

Meeting minutes from the Aug 11th, 2021 EDA meeting (to be approved at the September Meeting), Bath County Historical Society Building, Warm Springs, VA

Chair Joe Wood opened its regularly scheduled meeting inside the Bath County Historical Society Building Wednesday, Aug 11th, 2021 at 6:03 PM.

Members attending: B. McWilliams, J. Wood, P. Haynes, T. Richardson, S. Puller, & R. Garcia

Members absent: D. Hahn

Staff attending: EDA Attorney Chris Singleton and County Administrator A. Harrison

Guests: Mike Bollinger & Austin Hall (“The Recorder”); Michael Scales (Alleghany Highlands Trail Club)

Pledge of Allegiance: we recited the *Pledge of Allegiance*

Agenda – The agenda for the evening was approved (motion by R. Garcia, seconded P. Haynes, approved unanimously)

Public Comment/New Business: Mike Bollinger introduced Austin Hall as his replacement after his pending/upcoming retirement (exact date is TBD). Michael Scales was introduced by Tom Richardson and Michael gave the group a short summary of the trail-clearing activities that the Alleghany Highlands Trail Club (AHTC) has been involved with, and a glimpse of future plans. And although the club does a lot of work in neighboring Alleghany County, they also do a lot of work here in Bath County (in and near Douthat State Park, the Nature Conservancy atop of Warm Springs Mountain, and also in the Hidden Valley Recreation Area). A primary goal of the club is to create or clear large ‘loops’ of trails useful for mountain bike activities, and one ‘long range’ goal is to establish (or reclaim) trail segments in our area that connect to the “Great Eastern Trail” (‘GET’), a long haul trail that is similar in function to the better-known Appalachian Trail and starts in Alabama and ends in New York. This will take much time and money, of course, but Michael is working to piece together partners for these efforts, and wishes us to just be aware of these efforts for possible future funding activities, and how that benefits ‘tourism’. Michael will put together a packet of information for our perusal, before October 1, 2021.

Approval of Old Meeting Minutes: A motion was made to approve the minutes from the July, 2021 EDA meeting (motion made by B. McWilliams, 2nded by R. Garcia, passed unanimously).

Legal Council: Nothing new to report

Treasurer’s Report: one new invoice was submitted (as part of the treasurer’s report) from P&B Electrical/Plumbing Service for \$1,223.74 for repairs and improvements to the picnic shelter in the Industrial Park. A motion to accept the treasurer’s report and pay this bill was made by T. Richardson, 2nded by R. Garcia, passed unanimously). Current bank balance (before subtracting this new bill) is \$235,100 as of July 31, 2021.

Old Business:

Tourism Report: Ashton reported on the efforts to form a Tourism Steering Committee to help guide the county’s tourism efforts, including the hiring of a Tourism Director and to help guide the expenditures of the county’s ‘lodging & meals’ tax proceeds (Fund 15 & Fund 16 line items in the county budget). To date, a small committee has been formed with two (2) members from the

Homestead (Mark Spadoni & John Hess) and two (2) members of the lodging community (John & Kate Loeffler), but this committee will certainly grow to include many more members before the January 2022 target date.

Other miscellaneous 'tourism' topics that were discussed include: how can we get back to 2008 economic numbers??, what is the true impact of having many VRBO/short term vacation rentals on the long term housing rental market?? and a short discussion on whether (or not) Douthat State Park pays into the Lodging & Meals tax funds (as a 'state' park, they do not).

Also, Shawn Puller talked about the Entrepreneurial Arts Programs that are so active in other areas, and will send more information on this, as well as the Artesians Trail. No particular motions were proposed or passed; discussion only.

Other Old Business: a) Strategic Planning sessions are being planned for this fall with not just the Board of Supervisors, but also the Planning & Zoning Board (at September 15th meeting).

b) Given that 65% of the county's budget comes from Dominion Energy (thanks mostly to their pump storage facility on Back Creek), what is the county's 'diversification plan' to replace this funding as this asset is depreciated over time and there are less revenue \$\$\$ flowing in?? Is there hope that rising property taxes (from new residents building new properties and renovating old ones) will offset this?? New property assessments will be done in year 2022. Answer was unclear, or perhaps not even knowable at this point in time.

c) of great concern is the county's lack of reliable cell phone coverage and the access to high speed internet. As for high speed internet, BARC is reportedly going to offer this soon AND Ashton is submitting a grant request (in a joint request with Highland County) for high speed internet, as well. We know of no current efforts to improve cell phone service.

d) Shawn Puller suggested more 'cross pollination' between different county committees and service groups to improve information sharing. We have this in an informal manner (Puller & Richardson are on the Chamber of Commerce Board, Richardson is treasurer of *Preservation Bath*, etc), but perhaps this could be 'formalized' with a permanent standing members from other committees. No particular motion was made or passed; discussion only.

New Business:

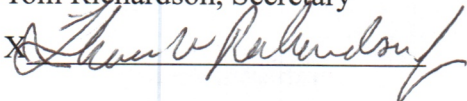
1) It was discovered that Speyside had been dumping bark on EDA land in the Industrial Park. A plan for disposal of these materials has been approved by the Va DEQ (Department of Environmental Quality).

2) Speyside will be offering a tour of their copper mill in SW Virginia sometime in late September. EDA members (as well as members of the general public) will be invited.

Next Meeting: September 15th, 2021; but instead of the regular Historical Society Building location (6:00pm) we shall meet at the Old Dairy Barn, and this is a joint meeting with the Zoning board. Unfortunately, **I'll be on a long scheduled trip that day and will need someone else to take notes for me please.** A motion to adjourn was made and approved unanimously (1st: P. Haynes, 2nd by B. McWilliams; unanimous) a little after 7:00pm.

Respectfully Submitted,

Tom Richardson, Secretary

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Joe Wood, Chairman

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