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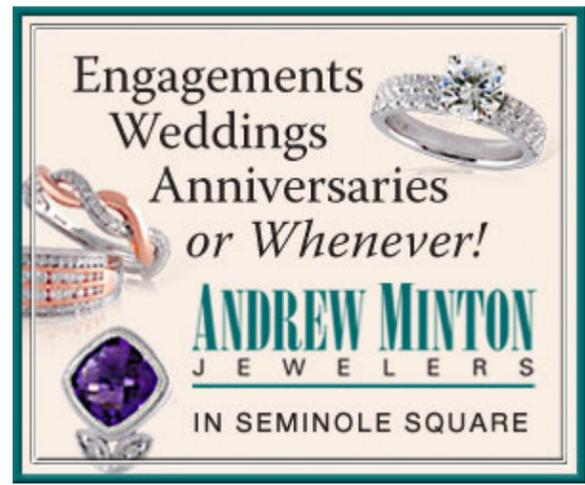
CHARLOTTESVILLE TOMORROW

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A River Runs to It

River commission restructuring as funding dries up

by Sean Tubbs | Wednesday, April 10, 2013 at 10:59 p.m.

A regional government agency that advises area localities on policies to improve the health of the Rivanna River watershed is drastically cutting back its operations because it is running out of funding.

"I am developing a staffing plan and timeline that describes how a limited number of Rivanna River Basin Commission core functions can be maintained until such time that funding can be identified to continue our work," said Leslie Middleton, the agency's executive director.

RRBC representatives declined to provide specifics on any personnel cuts and contingency plans. A balance sheet prepared for a meeting of RRBC's board on Monday showed that the organization is about \$5,000 short of meeting its budget for the fiscal year that ends June 30 unless more funding can be found.

The Rivanna River Basin Commission was formed in 2007 following a grant from The Nature Conservancy to help local governments create policies to improve the health of the Rivanna. There are currently three full-time employees including Middleton.

"The commission is the only entity that's based on the watershed scale," said Bill Kittrell, The Nature Conservancy's director of conservation programs. "Each locality is looking at things just within their jurisdictional boundaries but the RRBC looks at the whole watershed. That's a real strategic advantage and one of the reasons the RRBC was created."

"Grants for these activities have dried up since the completion of the [Chesapeake Bay] watershed implementation planning process," Middleton said.

The commission's Board of Directors includes elected officials from Albemarle, Greene, and Fluvanna counties, as well as the city of Charlottesville. However, none of the localities contribute any money to the RRBC's operations.

Some members of the RRBC Board of Directors have created a non-profit foundation to raise funds.

"If we're going to make this a viable commission and an ongoing force ... we are going to have to do whatever we can to work with our local communities to ensure we have [their] support," said Marvin Moss, a former Fluvanna County supervisor who is now chair of the commission.

The RRBC's executive committee held an emergency meeting in late March to discuss the funding crisis. One suggestion has been to seek funding opportunities with StreamWatch and the Rivanna Conservation Society.

"RRBC, StreamWatch, and RCS are launching discussions on how to collaborate and focus our energies," Middleton said.

Those two non-profits perform separate missions from the RRBC, which is a government entity created by the General Assembly.

Middleton said StreamWatch gathers data on water quality and does not promote or advocate policy. The RCS is an educational and outreach organization that seeks to build awareness of the river's health.

"We have received grants for all three organizations, most of which we have written, and in those applications we made clear what the division of labor is for each organization," Moss said.

Representatives of both organizations declined to comment for this story.

The RRBC has also requested \$25,000 in funding from the Rivanna Water and Sewer Authority for a variety of watershed planning projects.

Liz Palmer, a board member of the Albemarle County Service Authority, has called that request into



A view of the Rivanna River from Free Bridge

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The water and sewer authority will consider the funding request at its May meeting.

"We are working with RWSA and the members of its board so that they understand RRBC's downsizing is temporary, and the RWSA grant will be extremely helpful to the RRBC," Middleton said.

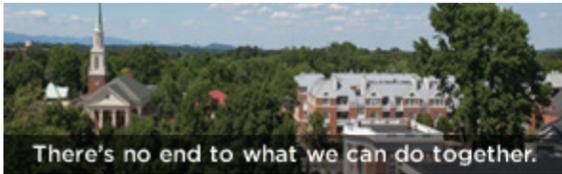
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