



# CAP Newsletter

## Spring 2011

Enhancing Rockingham's rural heritage,  
livable communities and natural resources.



(Image courtesy of Nancy Hess)

### Loop Road Lurks in Transportation Plan

Once every five years the Harrisonburg-Rockingham transportation planning organization (called the Metropolitan Planning Organization or MPO) updates its transportation plan for the region. And once every five years the loop road plans get dusted off and brought back out as part of this plan.

The MPO's draft Long Range Plan shows that Dayton wants a new road that directly connects it to interstate 81 at exit 243; Rockingham wants the northwest and southwest pieces of the loop road; and Bridgewater wants a bypass that data show will make traffic worse on main roads in the town. Roads are drawn through current agricultural and forestal districts and active farmland. These productive farming and rural areas in western Rockingham County will face significant development pressure if the roads are built as currently projected.

As the southeast connector project around the hospital winds down, new road projects will become priorities. This spring, there will be an important opportunity for public comment on the new Long Range Plan. CAP is watching this one closely, so stay tuned for your chance to ensure our rural areas are protected from misguided road projects.

### County Zoning Revisions Expected This Spring

Rockingham County will complete its zoning ordinance update in 2011, which should provide greater protection for rural land and enhance livability in our communities. CAP representatives served on planning subcommittees appointed by the Board of Supervisors in 2010 and sit on the final committee pulling all recommendations together this spring.

The changes will impact ordinances for rural, transition, residential, commercial and industrial zones. For example, a new Business Rural Village District is intended to protect the character of existing towns and villages while providing opportunities for services to rural residents, and avoiding non-agricultural uses of prime farm lands.

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### CAP Calls On VDOT to Hold I-81 Stakeholder Meetings

VDOT invited county elected officials and staff in December to outline their priorities for improvements to I-81. Local comments reflected CAP's eight-year-old "Reasonable Solutions" campaign for the corridor: fixes to safety and congestion hotspots, upgrades to local road networks, and diversion of through freight from trucks to rail.

But the state's approved plan for I-81 still calls for an \$11 billion widening to eight-to-twelve lanes, with a possible bypass around Harrisonburg through Rockingham's Agricultural Reserve. CAP and partners are asking VDOT to schedule another round of meetings for local residents and other stakeholders. We hope to convince the state to

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#### Community Alliance for Preservation

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## Hydrofracking Proposed in Bergton: CAP Urges Caution

CAP has been closely following natural gas drilling using the controversial hydraulic fracturing process since the issue went to public hearing before the Board of Supervisors in February 2010.

CAP and its partners documented more than 13,000 acres under lease in western Rockingham, as well as nearby drinking water resources. The first proposed well site in Virginia is located in a flood plain near Bergton, at the headwaters of the North Fork of the Shenandoah River.

CAP briefed supervisors on water contamination and other potential impacts of hydrofracking and joined County officials on a day-long trip to Wetzel

County, WV, which has been devastated by the industrialization of rural lands for gas drilling since 2007. Supervisors tabled the special use permit for the Bergton site.



*Active well site in Wetzel County, WV  
(Image courtesy of Wetzel County Action Group)*

Hydrofracking drilling is very different from the conventional gas wells of the past. The process injects up to five million gallons of water, sand and undisclosed chemicals more than a mile underground to break up shale. Each well requires hundreds of industrial truck trips on rural roads, large wastewater lagoons, and 24-hour noise, lights, and fumes during the weeks or months of drilling.

## George Washington National Forest Management Plan Expected in Late April

The U.S. Forest Service plans to release the long-awaited draft management plan for the George Washington National Forest in late April. The plan will direct uses of 24 percent of the land in Rockingham County for the next 15 years and affect forest drinking water resources that supply 52,635 residents of our County, towns and the City of Harrisonburg.

CAP will be encouraging strong public comment on the draft plan this spring to support protections for important forest resources:

- Identification, management, protection and enhancement of drinking water sources.
- No private industrial wind energy projects on forested ridgelines on public lands.
- A ban or moratorium on hydrofracking gas drilling permits, at least until federal regulations and oversight are in place.

Rockingham County and Harrisonburg officials sent the Forest Service resolutions last year calling for similar forest management provisions.

*View from Flagpole Road (Courtesy of Wild Virginia)*



### A Message from CAP's President

Rockingham County is a great place to live. It is one of the most pleasant places on earth, with rich farmland and beautiful mountains and forests. But it is not this way by accident and we cannot take for granted that it will always stay this way.

The Community Alliance for Preservation is your voice for preserving our way of life and for supporting harmonious growth in our community. Whether it is opposing widening Interstate 81 to 10 lanes and putting a loop road around Harrisonburg, or asking questions about the cost to the community of fracking or industrial wind energy, or advocating comprehensive planning that will preserve agriculture—we are there for you. Please come to our open house on April 7 to learn more, and consider supporting CAP as we work for you, with your dollars and with your time.

*Tim Jost, President*



*Mobile pyrolysis unit that converts poultry litter to biochar and heating oil; (Source: FPPC)*

## Power from Poultry Waste: Look at All Scales & Impacts

When it comes to converting the Shenandoah Valley's abundant poultry manure into an energy resource, is bigger the best option or could small-scale solutions do a good job? That's the question confronting the region's poultry growers and local communities, as well as a new state advisory group.

On the big side, the Shenandoah Valley Poultry Litter to Energy Watershed & Air Advisory Group was launched in February under the direction of the state Departments of Environmental Quality (DEQ) and Conservation and Recreation (DCR). In the announcement, the agencies said the group is "evaluating the concept of a large scale poultry litter-energy project as a means to help us meet Virginia's Chesapeake Bay" water quality requirements, with "the additional benefits of helping meet the Commonwealth's renewable energy goals."

That got the attention of Page County Supervisor J.D. Cave and local activists, who last year rebuffed Fibrowatt LLC's efforts to locate a major litter-to-energy power station in the county. At the Advisory Committee's first meeting last month in Charlottesville, Supervisor Cave and Page residents repeated their objections to the air impacts and 300-foot smoke stack from such a power plant, as well as the hundreds of trucks loaded with manure converging on a single site every day.

So how else could we solve the Shenandoah Valley's poultry manure management problem? And which solution might provide the best

economic return to poultry growers, either in the price paid for poultry litter or through by-products from energy generation?

On the small side, Valley conservation groups last month urged the Advisory Group to expand the study to include smaller scale options that use promising new technologies like on-farm gasification, pyrolysis or anaerobic digestion of poultry litter to create energy. The groups called for the state study to be expanded to include multiple systems, at multiple scales, both centralized and distributed across the region.

The conservation groups urged the Advisory Group to measure more than just reduction of nutrient loads on water quality or of a power station's impacts on air quality. They also asked that the study measure "all environmental impacts to the region" and develop a cost-benefit analysis of impacts to the community and local poultry producers.

Some developers of smaller manure-to-energy systems say they could start operating in the Shenandoah Valley in the coming year with fewer impacts than a single major power station. Some of the emerging companies and technologies include BioChar Soils Systems, which uses gasification; BioMass Heating Solutions LTD, combustion; BioEnergy Planet Inc., a pyrolysis system based on a Virginia Tech test project in Rockingham; and Cumberland/Pepco Energy Services, anaerobic digestion.

All manure to energy systems offer at least one source of revenue for poultry growers, the purchase of poultry litter to start the process. The large and small scale options differ in other ways: grower contract requirements, from none to a 10 year commitment; the price paid for the litter, from \$5 to \$15 a ton or more; the grower's investment, from none to \$100,000 or more; and who owns the power generated, electricity, bio-gas or bio-oil, and any other saleable by-products, such as fertilizer.

This is an enormously complicated issue with impacts on the farm economy and local communities. CAP supports options that help poultry farmers increase income and reduce nutrient loads on waterways and that have low impacts on natural resources and local communities. Only by looking at all scales and cumulative impacts can the Advisory Group assure Valley residents that we won't be trading a water quality problem for a host of other negative impacts.

*A version of this article by Kim Sandum was submitted as an Open Forum to the Harrisonburg Daily News-Record.*

### **County Zoning (Continued from Page 1)**

Improvements to the residential development zone would address density, lighting and setbacks.

CAP hopes to generate public interest and comment on the proposed revision. We continue to press for greater oversight of industrial uses in the Agricultural Reserve, such as large-scale wind development and high-impact drilling for natural gas.

### **I-81 Stakeholder Meetings (Continued from Page 1)**

scale back the I-81 plan to more affordable options, with far less impact on our communities and natural resources.

In other I-81 news, Norfolk Southern starts work this spring on a new passing track at Elkton, part of the Crescent Corridor project to improve freight service from New York to Texas. The railroad expects to move more than 750,000 trucks a year to rail in Virginia by 2013.

Community Alliance for Preservation



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rural heritage,  
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and natural resources.*

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Community Alliance for Preservation

# Open House

**Please Join Us**

6:30 - 8:00 pm  
Thursday, April 7

**Coffee and Dessert**

Parkview Mennonite Fellowship Hall  
1600 College Avenue  
Harrisonburg



Find out about issues that  
affect Rockingham's rural  
heritage, ag economy, and  
livable communities and  
how to get involved.