STAFFORD COUNTY WETLANDS BOARD

Meeting Minutes

Monday, January 30, 2023 at 6:00 p.m.
Board Chambers | George L. Gordon Government Center

A. Call to Order

The meeting was called to order at 6:00 p.m. by Chair Henderson

B. Roll Call

Members Present: Sue Henderson (Chair), Mary Rust (Vice-Chair), Anthony Pineau, Dan Adams, Robert Hayden, and Benjamin Rudasill

Members Absent:

Staff Present: Joe Fiorello, Emily Torrey, and Savannah Carabin

C. Determination of a Quorum

A quorum was established with 6 of the 6 members present.

D. Election of Officers

- Election of a Chairman

  Ms. Henderson called for the election of officers, starting with the nomination for the chair position. Ms. Rust nominated Ms. Henderson, which was seconded by Mr. Pineau. As there were no other nominations, Ms. Henderson was unanimously elected as the chair.

- Election of a Vice-Chairman

  Ms. Henderson called for nominations for the Vice Chair position. Mr. Pineau nominated Ms. Rust, and Mr. Hayden seconded the nomination. Ms. Henderson inquired if there were any additional nominations or discussions. Ms. Rust was elected as the Vice Chair unanimously.

E. Approval of Meeting Minutes from December 19th, 2022

Ms. Henderson asked if anyone had any discussions or comments regarding the minutes and mentioned that they were included in the meeting package. Ms. Rust volunteered to make a motion to approve the minutes, and Mr. Hayden seconded the motion. Ms. Henderson inquired if anyone had any comments. All attendees expressed their agreement, and the meeting minutes from Monday, December 19, were approved unanimously.

F. New Business

Ms. Henderson suggested discussing the website during the meeting, whether it is appropriate for the Wetlands Board or the Chesapeake Bay. Mr. Fiorello mentioned that they typically discuss only wetland issues but could discuss the website since they have 25 minutes. Ms. Henderson confirmed that they can talk about anything related to the website. She asked if anyone had new business, but there was none.

G. Old Business

Ms. Torrey mentioned that Ms. Carabin would control the website and asked if they wanted to look at the entire website or just the sections applicable to homeownership and watershed. Ms. Henderson suggested going to the Development Services page, specifically the Environmental Services section. Ms. Torrey suggested typing "wetlands" or asking the website's search tool, "AskBlue". They found the Wetlands page and the Wetlands Board page but couldn't find the waterfront property owners page. Mr. Pineau mentioned that the *Tips for Waterfront Property Owners* were under the stormwater management section and suggested including them on the *Wetlands and Chesapeake Bay Board* pages as well. Ms. Torrey explained that they had restructured the website and were in the process of updating several pages. They had added the *Shoreline Management* page and the *Tips for Waterfront Property Owners* page. Ms. Henderson expressed her hope that they would complete the updates soon, as it had been three years and counting. She asked to see the *Shoreline Management* and tips pages, and Ms. Torrey obliged. Ms. Henderson mentioned that the *Shoreline Management* page needed more visuals and suggested using existing state resources and graphics. She also discussed the importance of having definitions and a step-by-step guide on the website.

Ms. Rust mentioned the need for a map that would guide homeowners through the process based on their specific situations. Ms. Torrey explained that they had a map but needed to work with GIS to put it on the website. Ms. Rust agreed that the map would be helpful for homeowners to understand their responsibilities. Mr. Hayden requested to see the GIS page, and Ms. Torrey obliged.

Ms. Henderson expressed her satisfaction with the progress of the website but emphasized the need for promotion and making people aware of its existence. She suggested creating a video and including the website link, as well as engaging with real estate agents and providing brochures or rack cards with the information. Ms. Henderson also mentioned the availability of funds for wetlands education that could be tapped into. Mr. Fiorello stated that he was not aware of such funds but agreed to revisit the topic in the next meeting. The discussion concluded with the agreement that the website needed more visuals, definitions, and a user-friendly approach. They also acknowledged the importance of promoting the website and exploring funding opportunities for wetlands education.

Mr. Pineau expressed his concern over the issue of neighbors and friends notifying committee members about suspicious activities. He raised the question of whether it is appropriate to bring up these concerns in the board meetings or if they should be reported directly to the staff. He mentions instances where he has brought such concerns to the attention of county staff before discussing them in the meetings. However, he believes it is important to share this information with fellow board members, even if specific names and addresses are not disclosed.

Mr. Fiorello suggested that it would be better for the board members to report these complaints to the staff first, as the staff can determine if the issues fall under the board's jurisdiction. He explains that the staff will take appropriate actions based on their findings, even if the county does not have jurisdiction. Mr. Fiorello also mentions that they handle most complaints based on citizen reports, as it would be impractical for the staff to inspect all areas themselves.

Ms. Henderson suggested that board members can indicate if they have received any complaints since the last meeting during the Chairman's or Board report. This way, the complaints can be recorded on the formal record without disclosing specific details. She also proposed that the board should receive a report on the number of complaints and their resolutions to get a better understanding of the volume of concerns. She emphasizes the need for education and information dissemination to address the issue effectively.

Mr. Fiorello agreed with the idea of reporting complaints and their resolutions at the committee board meetings. He suggests that this information can help educate the board members and provide background for understanding why certain cases require a board hearing. He also clarified the process of handling complaints, stating that they assess if there is a violation and give the property owner an opportunity to mitigate the impact. If the property owner refuses, the violation is brought before the board.

Mr. Pineau supported the idea of reporting complaints, and he referred to a statement in the minutes of a previous wetlands meeting that mentioned the number of wetland permit submittals and the actions required. Ms. Henderson suggested adding the complaint statistics to the staff report, which would provide more information and help identify any patterns or trends. Mr. Rudasill raised a question about the difference in fees for permits versus after-the-fact applications, suggesting that the after-the-fact fee could be higher as a disincentive to encourage compliance. Ms. Torrey stated that there is no difference because fees are collected as part of the application. The only difference being is when penalties are accessed. Ms. Torrey explained that however, the access penalties, there is a legal process and the legal team would either recommend or not recommend penalties. Mr. Rudasill asked if there should be a difference and if there could be a difference. Mr. Hayden proposed a potential that fees from after-the-fact permits could fund educational outreach one day. Mr. Fiorello stated he was unsure of what that would require to be feasible. Ms. Henderson suggested that a change in fee structure would probably have to be presented to the Board of Supervisors but more data and statistics would be needed to make that recommendation.

Ms. Henderson noted that the cost of environmental engineer studies and new plantings in after-the-fact cases can be significant, and board members should be aware of the potential expenses for violators. The discussion ended with the decision to gather more information on complaints and explore the possibility of adjusting the fee structure in the future.

H. Chairman's Report

None

I. Staff Report

None

J. Adjournment

With no further business to discuss, Mr. Rudasill made a motion to adjourn. The motion was seconded by Mr. Pineau. The Wetlands Board meeting adjourned at 6:43 p.m.