

VMI Chessie Nature Trail Advisory Committee Meeting, Nov. 12, 2013

The first annual Public Meeting of VMI's Chessie Nature Trail Advisory Committee was held at 5:00 p.m. on Nov. 12, 2013, in the Turman Room, Preston Library, Virginia Military Institute.

Attending committee members were MAJ Jennifer deHart, chair; Sam Crickenberger; Keith Holland; Jay Scudder; Lisa Tracy; Chris Wise; Michael Zehner; LTC Dallas Clark.

A list of the 25 other attendees is available upon request.

The meeting opened with a welcome from MAJ deHart and an invitation to those attending to avail themselves of the sign-in sheet for use in future communication.

MAJ deHart explained her role as chair of VMI's Chessie Trail Advisory Committee and her post at VMI as Staff Engineer and Sustainability Coordinator. She acknowledged LTC Dallas Clark's oversight of the Trail in the years leading up to the present.

She explained that the Advisory Committee had first met in June 2013. She then invited its members to introduce themselves and briefly explain their interest in the trail.

MAJ deHart launched into the main content the presentation. This began with a brief history of the trail, including its predecessors: the canal trail and the railroad, and its acquisition by the Nature Conservancy in 1978 and conveyance in 1979 to the VMI Foundation as a Rail Trail, and thence to VMI, and LTC Clark's successful application for a Recreational Trail Program grant, comprising \$79,000 for trail improvements. A student intern has established a website containing some of this info at www.vmi.edu/chessie

MAJ deHart explained VMI's current maintenance oversight, through the VMI Physical Plant: routine care and storm damage cleanup, plus summer mowing, which is contracted.

She set forth current trail use guidelines, as specified by current signage, noting that any use not specifically prohibited is allowed. MAJ deHart urged attendees to notify VMI of intent to use the Trail for organized events using the contact information on the web site, or the on-line feedback form.

She described near term projects, including mile markers, signage (way finding and interpretive), gates, and parking areas. Future initiatives include demolish a shed (for new parking), replace west pedestrian bridge, replace South River bridge, connect to BV city limits.

The slides from the presentation are available at www.vmi.edu/chessie

MAJ deHart then opened the floor to questions.

QUESTION & ANSWER SESSION

Q: Size of the right of way

A: Mower maintains 15 foot wide swath from center of Trail. ROW is sometimes 15 feet, sometimes 100 (50 each way from center of trail), based on old RR ROW. Currently no plans to demarcate the ROW;

users are asked to stay on the trail and respect the agricultural land use that abuts the trail. Valuation maps can show more specific detail.

Q: Questions and discussion on gates – what kind and when?

A: Cattle guards are a liability to trail users. Plans are for universal access self closing gates where needed to keep livestock on their side. Timing: would begin this summer with a pilot installation.

Q: There is some misuse of industrial stretch of trail

A: VMI will look into providing bollards to deter vehicle use in industrial area.

Q: Are there plans for permanent toilets near parking areas?

A: Not at this time.

Q: Can the state maintenance lot on Old BV Rd be a possible parking site?

A: VMI/the state do not own that, so we cannot develop it.

Q: South River crossing involves an extensive detour...need for correct information. Any alternate routes? Could SHARROWS help? Will the next flood just wash a new bridge away?

A: Discussion included South River crossing using bridge vs. land; landowner relations, preventing trespassing (which currently occurs); the rip-rap VDOT installed is dangerous. Sharrows may not be allowed due to width of bridge. VMI web site will provide the right information to share. Will look into adding informative signs to encourage proper use. Bridge replacement project will need account for 100yr flood design.

Q: Signs need emergency information. What to do if you get stuck 5 miles in for example. Cell phone coverage.

A: Good ideas.

Q: Plans to join trail to Jordan's Point?

A: Lexington city's role is to develop trails to and from Rt 11 bridge using grant funds from VDOT to do that and signage for it. Spring 14 construction expected. Intent to maintain JP as the beginning of the Chessie. Pedestrian bridge across the Maury is not in plans.

Q: Idea of the "braided trail" and boat access at Mill Creek and BV end

A: Long range plans include integration of signs and water access at ends of trail.

Q: What about right of way on BV end?

A: There is a master plan to connect into and thru city of BV; the BV City Manager explained about Bontex et al.

Q: How does VMI use the trail? Do we ever close it?

A: Heavily used by ROTC, Rat challenge, NCAA, Cadet life 10k. High school and WLU cross country. It is never closed during any event.

Q: How do users know the dates of VMI events - so they can schedule. What if students want to have a 5K race?

A: Organizers should contact VMI to de-conflict schedule. VMI will publish list of cadet marches on the web site.

Q: Does VMI own parking areas at South River?

A: Yes

Q: Are horses allowed?

A: They are not prohibited.

Q: Rules do not state "no motorized vehicles" whereas other trails explicitly prohibit motorized vehicles.

A: VMI will add "no motorized vehicles" text to the signage.

Q: Trail surface - what are the long term plans?

A: Runners value unpaved surface, and the deed stipulates maintaining trail in its "natural" state. No paving is planned but resurface effort will be ADA compliant.

Q: One of the popular parking areas is just after the change from 25mph to 55mph. Could VDOT change the signs and the limits?

A: Will look into it.

Q: Why was a split rail fence added at mill creek gate?

A: Unknown. VMI will look into it and remove if needed.

Q: Benches are privately funded on the trail in Abington. Would be nice to consider. Dedicated or in memory of individuals.

A: Will certainly consider.

Q: Will there be trash receptacle and dog owner refuse stations?

A: Yes, these are planned at parking areas. Receptacles could be placed at unimproved parking areas in addition to planned areas.

Meeting adjourned at 6:00pm.