



## Purchase of Development Rights

### VCC Works to Bring Easement Purchase Options to the Valley

Many people in the Valley may have land but are not in a position to take advantage of the tax benefits associated with donating a conservation easement. For these folks, arranging for the purchase of their development rights—essentially buying the easement from a landowner—may better suit their needs.

#### **PDRs Need Your Support**

PDRs require two elements: farmers who are interested in having their development rights purchased and funding to make the purchases. Farmers and VCC are natural allies on PDRs. Elected officials also need to hear from supportive citizens.

**Farmers: get on the list.** VCC is keeping a database of interested farmers to contact when application time comes and money is available. Farmers are not committing to anything by being on the list. Strong interest will help win funding.

**Citizens: encourage your county to adopt a PDR program.** Farmers in localities with PDR programs are in a better position to take advantage of funding if it becomes available. Let your board of supervisors know you support PDRs.

These programs are just taking root in this area and they hold great promise to conserve thousands of acres of working lands. Nearby Clarke and Albemarle counties have had purchase of development rights programs (PDRs) for years and the idea is spreading fast. The Valley Conservation Council (VCC) is involved in many efforts to give landowners PDR options.

The obvious question: who's buying? Funding PDRs is a major hurdle. With partners throughout the region VCC is concentrating on efforts to leverage federal funds with matching dollars from local and regional sources. A VCC proposal to fund PDRs is part of the initial work program for the newly formed Shenandoah Rural Conservation and Development Council (see p.3).

VCC also continues to encourage county governments to implement local PDR programs. Currently, Rockbridge County has adopted a PDR ordinance (although it is not funded or fully implemented) and Rockingham County is considering one. VCC staff presented information on PDRs to Frederick County supervisors and planning commissioners recently, as that county wrestles with how to keep its rural areas viable. The Augusta County Farm Bureau has asked Augusta County to look into a PDR program. The idea is gaining momentum.

In addition to seeking funding, VCC is recruiting farmers who might be interested in participating in a PDR program (call 886-3541). VCC can assist farmers

**See PDRs p. 3**

### Two New Easements Recorded

Two new conservation easements were completed recently. In Warren County, Martha T. Irvin placed an easement on another property, her third in a cluster of family lands. This 58-acre parcel near Ninevah, which has a dwelling and farm buildings, consists of pasture and forest and is surrounded by other working farms. She and her brother Bill Trenary have placed easements on more than 1,000 acres of land. This easement is co-held by the Virginia Outdoors Foundation (VOF) and VCC.

In Rockbridge County, John L. Morgan has placed an easement on 279 acres near Brownsburg. About a third is deciduous forest, while the remainder is open pasture. The property is visible from throughout the Dutch Hollow area and lies near Jump Mountain where there are a number of other easements. The property has an existing dwelling and two secondary dwellings. The easement allows only one additional new dwelling and one division. Morgan is a long-time VCC member. His easement is held by VOF.



*Morgan Farm in Rockbridge County*

# Citizen Groups, VCC Help Frederick County on Rural Options

Fast-growing Frederick County is undertaking a serious review of its “Rural Areas” land use policies in anticipation of its Comprehensive Plan update. Farms and natural areas are disappearing as nearly a third of new development is settling outside designated growth areas. In a series of community input sessions, some citizens have asked for greater conservation efforts. To get more information on the options, VCC staff and representatives from the Virginia Outdoors Foundation and the Potomac Conservancy were asked to talk to a joint work session of the Board of Supervisors and the Planning Commission about conservation tools. VCC public policy director Kathy Holm spoke on the process and value of purchase of development (PDR) programs.

One local group providing positive focus is the Community Coalition Consensus (CCC). CCC works through its 15 membership organizations, one of which is VCC. “Our strength,” says co-chair Diane Kearns

(who also serves on the VCC board of directors), “is that we have members, such as builders, developers, landowners and environmentalists, who, while coming from different perspectives, have developed trust in each other.” She describes the group as working along the same lines as VCC’s Community Partnerships. “Once we reach consensus on what the most important issues are, we attempt to educate ourselves and the public, come to agreement on what should be done, and then communicate this to the local governments.” This apolitical, results-oriented method is working. The CCC was asked to provide input on the Rural Areas issue and is helping with public education on growth issues. They recently co-sponsored citizen planning workshops along with the Virginia Citizens Planning Association and plan to sponsor educational forums on conservation easements. VCC salutes and supports committed and effective local groups like this.

## New Members

### Augusta County/Staunton/ Waynesboro

Robert & Jocelyn Audet  
Asher Brand & Charles  
Lunsford\*

J. Haskins Coleman, III  
Joseph Dockery  
Mrs. Ann Eckman  
Arthur & Christine  
Fioramonti

Dale & Beverly Hungerford  
Katherine Morgan  
Doug & Sally Wiggs  
Lee Womack  
Dwight & Mary Wood

### Botetourt County

Altec Industries, Inc.  
Mr. & Mrs. Thomas Richmond  
Maxine Rogers\*

### Rockbridge County/Buena Vista/Lexington

Frank McCutchan, Jr.

Charles & Sharon Peebles\*  
Olivia Reed  
Jerry & Lynn Williamson

### Rockingham County/ Harrisonburg

Mary K. Handley  
Mark & Wendy Hochstedler  
Steven & Anne Sisson  
Derek & Pauline Tidman\*

### Shenandoah County

Joan Comanor

### From Afar

Robin & Charlotte Boylan  
John & Elizabeth Coleman  
Kent Holliday  
Nelson Hoy & Elizabeth Biggs  
John & Margaret Miller  
Mr. & Mrs. James Phelan  
Mr. & Mrs. C.K. Whitescarver

*\*honorary member  
(donated an easement)*

## Time for Annual ‘Renewal’

With the arrival of spring, my garden is vibrant with color and new growth. I am pleased to say that my perennials — both herbs and flowers — survived the dampness of last summer and are now, happily, renewing for this year. They are pushing their way through Rockbridge County’s rocky soil, sending out new shoots and spreading throughout my garden.

Coincidentally, it is also time for VCC’s “perennials” to renew. You will find an envelope in this newsletter and may have recently received a renewal letter in the mail. We depend on your perennial support through your membership contribution each year.

More than half of our annual budget comes from the contributions of our members. That means that without you we could not do our work. VCC has worked for over 14 years to protect the land in the Shenandoah Valley region. We use many of our resources to educate landowners about the options for private, voluntary land protection. Along with landowners, we work with local government, with legal and real estate professionals, with developers and builders, with scientists and resource managers, and with the citizen volunteers and students who constitute our membership. Building partnerships makes the highest and best use of our resources.

The message is simple: The region’s vital land resources and rural character are seriously threatened. As a VCC member, you truly can do something about it. Renew your membership and invite others to join with you. Perennial support for VCC’s ongoing work protects our Valley’s past and assures the future.

Together, we can make a fine garden.

*Melanie Griffis Tillison  
Director of Development*

***Many thanks to those who have already  
renewed their VCC membership.***

## VCC Receives Grants

VCC is grateful to these organizations for recent grants to support specific programs:

- **Virginia Environmental Endowment** for conservation education focused in Botetourt and Alleghany counties
- **Oak Hill Fund** supporting VCC attendance at the national “River Rally”
- **Shenandoah Basin Project** to create and offer presentations on the *State of the Valley* and *Better Models for Development* throughout the Shenandoah watershed.
- **Beirne Carter Foundation** supporting direct payment for the purchase of development rights for land conservation

## Kathy Holm Leaves VCC, Still Rooted in Valley

It was with great mixed emotions that I resigned from the Valley Conservation Council this spring. I have enjoyed working with the people committed to VCC, to land protection, and to local conservation policies across the Valley over the past 5 ½ years. The good part is that I am not going far and my new work will enhance the work of VCC and build on the Community Partnership work I have been doing.



In my new position as the first Shenandoah Resource Conservation and Development (RC&D) coordinator, I will be working out of the Verona office of the Natural Resource Conservation Service (NRCS). My job will be to work with interested individuals and community groups on five key areas important to the Shenandoah RC&D

Council area. They are 1) land protection, 2) water quality and quantity issues, 3) nutrient management, 4) education, and 5) rural economic vitality. The Shenandoah RC&D Council area comprises Augusta, Rockingham, Page, Warren, Frederick, Clarke, and Shenandoah counties.

The purpose of the RC&D Program is to promote conservation, development, and natural resource use; to improve the general level of economic activity; and to enhance the environment and standard of living in all communities. I look forward to bringing together people with shared ideals surrounding these aims.

VCC is a contributing member of the RC&D Council, with Executive Director John Eckman as a voting member and Council participant. One of my initial tasks will be to try to implement a Council-approved proposal, put forward by VCC, to obtain matching funds for the Federal Farm and Ranchland Protection Program and the Forest Legacy Program. These matching funds will go to VCC for the express purpose of purchasing development rights on farm and forestland in the RC&D area.

I truly believe in the mission of the Valley Conservation Council, and I truly believe in the mission of the newly formed RC&D Council. In my years at VCC, I was fortunate to have worked with a great variety of committed, idealistic people who care about their communities and about preserving the character of those communities that make them unique in the world.

As I leave VCC, I am struck again by how important this work is and how important this one organization is to achieving these aims. Please continue to support VCC through your time, your membership, and your giving. And please don't consider this goodbye, consider it a new opportunity to contribute to the aim of enhancing the Valley we all care about so much. I look forward to continuing to work with you and VCC in the future.

*Kathy Holm*

## Poultry Co-op Forming; May Save Farms

Poultry farming in the central valley was jolted by the announcement by Pilgrims Pride of the possible closing of its Hinton (formerly Wampler) turkey processing plant in Rockingham County. The impact would be felt by 1,300 employees, a substantial number of contract growers, and the broader agricultural community. The plant is scheduled to close in October 2004 unless a buyer is found.

Poultry is the top-valued product in the region, providing a means of support for many farming families. It also is the top employer in the Rockingham-Harrisonburg area. Growers have made over \$50 million in capital investments in their turkey houses. At press time, a cooperative of growers is formed and may purchase the plant.

## Congratulations, Rockingham

Rockingham County passed its revised comprehensive plan on April 28. VCC was involved with local partners to offer language and advice to the planning process.

## PDRs (continued)

interested in selling their development rights. Working through a federal program, VCC helped facilitate a May application for the purchase of a conservation easement on a Rockbridge County parcel (see below).

PDRs make sense for farmers and for communities, emphasizes VCC Executive Director John Eckman. "Waiting for easement donors to step forward will not be enough to get the job done, not when you couple the population growth we're seeing with the kind of blows farming is taking. It's more important than ever to add PDRs to the list of conservation tools available."

### First PDR Application Sent for Valley Farm

In May, an application for the purchase of a conservation easement on a Rockbridge County parcel was sent to the Federal Farm and Ranchland Protection Program (FRPP). This program requires farmers to apply with another entity such as a land trust or a county that has a structure to purchase easements. This application was a collaborative effort. The farmer was able to apply through Rockbridge County because it has a PDR ordinance. The county's PDR (REAP) committee wrote the proposal. The Rockbridge Area Conservation Council (RACC) and VCC raised the required 50% match money, along with a donation from the local soil and water conservation district. RACC found an anonymous donor and VCC applied successfully for a grant from the Beirne Carter Foundation. FRPP staff will decide this summer which proposals to fund from throughout the state.



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CONSERVATION  
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## Let's Talk: VCC Presents...

Think what a difference it might make for the Valley region if more people understood growth and conservation issues more fully and really knew what their options were. Fortunately, VCC has greatly expanded its ability to deliver programs to elevate the debate. A grant from Shenandoah Basin Initiative is supporting staff time to develop and deliver educational programs tailored to the needs and interests of civic groups, local governments, and the public at large.

Programs on the **State of the Valley** (what's going on in your locality and the region) and **Better Models for Development** (illustrations of how to build better) are ready to go, and can be tailored by topic and locality. Sara Hollberg, who helped produce the books, will be doing many of these presentations. VCC also continues to offer workshops on **Conservation Tools**.

VCC Executive Director John Eckman explains, "Our goal is to get as many people as possible thinking about how growth issues can affect their quality of life. These programs have been well received because they are as relevant to public officials as they are to the general public. People appreciate the information and the graphics help communicate it".

VCC has made presentations to groups like Rotary, Farm Bureau boards, business associations, and builders associations, with more programs lined up over the coming months. **To request a VCC program, call 540/886-3541 or [vcc@valleyconservation.org](mailto:vcc@valleyconservation.org).**

Save the Date!

**VCC Annual Meeting**  
**September 10 at Wade's Mill**

## Budget Boosts Conservation

The hard-fought biennial budget for Virginia includes stepped up conservation funding after several years of minimal allocations. The legislature provided \$15 million (\$7.5 million per year) for nonpoint source water quality improvements. A minimum of two-thirds of this amount will be for agricultural cost-share practices (essential to Chesapeake Bay clean up efforts); \$5 million (\$2.5 million a year) is designated for land conservation and protection. Twenty-five percent of the latter will be directed to the Virginia Outdoors Foundation's Preservation Trust Fund, which can be used to help defray landowner easement costs and to purchase easements. The remainder will be distributed to the Virginia Land Conservation Fund. Qualifying applicants include state agencies, local governments, and non-profit organizations. These funds can also be used to match federal funds such as the FRPP.

These state allocations provide critical leverage for federal funds and landowner contributions. A report last year found that Virginia ranked 50th in the nation in spending for natural resources and parks.

## Annual VCC Membership Due

Please use the enclosed envelope to renew your VCC membership. Your support matters!

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