



August 14, 2012

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Charlottesville Planning Commission
Albemarle Planning Commission

Dear Ms. Keller and Mr. Morris,

We write to commend your decision to convene a joint session on September 18, 2012, to discuss ways to coordinate planning along the Rivanna River especially as it relates to the updates of your respective comprehensive plans. We would also like to offer our assistance and let you know about work that the Rivanna River Basin Commission has underway that could be helpful to your deliberations.

ALBEMARLE COUNTY
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Duane Snow
Liz Palmer

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The Rivanna River is a cultural and ecological asset that can serve to join the communities on both sides of the river. The river trail systems provide an opportunity for the public to actively experience and enjoy the riparian habitat along the river. With the removal of the dam at Woolen Mills, migratory fish and eels can transit up and down the river freely through the urban section of the waterway – and the river serves as recreation area for an increasing number of residents and visitors.

At the same time, it is important to understand that the health of the Rivanna is not good. The Virginia Department of Environmental Quality designates the Rivanna from the South Fork dam to below the confluence with Moores Creek as having impaired water quality. The river periodically contains high levels of bacteria that render it unsuitable for “primary recreational contact.” In addition, the river does not meet the aquatic life standard, which is measured by the presence of the aquatic macro-invertebrates that serve as an important link in the food chain for fish, amphibians, birds, and mammals. The sources of the bacteria include wastes from animal, human, and pets as direct deposit or run-off to the river. The aquatic impairment is due to excessive stormwater runoff that carries sediment and other pollutants as well as contributing to scouring of riverbanks.

We know that efforts are underway in both localities to address these problems for specific tributaries of the Rivanna, such as the Moores Creek Bacteria Implementation Project being coordinated by the RRBC with its partners (Charlottesville, Albemarle, University of Virginia, Thomas Jefferson SWCD, StreamWatch, and the TJPDC). The project to restore the form and function of Meadow Creek will also be a huge contribution to restoring the Rivanna. Both Charlottesville and Albemarle hold MS4 permits that regulate the discharge of stormwater into the Rivanna and its tributaries.

We would like to encourage and support additional efforts to reduce the excessive stormwater flows and bacteria and other pollutants from entering the river. Site development in the river corridor needs to respect the vital ecological function of the riparian buffer in stabilizing banks and absorbing flow and pollutants that would otherwise overwhelm the river. Restoration coupled with permanent protection on both sides could be a cost effective and revenue-generating strategy (i.e., maintain sufficiently high quality buffer so that it could be a generator of credits to offset development elsewhere). The river is like a report card of how we live on the land – and indeed, everything we do in the river’s watershed will affect not only the river but also its corridor.

EXECUTIVE DIRECTOR
Leslie Middleton

PROGRAM MANAGER
Jessica Lassetter

The Rivanna River Basin Commission is completing an assessment of the Rivanna watershed, the “Rivanna Snapshot.” This assessment will include evaluations of the measures of key indicators of aquatic health as well as indicators that suggest the degree of protection provided to the river and key landscapes in its watershed. The Rivanna Snapshot will be published in the late fall and is our initial step in developing a comprehensive watershed management plan for the Rivanna in 2013. We hope our efforts will help guide the communities of the Rivanna upstream in Greene County and downstream in Fluvanna County as well as Albemarle and Charlottesville.

We would be pleased to provide more information about these projects and look forward to providing input during your discussions about the Rivanna as it flows through Albemarle County and the City of Charlottesville.

Sincerely,

A handwritten signature in black ink that reads "Marvin Moss". The signature is written in a cursive, flowing style.

Marvin F. Moss, Chair
for the Rivanna River Basin Commission

Copy to:
Charlottesville City Council
Mr. Maurice Jones, Charlottesville City Manager
Mr. Jim Tolbert, Director, NDS, Charlottesville
Ms. Missy Creasy, Planning Manager, Charlottesville
Albemarle County Board of Supervisors
Mr. Thomas Foley, Albemarle County Executive
Mr. Mark Graham, Director, Albemarle Community Development
Ms. Elaine Echols, Principal Planner
Mr. Steve Williams, Executive Director, TJPDC
Ms. Summer Frederick, Project Manager, TJPDC
Ms. Kim Tanzer, Dean, UVa School of Architecture