if the

building and initiating the permitting process. Please contact if you have any questions. Will provide a more thorough update next month.”

- **James River Park update:** No representatives present, but Greg Velzy and Shawna Shade provided some update
 - Huguenot Flatwater: Moving at snail’s pace but hopefully will be completed soon. Shamar Young, Deputy Director of Parks Recreation & Community Facilities at City of Richmond, Virginia is the supervisor.
 - JRP Programs and Trail Update: Penelope Davenport is back from maternity leave. Programs are ongoing.
 - Invasive Plant Week: very successful culminating in festivities at Legends with goats and information tables.
 - The 30 million (COVID funds) appropriated for park and recreation improvements did not make it out of committee – Virginia General Assembly.
 - Buttermilk West acquisition grant: Greg sent letter on Falls Committee behalf in support of this effort.
- **DPU updates:** Jenn Clarke:
 - Regarding Senate Bill 354: DPU is grateful to all NGOs, local official and other support for defeating this impossible requirement without funding. In particular in appreciate to Senator Jennifer McClellan. Still looking to fund at 1.3 billion starting now and that doesn’t include materials costs. DPU has not heard of any funding efforts from the Federal or State governments.
 - Citizen Plan involvement should be kicked off in April.
 - Stream Restoration: Reedy Creek and Rattlesnake Creek stream restoration efforts are off the table due to citizen protest. Pine Camp should be the next stream restoration and hope it can be a successful model for the City. Haven’t had a stream restoration since 2017 of which Gambles Mill is the best example. Also working on Maury stream.
 - Asked about efforts in the JRP Wetlands, Jenn said she would try to get an update and report back.
 - Working with JRA to plant trees at Broad Rock Library to support Green Infrastructure.
 - DPW is currently working on the Gillies Creek Greenway.
 - RVA-H2O update: the next RVAH2O Stakeholder Meeting on Tuesday, March 29th from 1:00 pm to 3:00 pm. All Committee members are welcome to attend. Our agenda will include updates on both the [Interim Plan](#) and Final Plan for Richmond’s Combined Sewer System.
 - Jenn was asked about the situation with the Manchester canal and Walker Creek. She said she would monitor.
 - Also, she was asked about the property underneath the I-95 Bridge, who monitors, owns, can a kayak boat ramp be fashioned? She will find answers for next meeting.
- **BridgePark Proposal Restructure:** Jim Hill. New Chairman of the Board of the BridgePark Foundation-James Warren: <http://m.richmondfreepress.com/news/2022/jan/20/personality-james-w-warren/>. They have extensive engagement going forward to find their focus. Finalizing schedule of action.
- **Friends of James River Park:** Shawna Shade:
 - We were recently awarded a grant to construct an outdoor classroom at Reedy Creek, next to HQ’s. Implementation will be Saturday, March 19th working with JROC and other volunteers.
 - Wood River Run will be held April 16 on River Road to benefit Friends of the James River Park
 - Also, Legends has a new pilsner – Raging James to benefit Friends’ efforts.

New Business: None

Reports:

JRAC: none

JROC: Producing bilingual signs and pamphlets for James River safety and JRP water access compliments of a Virginia Outdoors Foundation grant.

Open discussion:

- There was discussion about the impact of removing preservation planning from the City Planning Department and placing it under Economic Development and what this might mean for development along the river as well as impact other areas such as the Shockoe area.
- Leighton also brought up the difficulties in designating Scenic Rivers in this year's General Assemble and how we need to monitor designated areas as most legislators don't see the importance of the designation in Virginia.

Adjourn: 2:00pm

Next Public Meeting: April 21, 2022

Meetings begin at 12:00 noon in the Conference Room on the 5th floor of Richmond City Hall and conducted via Zoom. 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