

Press Release to Charlottesville news media

April 26, 2011

Subject: Local groups emphasize importance of environmental protection and cooperation to region's future; urge more complete background information for Comprehensive Plan updates in Charlottesville and Albemarle

Seven environmental groups sent the attached letter today to local officials who are beginning the periodic updates of the long-range planning documents for the Charlottesville-Albemarle area. The groups are the League of Women Voters of Charlottesville and Albemarle County, Piedmont Group of the Sierra Club, the Nature Conservancy, the Southern Environmental Law Center, Advocates for a Sustainable Albemarle Population, the Rivanna Conservation Society, and the Piedmont Environmental Council. The letter represents a united stand on the importance of environmental goals in planning for a sustainable future for this community. It includes a pledge from the groups to be "closely involved in this process and make sure that the responsible protection of natural resources is a foundation of the City and County's updated comprehensive plans and the MPO's long-range transportation plan."

The letter's release coincides with the Open House to be held from 3:00pm to 7:00pm on Wednesday, April 28 at the County Office Building, to begin the public's participation in the process of updating the plans. The planning process is partially supported by a "Sustainable Communities Planning Grant" which was awarded to the Thomas Jefferson Planning District Commission. The letter applauds the goal stated in that grant's application, to "mov[e] sustainability from the realm of unrealized goals into actual implementation." It also praises increased collaboration between the two localities, as well as the University. "Pollution does not recognize jurisdictional borders; better communication and cooperation in joint efforts will be critical to achieving the environmental goals this community has continually reaffirmed."

Given that local citizens have repeatedly affirmed the critical importance of maintaining this region's natural resources, and given that those resources contribute to this area's excellent quality of life and long-term economic prosperity, the groups' letter expresses two goals. One is for a process of communication with and involvement of the environmental community during the rewrite. The other is for three specific types of background information, recognizing that "without knowing where we are, this community cannot begin to plan for where it wishes to go." That is, the public needs a reasonable idea of what is already in the "development pipeline" in the areas where growth is being channeled, as well as the potential for development outside of those areas.

Contact information:

Jeff Werner, Piedmont Environmental Council: 434-977-2033, ext 29.

Morgan Butler, Southern Environmental Law Center: 434-977-4090

Jack Marshall, Advocates for a Sustainable Albemarle Population: 434-974-6390

Tom Olivier, Piedmont Group of the Sierra Club: 434-831-2408

Tatyanna Patten, Rivanna Conservation Society: 434-806-4060

Bill Kittrell, The Nature Conservancy: 434-951-0562

Pat Hurst, president of the League of Women Voters of Charlottesville and Albemarle County, is out of town this week.

April 26, 2011

Chairwoman Ann Mallek
Albemarle County Board of Supervisors

Via Email

Mayor Dave Norris
City of Charlottesville

Stephen W. Williams
Thomas Jefferson Planning District Commission

Dear Chairwoman Mallek, Mayor Norris and Mr. Williams:

On behalf of seven different organizations working to preserve and protect natural resources in the Charlottesville-Albemarle area, we are writing to voice our strong interest in—and our high expectations for—the upcoming work that County, City and Thomas Jefferson Planning District Commission staff members will be doing to better integrate sustainability strategies into the major plans that chart this community's future.

Our community is blessed with a richness of natural resources and a unique scenic beauty that are inextricably connected with the Charlottesville-Albemarle area's continuing economic prosperity and renowned quality of life. Each of these cherished aspects depends on the others, and maintaining that inter-connectedness over the long term is the essence of sustainability.

In recognition of that vital connection, environmental stewardship is a key part of the long-term vision statements that both the City and County have adopted. The Charlottesville City Council's 2025 Vision foresees the City as a "leader in...environmental sustainability" and stresses the importance of "healthy rivers and streams" and "clean air and water." And Albemarle's vision statement declares that the County's "natural resources and natural beauty will be maintained."

Unfortunately, it is becoming increasingly clear that we must do more if we are to achieve those visions. The number of impaired waterways in our area continues to increase as stormwater runoff and other sources deliver sediment and other pollutants to local streams and rivers, many of which are sources of our drinking water. Similarly, local officials recently acknowledged that the air in our region may soon be found to fail a national standard for what is considered healthy to breathe. And we are seeing a continued loss of natural resources in the County's Rural Areas as farms and forested lands are subdivided for residential development.

If this community is to rise to meet these growing challenges, environmental protection must be even more of a focus in the City and County's updated comprehensive plans and the Metropolitan Planning Organization's long-range transportation plan. We applaud the TJPDC for being awarded the Sustainable Communities Planning Grant, and we are encouraged that

environmental sustainability will be one of the key focus areas of that work. As the narrative report for the grant recognizes, there is a need for this region to “mov[e] sustainability from the realm of unrealized goals into actual implementation.” Further, we are glad the grant work will emphasize improved collaboration between the two localities, as well as the University. Pollution does not recognize jurisdictional borders; better communication and cooperation in joint efforts will be critical to achieving the environmental goals this community has continually reaffirmed.

For all of the important considerations going into the upcoming planning work, our groups are concerned that a vital component of this process may be lacking. The grant narrative states that the planning work will identify population, employment and housing projections, as well as the anticipated area needed for non-residential land uses. However, that information cannot properly serve its purpose if the community does not first have a reasonable idea of what is already in the “development pipeline” in the areas where growth is being channeled, as well as the potential for development both inside and outside of those areas. We believe it is therefore critical that the earliest stages of the planning process make available to the public an assessment of the following:

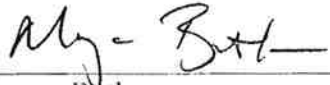
- (1) The amount of approved but unbuilt residential and commercial development in the City and the urbanized areas of the County;
- (2) The development potential of undeveloped and underdeveloped parcels within areas designated for more intensive development in the current comprehensive plans; and
- (3) The approximate residential build-out potential of the County’s Rural Areas.

This information will ensure that the public and public officials are adequately informed before important decisions are made that will shape the updated comprehensive plans and guide our community’s future. **Without knowing where we are, we cannot plan for where we want to go.**

In closing, we look forward to being closely involved in this process and making sure that the responsible protection of natural resources is a foundation of the City and County’s updated comprehensive plans and the MPO’s long-range transportation plan. As the work on these plans moves forward, we will be taking advantage of every opportunity to participate in and inform the process. At the same time, we respectfully request that you reach out to us, recognizing the important role our organizations play in ensuring a bright future for this community.

Thank you for your consideration.

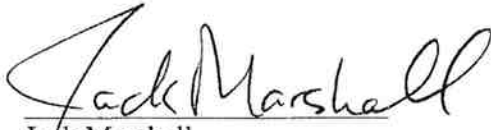
Sincerely,



Morgan Butler
Director, Charlottesville-Albemarle Project
Southern Environmental Law Center



Patricia W. Hurst
President
League of Women Voters of Charlottesville and Albemarle County



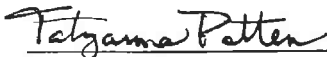
Jack Marshall
President
Advocates for a Sustainable Albemarle Population



Tom Olivier
Chairman
Piedmont Group of the Sierra Club



Jeff Werner
Land Use Officer
Piedmont Environmental Council



Tatyanna Patten
President, Board of Directors
Rivanna Conservation Society



Bill Kittrell
Virginia Director of Conservation Programs
The Nature Conservancy

cc: Albemarle County Board of Supervisors
Charlottesville City Council
Wayne Cilimberg, Director of Planning, Albemarle County
Missy Creasy, Planning Manager, City of Charlottesville