

MEMORANDUM

TO: Charlottesville City Council

FROM: Tatyanna Patten, Vice President
Rivanna Conservation Society (RCS)

DATE: September 17, 2007

RE: Water Resources Protection Program

On August 7, the directors and staff of the Rivanna Conservation Society were invited to review and comment upon the Water Resources Protection proposal, which you will be listening to later in this session. We think this proposal has merit and, therefore, it was our recommendation that this proposal go forth, because it seems to us that City staff has done all that can be accomplished without further official and public direction.

Council tasked staff with designing this proposal, so I do not think you need to be reminded of why a new program is needed. The Charlottesville public, I hope, is also aware of our aging, failing infrastructure. The number of complaints that the City receives during a major storm event should be an indication. In a drought time, however, it is difficult to remember what it is like to slog through our flooded city streets.

Essentially, both our streams and our pipes are eroding out from under us, threatening foundations and natural habitat alike. Thus far, what we have allocated to stormwater resources from the City budget only allows us to be reactive to the events as they occur, not proactive in replacing and repairing systems before they fail. The Route 29 sinkhole could just as easily have happened in the Downtown area. We need to establish funding and institute a new program before it does.

Public funding for any major program is controversial in a region that is reeling from rising tax assessments; this program will be no different. This proposal includes a reasonably fair, fee-based mechanism so that the water resources program can continue to be funded over time, without reference to the City budget. In many citizen involvement campaigns over the past 3 years—from the budget hearings to the comprehensive plan round tables—there has been a consensus among those who attended that stormwater issues need to be addressed and, further, that water quality and quantity are sufficiently important items for which those citizens would be willing to pay extra.

A fee-based proposal may raise eyebrows, but we at RCS believe it is time to find out if the citizens are willing to put their money where their mouths are. There are 4 options, of various dollar amounts, to choose from, and many ways to offset those expenses and/or reduce fees over the course of the program's implementation through incentivizing private owners' improvements to their own real estate. We do not endorse a specific option as yet. The funding mechanism and its possible variations should be discussed by all residents, not just staff and a few concerned groups, before the program takes effect. In the belief that such involvement can only improve an already good plan, RCS stands ready to assist the facilitation of the City's dialogue.