



As Land Trust, VCC Makes Perpetual Commitment

As the number of conservation easements recorded in the region continues to expand greatly, so does the ongoing responsibility of the holders of these easements. The easement holder is the body that ensures that the terms of the easement are followed year after year and owner after owner. The Virginia Outdoors Foundation (VOF) holds the vast majority of easements in the state. VCC, as a bona fide land trust, is a co-holder on a number of easements, some with VOF and some with local soil and water conservation districts (SWCDs).

This makes working with landowners in the stewardship of their eased properties an expanding part of VCC's activities. In 2005, VCC accepted the perpetual responsibility to co-hold nine more easements with VOF, protecting 954 acres in Shenandoah, Augusta, Rockbridge, and Warren counties. VCC ended the year sharing direct and ongoing responsibility for monitoring the stewardship of 4,290 acres of land. So far in 2006, VCC already has an additional 2,092 acres of new easement co-holds either approved or being considered by our board of directors.

On most of these co-held easements, the easement process was aided by funds from Virginia's Preservation

See **VCC Makes Perpetual**, p. 7

Landowners Save Thousands of Acres

Landowners in the region placed an unprecedented number of conservation easements with the Virginia Outdoors Foundation (VOF) in 2005. A total of 49 easements, spanning more than 6,800 acres, were recorded. The last quarter alone brought in 38. These easements are held by VOF, with some co-held by Valley Conservation Council or the local soil and water conservation district. Other land trusts protected still more acreage.

Particularly noteworthy in this batch are the addition of another large easement in Alleghany County, which has not traditionally had much easement activity. Rockbridge continues to lead in the number of easements. Shenandoah County gained a good number, including some by longtime residents and farmers. Landowners in Bath County also were active, protecting parcels of notable size and habitat.

The conserved properties were spread throughout 10 counties in the region. For the year, there were 17 easements in Rockbridge County, 10 in Augusta County, and 7 in Shenandoah County. Many of these new easements are listed on page 7.

Easements Come in All Shapes and Sizes



Wilson farm, 603 acres in the Alleghany highlands



French farm, 58 acres on the river in Shenandoah County



Waldon property, 141 acres on a mountain stream in Warren County

Engineers Show Readiness for Low Impact Development

Nearly 65 people attended the workshop “Low Impact Development for Engineers” in November. The group, mostly engineers, was a mixture of local staff and private sector. The main speaker, Richard Street, shared his extensive experience and interest in site designs that help

mimic natural water flow. His wealth of resources and practical tips were appreciated by a group obviously ready to put these principles into place.

Brian Henshaw of the Northern Shenandoah Valley Regional Commission and consulting engineer C.J. Mitchem presented a soon-to-be-released manual on just how to do that in our region. VCC then facilitated an input session. It became clear that LID is quite possible technically throughout the region, but that ordinance and review issues can be complex.

The workshop was part of VCC’s Shenandoah Land Use Network (SLUN) initiative. These ‘planning exchanges’ provide focused education among planners and related professionals on topics that can improve the quality of growth management in the region. The LID workshop was funded in part by the Shenandoah Basin Project.



Presenters at the LID workshop (from left) Richard Street, John Eckman, Brian Henshaw, and Sara Hollberg.

To find out more, go to the LID section of VCC’s website: www.valleyconservation.org/LID.html.

What is LID?

Low impact development (LID) means developing a site in ways that reduce stormwater runoff. Measures range from limiting the amount of impervious area (such as pavement or rooftops), to installing rain gardens to soak up excess flow, to combining these with structures. LID design principles emphasize many small controls and working with each particular site. In contrast, standard development aims at controlling the runoff, often channeling it off site. This increases flooding problems and is a major source of nonpoint source water pollution. LID could be a tremendous help to water quality as development ramps up throughout the region.



This rain garden absorbs and filters the runoff from the adjoining parking lot.

Stay Alert on I-81: It’s Comment Time on Impact Report

The Virginia Department of Transportation (VDOT)’s draft environmental impact statement (DEIS) is up for citizen comment in April. The document contemplates alternatives for widening Interstate 81 the length of Virginia, including adding eight or more lanes in places (for a total of 12) at a cost that could reach \$16.4 billion

In November, the VCC Board of Directors passed the Reasonable Solutions resolution calling for key improvements to the highway focused on safety and efficiency while having the least possible impact on cultural and natural resources. The same resolution has been endorsed by many Valley localities and groups.

VDOT has set public hearings for April. These hearings and the DEIS comment period provide citizens an opportunity to be heard regarding a plan for what potentially could be the most expensive construction project in the state’s, and perhaps the nation’s, history.

Official information, including the DEIS and instruc-

I-81 Hearings (5 - 8 p.m.)

Mon., April 17: Natural Bridge Hotel

Tues., April 18: Winchester Travel Lodge

Wed., April 19: Turner Ashby High School

Comments due April 29, 2006.

Comments can be sent from the I-81.org website or in writing. Citizens also can write to Governor Kaine, Officer of the Governor, Patrick Henry Building, 3rd Floor, 1111 East Broad Street, Richmond, Virginia 23219.

tions on sending in comments, is at www.I-81.org. For analysis of these proposals, concerned citizens might find the site www.shenandoahvalleynetwork.org helpful.

VCC Names Better Models Winners, Takes to the Road

In Lexington on March 21, the Valley Conservation Council (VCC) honored outstanding construction projects in the region, naming the winners of this year's Better Models for Development awards. The change of location enabled VCC and host Lexington to offer a tour of the many Better Models award winning sites in Lexington.

Better Models awards show that new development can contribute to community character and protect environmental and historic features while adding economic vitality. In particular, building more livable, attractive communities encourages people to live in or close to town and city centers. VCC sees this as a sensible development pattern that, when combined with strong rural protection policies, can accommodate population growth yet leave significant farming and rural areas intact. This is the sixth year that VCC has made such awards, which take their criteria from VCC's publication *Better Models for Development in the Shenandoah Valley*.

Excellence in Design for Urban Infill

Amherst Street-Meadow Branch Ave. Plan *City of Winchester*

Brought about as part city plan and part developer proffer, this mixed-use project will develop a key portion of the City of Winchester. It envisions a walkable community, a focal point and gathering place in the western end of the city. Carefully designed for both function and aesthetics, the project will combine commercial, mixed use, and residential development along a newly constructed boulevard.

A CVS Pharmacy is customized for the site, with a pitched metal roof, architectural features and materials that reflect local tradition, reduced sign size, minimized front parking, extensive landscaping, and pedestrian access. Quality public infrastructure is the core of the project. A new boulevard will connect major roads and build the first portion of the city's planned Green Circle bikeway and trail. A strong citizen participation process enabled developers to understand and mitigate many of the neighbors' concerns and to design the site plan to be compatible with adjacent uses, including historic Glen Burnie. The award honored Winchester planning officials and the property owners and developers. Accepting for the Smith family, Thomas Lawson noted that the project design fit with the family's intentions and found support in the city's ordinance and policies.

Outstanding Urban Park

Liberty Park

City of Harrisonburg

Liberty Park, a small but essential urban park, stakes out open space in the center of downtown Harrisonburg. As part of the city's greenway master plan for Blacks Run, Liberty Park is the gateway to this linear park and the first of a string of proposed parks and nodes that use the stream as physical and visual connections and aim at restoring some natural habitat within the city. Built on a



Among the features of an infill project in Winchester are a mixed-use core and a new urban parkway that will incorporate a bike and pedestrian trail.



Liberty Park adds green space to downtown Harrisonburg.

former gravel parking lot, Liberty Park brings a much improved, more stream friendly environment.

The design uses the local bluestone featured in many of Harrisonburg's venerable old buildings. The park should prove a popular outdoor recreation spot that helps build a livable downtown. For example, its raised gardening beds will provide gardening opportunities for the elderly and handicapped residents of nearby apartments. A rain garden assists in the removal of pollutants from stormwater before it enters Blacks Run and the riparian buffer has been restored along 175 feet of the stream.

The project was coordinated and implemented by a local nonprofit group, Friends of Blacks Run Greenway (FBRG), which raised funds and brought in a wide array of volunteers, donors, and contributing organizations. Ownership and maintenance will be shared between the city and the Harrisonburg Redevelopment and Housing Authority. FBRG's Todd Hedinger, in accepting the

award, expressed gratitude for the many people involved and the enthusiasm with which the community has embraced the park.

Outstanding Urban Residential Design
Old Y Lofts
City of Staunton

This striking five-story Italian Renaissance Revival building was constructed in 1914 as a YMCA and public library. The Old Y Lofts project transformed a vacant



landmark building in the center of downtown Staunton into 18 residential condominiums. Brisk sales show a strong demand for downtown living. Units range from 750 square feet to 3,000

square feet with each having a unique floor plan. The addition of distinctive residential units in the city core further boosts the round-the-clock vitality of this vibrant downtown. Residents can live, work, shop, dine, and enjoy entertainment in close walking distance. The developer was Miller and Associates (partners Robin Miller and Dan Gecker of Richmond. Frazier Associates of Staunton served as architects.

Old Y project manager Jerry Austin accepted the award, calling himself “a born again developer” who in his past life had developed farmland but now was finding that “there are many more challenges to creating infill and renovating a historic building, but it’s much more rewarding.” He was struck by how the better development principles espoused by VCC fit his company’s vision.

Outstanding Public Reuse of a Historic Building
Hardesty-Higgins House
City of Harrisonburg

With this project, Harrisonburg sets a high standard for public buildings. The Hardesty-Higgins House, the city’s second oldest building (1849) and one of its most important historically, had been abandoned and neglected for decades.



The Hardesty-Higgins House has been reborn.



Old Y Lofts in Staunton fill a niche for downtown living.

In 2003, the City of Harrisonburg, led by the Department of Economic Development, purchased the property, which sits right on Main Street. The city renovated the building with care not only to preserve its historic features but to showcase them to the community and visitors. The Hardesty-Higgins House is home to the Valley Turnpike Museum and the Harrisonburg Visitors Center and is a stop on the Virginia Civil War Trail. A number of city offices are in the building and the rear addition holds Mrs. Hardesty’s Tea Room, a small restaurant that has thrived on a stream of downtown workers, visitors, and JMU students. Brian Shull, Harrisonburg’s Director of Economic Development, was enthusiastic about the results of preserving the landmark building. “Our community has really taken hold of it and visitors really love it. Our visitor numbers have skyrocketed.”

Tour Highlights Better Models Sites in Lexington



Before the awards ceremony, planners and public officials and the general public were invited to see exemplary projects in Lexington. Above, Lexington Planning Director Bill Blatter describes the different measures taken in the Woods Creek watershed to protect stream health.

Town Planning Award for Growing In, Not Out **Town of Stephens City**

Stephens City's 2005 Comprehensive Plan and the location and composition of the Stephens Landing subdivision demonstrate the principle of extending villages and towns. The latter project adjoins the town core, adding a mixture of housing in a manner that reflects the historic streetscape and expands the road grid. In a redesign of a previously platted subdivision, the residences are sited compactly on part of the 43-acre site; 15 acres are left undeveloped except for a walk/bike trail and playground which will be constructed by the developers.

This design reflects the town's desire for mixed use and walkable designs. In fact, the town's plan features a 'traditional neighborhood development' district and includes a plan for an extensive network of pedestrian and bike ways.

Town officials worked with developer Long Companies of Middleburg on the Stephens Landing design. The town's comprehensive plan was produced by Sympoetica. Mayor Ray Ewing and Town Manager Mike Kehoe were pleased with the recognition. As Ewing said, "it's traditional, but it's new." Kehoe added, "The best compliment for Stephens Landing was from my wife. She doesn't usually like new development but when she saw these, she said 'that looks good.'"

Outstanding Riparian Protection & Trail Project **Woods Creek Stream Restoration and Watershed Protection**

Lexington and Rockbridge County

Woods Creek winds its way the length of Lexington, from its headwaters in the county through neighborhoods and two college campuses before emptying into the Maury River at Jordans Point. Concerned about the deteriorating environmental health of the stream, the City of Lexington set about finding ways to restore the streambanks and reduce stormwater pollution. What has resulted is a model for watershed protection. A comprehensive Woods Creek Watershed Improvement Plan was developed and the city and its partners have been able to win grants and implement much of the strategy.

Many projects have been completed: rain gardens, retrofitted parking lots, establishment of bioinfiltration areas, the addition of wetland plants to a dry stormwater management pond, and the stabilization of large swathes of streambank. Educational outreach has been a large part of the strategy. The program offers guidance to developers and riparian landowners on measures to improve stream health. Not only are descriptive signs posted at every project site, but the city's 4th grade curriculum includes a stream walk the length of the city. Annual Woods Creek Restoration Days have engaged hundreds of volunteers in the planting projects.

The City of Lexington has taken the lead role in accomplishing the tasks and applying successfully for grants. Rockbridge County and Washington and Lee



Old Stephens City



New Stephens City

University also have contributed funding and participated in the project. W&L in particular has maintained the creek as a centerpiece of its campus and has undertaken projects to restore its natural qualities.

Accepting the award were John Knapp, Mayor of Lexington, Sam Crickenberger, Rockbridge County Planning Director, and Joe Grasso of Washington and Lee University. They acknowledged there were many more people who have helped on the watershed-wide project, which Knapp called "a cooperative project — a piece of a grander plan."



Plantings now stabilize this side of the bank of Woods Creek near Waddell Elementary School.



Old Blends with New, Col Alto



Lexington Firehouse



**Sidewalks, Street Trees,
and Screened Parking**

Gold Standard Community Award
City of Lexington

For its outstanding commitment to better development, the City of Lexington was honored with the Gold Standard Community Award, the first time VCC has presented such an award. Lexington has won five Better Models awards, every one of them exhibiting the best of what development can be. The city consistently has integrated such quality of life goals as environmental protection, historic preservation, and compatibility with community character into the design of new development. In addition to Bill Blatter, the director of planning and development, city councilmen and planning commissioners won kudos for their commitment to this vision, as well as City Manager Jon Ellestad for marshaling the resources. The citizens of Lexington, and the countless visitors to the city, can be proud of this team and all they have accomplished.

The most distinctive aspect of Lexington's success is that it has set high standards for new projects throughout the City, not just in the historic areas. This approach has resulted in projects that interlock and support each other in their positive effects. The East Nelson Street corridor redesign leads right into the historic area, with Col Alto Hampton Inn at the gateway. The South Main Street project combines the benefits of establishing an attractive gateway and helping protect water quality. The firehouse is attractive architecturally and makes a fitting transition between residential and commercial; it also includes water protection features. The city's initiative to restore the health of Woods Creek has enlisted participation of all who have impact on the stream: the city, Rockbridge County, two colleges, adjoining property owners, and all citizens in the community.

Kathy Frazier, an architect with Frazier Associates, called Lexington "a shining example to the Valley and to the rest of the state" and shared her insight from decades of working with the city. "Lexington has always had this tradition of quality. There must be something in the air or the water here. Everyone in Lexington is very focussed and they have put their money where their mouth is." She particularly praised Blatter for his calm and "very under the radar" approach. She described how she'd be brought in to do some sketches and brainstorm and "the

Gold Standard Leadership Award
Bill Blatter

Bill Blatter, Lexington's director of planning and development, has been the driving force in achieving the high development standards achieved throughout the city. His vision was behind many of the initiatives that have garnered Better Models over the years and it was through his skill and persistence that they were implemented successfully. He also lives what he preaches. He won a Better Models award for his own conservation design subdivision in Rockbridge County.

Blatter said how grateful he is "to work in a place that has such a strong sense of who they are." "My mantra as a planner is that those places that recognize what makes them special will succeed and those that don't will become like everyone else."

Congratulations, Jackie

VCC staffer Jackie Errecart was married in January and is now Jackie Jamison. Congratulations!

New Members

Augusta County/Staunton/
Waynesboro

- Frank Calhoun
- David Copper
- Bill & Edie Eckman
- Joy & Greg Jackson
- Eric & Penny Shiflet
- Jill Stephens
- The Wilderness, LLC

Botetourt County
Dale & Gloria Carter

Rockbridge County/Buena
Vista/Lexington

- Patricia & R.E. Donald
- Glenn & Marjorie Rose

Rockingham County/
Harrisonburg

- Lorie Merrow &
Tom DuVal
- Carl Goetz

Shenandoah County
Stan Jorgenson
Carolyn & Larry Long
Mark Pierce &
Karen Ely-Pierce
Town of Mt Jackson

- From Afar
Matthew & Elizabeth
Morgan
Laura McMillan
Robert & Barbara Priddy
Alice Siegel
Mr. & Mrs. William Talbott

Membership Renewals Due in April

Siting of Wind Energy Facilities a Regional Concern

VCC is concerned about the potential for a fast boom in development of large-scale industrial wind power plants on ridge tops throughout western Virginia. Hundreds of towers, some approaching 450 feet tall, might be built over time, forever changing the mountain landscape.

In February, VCC sent a resolution to the State Corporation Commission requesting more thorough study of the issues

surrounding industrial wind energy projects before allowing such large-scale utility facilities to be built in Virginia. The resolution, passed by VCC's board of directors, requests that the Virginia General Assembly refrain from enacting any policies or incentives that encourage wind energy development until the Commonwealth has completed a comprehensive study of potential impacts.

VCC Makes Perpetual Commitment, cont'd from p.1

Trust Fund (PTF). PTF funds are used to support the "upfront" legal and appraisal costs of easements and in some instances may provide payment for a portion of the easement's value to the landowner. While the vast majority of land protection agreements rely on the donation of the entire easement value, in special cases, some families can qualify for partial cash payment. In this highly competitive process, both the land and the landowners must meet certain criteria, including demonstrating financial need. The state requires a co-holder on PTF-supported easements. VCC has stepped forward in this role, helping to ensure that all landowners, regardless of their financial situation, have the opportunity to protect their land.

Securing the conservation values that landowners have so generously supported is the centerpiece of VCC's growing legacy in the region. VCC must be prepared to help monitor and, if need be, defend these conserved lands forever.

Garden Tour Features Conserved Farms in Augusta

VCC is proud to join with the Augusta Garden Club to welcome hundreds of visitors from around the state to the Shenandoah Valley on April 29th. The historic working landscape of the Swoope area is featured this year, with tours of farms permanently protected by conservation easements. VCC volunteers will be assisting with the tour to help explain land protection options. VCC will host discussions about the value of conservation easements in preserving the integrity of Virginia's beautiful rural countryside at 9:30 a.m., 2:30 p.m. and 4 p.m., in the library of Hebron Church. For information, visit VCC's website, www.valleyconservation.org, or call the office.

Property Visits Ensure Strong Conservation

VCC's Jackie Jamison has been busy in recent months monitoring some of the 32 riparian easements that VCC co-holds with local Soil and Water Conservation Districts (SWCDs). Jackie and VCC Board member Bob Eggleston accompanied Sandy Greene of Headwaters SWCD and Pete Benedetto and Lauck Walton of Lord Fairfax SWCD on the field visits. The purpose of annual monitoring is to help landowners keep their river and streambanks healthy. These easements include provisions aimed at protecting riparian corridors.

Recent Conservation Easements

Alleghany County

Bill & Lang Wilson, 603 a.

Augusta County

James & Carole Grove, 161 a.
Michael & Annette Hanna, 203 a.
Richard & Laurel Landes, 124 a.
Martin & Linda Lightsey, 70 a.
Melyni Worth, 37 a.
Paul J. and Elizabeth Wright, 107 a.

Bath County

Brent & Blake Brandon, 276 a.
Bert Carlson & Marian Quinlan, 72 a.
Earl & Betty Haddix, 127 a.

Botetourt County

John W. Rader, Sr., 227 a.

Highland County

Thomas & Martha Byerly, 124 a.

Rockbridge County

Thomas & Janet Beebe, 135 a.
Donald W. Firebaugh, 63 a.

Michael & Denise Lennon, 55 a.
Samuel McLaughlin, 115 a.
Rodger & Susan Rinehart, 38 a.
Glenn & Marjorie Rose, 230 a.
Anonymous, 113 a.
William & Virginia Ruddiman, 68 a.
John & Cherie Taylor, 110 a.
Betty C. Teague, 144 a.
Mary Warner, 68 a.

Rockingham County

William P. Boyer, Jr., 11 a.

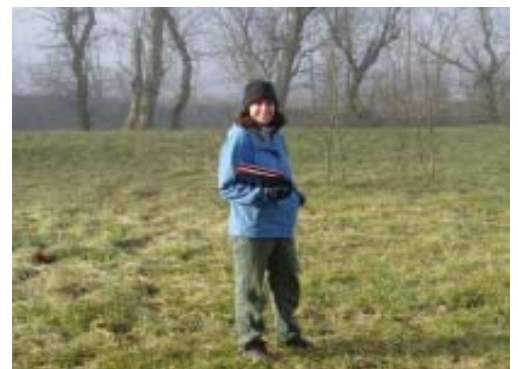
Shenandoah County

FDF Properties (French family), 58 a.
Frederick Hepner, 43 a.
Fred & Constance Hepner, 142 a.
Knipling LLC, 154 a.

Warren County

Myrle J. Waldon, 62 a.,
Weddle Trust, 141 a.

* Held by Virginia Outdoors Foundation and in some cases co-holders.



VCC's Jackie Jamison in the field checking on protected river lands.



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Deb Truban Is New Shenandoah County Steward

Deborah Truban has joined VCC's team as a "County Steward" helping landowners in Shenandoah County learn more about options for saving their family lands. Deb is a native of the Strasburg area and lives with her husband Peter and their children on a large farm north of Woodstock. Along with her passion for conserving the Valley's heritage, Deb also is an avid rider and is active in many local civic issues. If you know of landowners in Frederick or Shenandoah counties who might be interested in learning more about protecting their property, please call VCC and we will be glad to put them in touch with Deb.



Big Valley Bumper Sticker

valleyconservation.org

Free for the asking.

VCC Wants Tax Credit Reform That Helps Farmers

The General Assembly has been debating the program that gives easement donors a credit on their state taxes of up to 50% of the value of the easement donated. The program's popularity has the assembly concerned about its impact on the state budget. A few huge deals in expensive markets have accounted for much of the credits (e.g., 7% of the acreage, but 34% of the credits). The reform favored by VCC and many Valley legislators is to cap the amount for each project. Instead, what is being considered is a cap on the entire program. VCC opposes this, believing that it would force landowners to compete with savvy real estate interests and would mean fewer acres preserved.

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