



## South Hill Town Council

### Special Meeting Minutes

#### Public Hearing – Blueway Trails Project

**Tuesday, August 19, 2008 at 7:00 p.m.**

Tuesday, August 19, 2008, the Town of South Hill held a public hearing to hear comments on the proposed Blueway Trail-Southern Virginia Region project from the general public. South Hill's participation will include the construction of canoe/kayak put-in/take-out ramps and supporting facilities at Whittles Mill and the former Town landfill along Highway 138.

#### **Roll Call**

Mayor Horne called the meeting to order and asked Gladys Jenerette (substituting for Anna Cratch) to call the roll.

#### **Council Members in attendance:**

Chad J. Barbour	Lillie Feggins-Boone	Millie Bracey
William R. Gregory	Gregg Harper	J. Woodrow Kidd
Mike Moody	Leroy Sasser	

#### **Staff in attendance:**

Kim Callis, Town Manager  
Gladys Jenerette (in the absence of Anna Cratch)

#### **Guests in attendance:**

Sandra Tanner, Tourism Development Specialist, Virginia Tourism Corporation  
Steve Kesler, DGIF

Town Manager, Kim Callis, was then asked by Mayor Horne to inform those attending of the purpose of the meeting.

Mr. Callis informed the gathering that the Town of South Hill advertised in the South Hill Enterprise on August 10<sup>th</sup> and the August 13<sup>th</sup> for a Public Hearing for August 19, 2008 for the purpose of hearing public comments on the proposed regional Blueway Trail Project along the Meherrin River.

The Town's participation will include constructing canoe/kayak put-in/take-out ramps and supporting facilities at Whittles Mill and the former Town landfill along Highway 138.

Mr. Callis then opened the Public Hearing for comments regarding same.

Sandra Tanner, Tourism Development Specialist for the Virginia Tourism Corporation, thanked the Mayor and Town Council for having her back to give the presentation at the Public Hearing.

The Town of South Hill met with the Department of Game and Inland Fisheries (DGIF). Steve Kesler, representing the DGIF, came to investigate the possibility of constructing put-in/take-out ramps on the Meherrin River on property that is owned by the Town and also property that is owned by the state.

Ms. Tanner said that there was helpful discussion after which Mayor Horne contacted her to see what tourism could do to help this effort and work with them. A round-table discussion ensued on June 29, 2007. People from all over Southern Virginia were invited. This discussion revealed that there was a lot of interest in developing a Blueway and canoe trail for the Southern Region. This group started looking at what type of canoe trails were there and what were the other things that were going on. Ms. Tanner stated that what she does with the Department of Tourism is to work with communities who want to develop projects.

Ms. Tanner stated that she made a field trip to Halifax, North Carolina (Roanoke Rapids area) and met with Christina Gordon. Ms. Gordon is the Eco and Heritage Tourism Director for that county. She is involved with a group called Roanoke River Partners. This group has been in existence for over 10 years and has done much of what we would like to do in the Southern Region.

Ms. Tanner said that they met with Ms. Gordon and the Roanoke River Partners to talk with them to find out first-hand what they had done. They offered to mentor us since they have a very successful program. This group has received several grants through congress and is already established in their region.

Ms. Tanner stated that the group started planning how this was to be phased and what would be included in each phase. They want to make sure that everyone is happy with this project.

Ms. Tanner stated the partners involved as follows:

- Brunswick County                      Virginia Tourism Corporation
- Halifax County                         Virginia Dept. of Game & Inland Fisheries
- Greensville County                    Virginia Dept. of Conservation & Recreation
- Lunenburg County                     Southside Planning District Commission
- Mecklenburg County                    Dan River Basin Association
- City of Emporia                         City of Danville
- Town of South Hill                     Town of Halifax
- Town of Lawrenceville                Roanoke River Partners, Inc.

The trail system, as we know it, is going to be a braided system of water trails and multi-use trails that will enhance the eco-enthusiasts' experience when they come into this state and those who live here.

There is also a multi-use trail that is being developed now in Southern Virginia called the Heritage Trail. The Meherrin River crosses this Heritage Trail in Brunswick County. There is an opportunity for a put-in/take-out ramp along that trail.

The more people who come to use these facilities and stay in our area, the more our economy will be boosted.

For tourism, the goal is to get more people to come and to stay longer and spend more money in our area. Also, the better facilities, the more will come and the longer they will stay.

The project goal is to create the canoe and paddle trail with some camping along the way to increase awareness of the river and to provide managed access points.

Ms. Tanner stated that the creation of the trails and managed access points is the most important. There are many people now who canoe on the rivers. Without the put-in/take-out ramps, these people are actually trespassing. With the managed access points, this problem of trespassing would be eliminated since these points would be on town or state owned property.

There are people who own land who may be willing to give easements for these put-in/take-out ramps. Roanoke Rivers Partners has been doing this and we will be working with people who own property who may well give easements for these ramps and possibly overnight camping.

Ms. Tanner pointed out that 98% of the businesses in Virginia are small businesses. Virginia Tourism wants to bring people into this area that would help sustain these small businesses.

The many benefits of the Blueway Trail include providing the following:

- managed put-in/take-out ramps
- social and recreational benefits
- community awareness of the river resources
- environmental quality
- contributions to the quality of life aspects
- health benefits
- direct contributor to the local economy through the tax revenues
- job creation retention
- small business development

Ms. Tanner says that whatever she does in her job, whatever is created, it is good for the citizens of the community. Plus, she added that the rivers will be cleaner when citizens have access to them because they will clean up the area that others have left unclean.

Ms. Tanner said that this project will help every person in this community. Tourism is big business. 55 million people come to Virginia annually to travel and spend money. They spend \$17.7 billion when they come into the state. It employs 208,000 people. There are \$2 billion in state and local taxes derived and \$4 billion in payroll taxes.

Ms. Tanner pointed out in her presentation that the Southern region was always mentioned as the Central region without any mention of the Southern region and its trails or towns or the things that were offered in the travel guides or on the website except a small listing. This group contacted Virginia Tourism and went to the local county or city legislators and said they wanted to pull away from the Central region and create a new region. The Southern Region was created. It goes from the City of Martinsville/Henry County all the way to Greensville/Emporia. It also includes Lunenburg and Charlotte Counties. These are the rivers this canoe trail will be in.

The economic impact of travel and tourism to this area includes \$382 million spent in the **Southern Virginia Region**. This region employs 4,837 people. This greatly benefits all the citizens of this area. State tax receipts totaled \$62 million and the local tax receipts totaled \$10 million.

**Mecklenburg County** is a huge player in tourism. The economic impact is \$98 million. The people coming into this area spend this much in hotels, shopping, restaurants, gas and canoe rentals. It employs over 1200 people. The state tax receipts equal \$48 million. The local tax receipts are \$3 million. These are the 2006 figures. Ms. Tanner feels that 2007 figures are higher.

Ms. Tanner asked what would happen if tourism went away. How would the businesses make up these funds and the jobs of these 1200 people?

Ms. Tanner said that projects like this will add to the funds. We can have more people coming in, we are cleaning up the area, and we are doing something great for our citizens. When more people come in having more things to do, they will stay longer and spend more money. The ripple effect will benefit the county by having more jobs and more tax money coming in.

## **Phase I**

- Construction of put-in ramps at proposed sites on the Meherrin River.
- Come up with model

In this phase, it was decided that the first construction ramps would be on the Meherrin River site since the Town of South Hill owns this property. The proposed sites are there at Whittles Mill.

## **Phase II**

- Develop Trail plan/map
- Construct put-in/take-out ramps at more sites as identified in the plan
- Construct parking
- Construct overnight camping shelters-key sites
- Construct park

## **Phase III**

- Develop overall Blueway/Canoe plan for Southern Region
- Develop marketing materials for Southern Region Blueway/Canoe Trails

Ms. Tanner stated that some of the proposed ramps are at Whittles Mill, at the number one site at the landfill/Brownfield project and then again at number one in Brunswick County and in Emporia. Fort Christanna in Brunswick County has been looked at and also a couple of places where VDOT will be constructing new bridges.

Ms. Tanner showed examples of what one of the overnight shelters looked like in North Carolina pointing out how it was built in different phases. Maps would be developed as well as identifying distances between the put-in/take-out ramps. The development of a web site and brochures to locate the different sites where the groups could look up on the web page will be looked into down the road. This is where the managed system comes in.

Ms. Tanner informed the group that anyone could go on the Roanoke River Partners web site at [roanokeriverpartners.com](http://roanokeriverpartners.com) and see all the things they have to offer.

The timeline for development is as follows:

August 11, 2008 – Ms. Tanner addressed the Mecklenburg County Board of Supervisors with the plan to update them.

August 11, 2008 – in the evening she addressed the South Hill Town Council with the same information.

August 19, 2008 – public hearing in the council chambers in the South Hill Municipal Building.

September 2, 2008 – Ms. Tanner will address the Emporia City Council. She stated that they were very excited about this endeavor.

Fall of 2008 – Phase I construction will be started.

Early 2009 – sites for Phase II will be identified and map the trail. Identifying the sites will come from a combination of sources 1) working with the public 2) people who own property, if they would like to grant easements or whatever 3) working with the state owned/county owned properties and work through this process.

Applying for funding for the Phase II project

Continue to identify new sites and add to the trails

The funding sources identified are an Outdoor Recreation Grant through the DCR, Tobacco Commission Grant, Foundation grants, private funding sources, local fundraising and when we get to the marketing, Virginia Tourism has a market leverage program for which we will apply.

Ms. Tanner stated that we need the commitment from the areas; we need the public input, the community planning, cooperation and communication. She said she was excited about this and that it is a good project because it puts us on property that is owned by the state and the towns and gives us the manner that will make everybody happy.

The cost estimate for the ramps was placed at \$5,000.00. This is what the Roanoke River Partners spent. In the latter phases, the last campsites, which were bigger and prices had risen, were around \$8,000.

Ms. Tanner introduced Steve Kesler, with DGIF, and asked if the public had any questions for him.

Mayor Horne thanked Ms. Tanner for her presentation and proceeded to open the public hearing. He asked the individuals who wished to speak to introduce themselves.

Public Hearing:

Cecil Hodges, 3035 Union Mill Road, rose to speak. His property and home runs approximately 500 yards from the road back to the old landfill and approximately 250 yards across the backside.

He stated the lack of water for kayaks was a concern. He definitely **OPPOSED** overnight camping. He said overnight camping creates problems like fire. Noise is created also.

Gary Creamer, boys scout troop (local 7400) leader and scoutmaster for 7 years, has taken troops on several canoe trips down the James River and Nottoway River. He said canoeing is the number one item on their list to do. It gives them a sense of adventure. It gives kids and parents a great bonding experience on the river. It is a good, clean sport. He said it would be nice to have a spot to be able to get out of the canoes and not be trespassing on someone else's property. He was enthusiastically in **FAVOR** of this project.

Mayor Horne asked Steve Kesler to address the group with the history of problems or positive things he has encountered within the state he has dealt with in his capacity with the state.

Mr. Kesler stated that he is with the Department of Game and Inland Fisheries. This agency does not deal with campgrounds, canoes or kayaks. He said people do camp along the river sources. His department has 215 public boat landings in the state. His department does not allow camping within 100 yards of the boat ramp. They have regulations stating if persons are not boating or fishing, they are trespassing and are subject to a ticket. Mr. Kesler stated that when he started with this agency 20 years ago, trash was a big problem. They have gotten the

litter problem under control now. The other big problem was trespassing. He stated that the five men who work under his supervision are required to have a resolution from the jurisdiction stating that they will pick up the trash and cut the grass. Some canoe outfitters give the canoeists plastic bags to pick up trash from the river. Some even have contests when they have groups of people on the river, giving a free trip to whomever has the most trash picked up from the river at the end of their boat trip. Mr. Kesler said that contrary to public thinking, the more people on the river, the cleaner the river remains.

Mr. Kesler said his agency's funds come from state (fishing licenses and boat registrations) and federal grants. The language in these grants state that funds provided are to be used for the sole purpose of providing opportunities for fishing and boating. They jeopardize their funding if they use the facilities for any other purpose. In order to do this, they must post their regulation signs at boat ramps.

Ron Griggs addressed the council stating that he was a troop leader and his experience with the scouts has shown him that you don't have disregard for people's property with these groups like you do with public campgrounds. He is in **FAVOR** of these projects.

Max Crowder informed the group of his 50 years of experience canoeing on many rivers and it is his experience that he had never known a canoeist who did not bring out more trash that he brought in. He guaranteed the group that any canoeist who navigated these rivers would be the same way. He is very much in **FAVOR** of this wonderful project.

Ann Tanner addressed the group stating that she feels much like Gary Creamer. Her husband and she are paddlers. They take a lot of kids paddling. They also take a lady who is 73 years of age who has two knee replacements. She said the most dangerous part of paddling the Meherrin is getting in and out of the river. It is either poison ivy, rocks or mudslides that bothers them. If they had a good way to get in and out of the river, they would feel comfortable taking more people. Ms. Tanner stated that she knows the Roanoke River Partners people and Phil Patrick, who paddles the Cashire River, has called her numerous times wanting to bring groups of 30, 40 or 50 people up here to paddle the Meherrin. After she tells him that there is no put-in/take-out access ramp, they do not want to come since they are used to having this access available. She is definitely in **FAVOR** of this project saying it would be great for so many people including school groups and scouts. The kids love it.

Kim Callis, Town Manager, asked if anyone else wished to speak.

There being no additional speaker, Mayor Horne adjourned the meeting at 7:45 p.m. thanking everyone for coming.

Respectfully submitted by Gladys Jenerette (in the absence of Anna Cratch, Town Clerk).

Signed:

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Earl O. Horne, Mayor

Attest:

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Anna B. Cratch, Town Clerk