

VMI Chessie Nature Trail Advisory Committee Meeting, November 11, 2014

The Chessie Nature Trail Advisory Committee met at 5:00 p.m. on November 11, 2014, at the VMI Physical Plant, Hinty Hall conference room.

Attending committee members were MAJ Jennifer deHart, chair; Keith Holland; Sam Crickenberger; Chris Wise; Lisa Tracy, and Terry Harrington. Absent was Jay Scudder.

Also attending were 13 members of the public at large.

GRANTS/PERMITS: MAJ deHart provided an update on progress on the Recreational Trails Program (RTP) grant. The grant application was submitted in October with receipt confirmed. A response is anticipated in 30-60 days. A proposal to demolish the VMI-owned warehouse on Old Buena Vista Rd was denied by the Department of Historic Resources pending more information about the history of the building. Sam Crickenberger offered to have County officials assist with deed and tax record research.

TRAIL UPDATES:

- Keith Holland reported that one of his gates was torn off by vandals. A police report was made. Physical Plant assisted in repairing the gate.
- MAJ deHart reported that the Eagle Scout mile marker project is complete.
- MAJ deHart reported that two recycling/trash/pet waste bag stations are in place. She thanked the Master Naturalists for keeping the pet waste bag dispenser stocked with bags.
- MAJ deHart reported that she passed along the committee's recommendations to the BV Baptist church regarding geo-caching.
- MAJ deHart reminded the audience that there will be a 20 mile march on the trail on Sunday 23 November (NOTE: date has since been changed to Sunday 7 December).
- Terry Harrington reported that funding is still secure for the City's development of better pedestrian access at Jordan's Point.
- NOT REPORTED (follow up from previous meeting): there are now VDOT pedestrian warning signs prior to the South River bridge on both directions.

CANAL/LOCK MAINTENANCE: MAJ deHart provided an update on canal lock maintenance. The VA Canals Society recommends annual trimming and spraying. Chris Wise is concerned about killing roots that might be holding the dry-set stones in place. Keith Holland is concerned about spraying so close to water. MAJ deHart will follow up with VACS for more details. Lisa Tracy offered to contact an arborist who could help Physical Plant with a maintenance strategy.

GATES: MAJ deHart reminded the audience that the Trimble gate can be opened by lifting the chain over the post. Each gate seems to have a unique access method, and a goal of the grant-funded improvements is to provide consistency. MAJ deHart reported that Clifford Kiracofe sent her photos of gates that are successful in England where trails pass through sheep and cattle farms. Keith Holland pointed out that maintenance will be the most significant issue with new gates especially self-closing mechanisms.

FRIENDS GROUP: MAJ deHart reported that she attended the second meeting of the Friends of the Chessie Trail group in October and encouraged the group's support in areas of education, trail monitoring, and species-specific plant management. MAJ deHart also reported that Clifford Kiracofe, a member of the group, presented the concept of an on-line interactive map; MAJ deHart will present the concept to the VMI Civil Engineering department as a possible student project.

Lisa Tracy provided further update on the Friends of the Chessie Trail. The first two meetings (June and October) were well attended by over 30 people; a third meeting is scheduled for December 2, during which they group will review by-laws. Three sub committees have been formed.

EASEMENTS: MAJ deHart reminded the group that a handful of properties in the "industrial zone" are privately owned with no provisions for the trail. Sam Crickenberger offered to assist in approaching the land owners to negotiate for recreational easements.

NEXT MEETING/HOMEWORK: MAJ deHart noted that the next committee meeting is 10 February at 4:00pm. She suggested that as "homework," the advisors consider what they might like to see in a Trail Maintenance Plan, which will be required as part of VMI's receipt of RTP funds.

The business portion of the meeting adjourned at 5:35pm.

PUBLIC COMMENT/Q&A

- Each community member introduced her or himself.
- A community member asked whether any of the plants around the locks have historical significance, e.g., were planted by the lock keepers.
- Mr. Faulkner asked whether the Mill Creek and McKethan gates can be left open permanently.