



# CAP Newsletter

Summer 2014

Enhancing Rockingham's Rural Heritage,  
Vibrant Communities and Natural Resources

## I-81 INTERCHANGES at Port Republic Road (Exit 245) and East Market Street (Exit 247)



Harrisonburg, Rockingham County and James Madison University have begun a study of interchange alternatives for two I-81 exits where bottlenecks are common. This federal study is the first step in reconfiguring the interchanges and will determine the design and location of the future roadways. Until CAP pushed for it, however, VDOT did not include any provision for public comment in the study.

"Virginia will never build roads 'faster, smarter, cheaper' if the public is not involved early in the process, before significant planning and engineering money is spent" CAP's Director, Kim Sandum, told Commonwealth Transportation Board (CTB) members at a recent public hearing for VDOT's six-year plan. (See related story on page three.) "CAP asks that you ensure robust public involvement throughout this interchange alternatives project."

Citizen input results in better projects that meet real transportation needs and avoid destruction of valued resources. CAP will continue to monitor this I-81 interchange project and encourage public participation as project concepts develop in the coming months.

## I-81 Exits and Loop Road Projects Raised at VDOT Hearing



For the first time in CAP's 15 years of work on local road issues, Virginia's Secretary of Transportation made the trip to the Valley for a routine six-year plan hearing April 29, held by the Virginia Department of Transportation (VDOT) in Harrisonburg.

At the meeting Secretary Aubrey Layne said the current \$11.4 billion plan to widen I-81 to eight or more lanes through the northern valley should be revised.

Sec. Layne said the current I-81 plan is "too big and too expensive. We all know where the trouble spots are and should be looking at fixing those instead." Since the I-81 plan was adopted in 2007, CAP and other groups have sought a more affordable and less damaging alternative, so it is reassuring to hear the new Secretary's view.

CAP's Kim Sandum spoke to the Secretary after the hearing about VDOT's need to seek input from local citizens so that a reworked I-81 plan reduces negative impacts on communities, farmland and battlefields.

Sec. Layne "confidently said there would be opportunity for public input," she said. In June, after hearings around the state, the CTB will determine which projects receive funding.

## LOOP ROAD PROJECTS LIVE ON IN COUNTY PLAN

Three of eight road projects listed by Rockingham County in its Prioritized Needs List, submitted to the Commonwealth Transportation Board at the hearing April 29, are loop road segments repeatedly rejected by county residents. Yet these projects persist in county, city and regional road plans.

CAP detailed the sustained public opposition to Sec. Layne and CTB member Dixon Whitworth.

- Route 11 to Route 42 – Dayton Connector. The project is strongly opposed by Harrisonburg and Rockingham citizens as well as the Town of Dayton. As recently as January, Dayton's mayor and Planning Commission declared the town does not want Eberly Road expanded to four lanes.
- Route 11 to Route 33 – Western Connector. Also opposed by city and county residents, this northwest piece of the loop road is affected by Rockingham's traffic study of the North Valley Pike which was tabled by the Board of Supervisors in 2010.
- Route 682 (Friedens Church Road) to Route 276 (Cross Keys Road) – Southeast Connector. This segment of the loop road also is strongly opposed by city and county residents, as it would create a four lane highway that dead-ends at the Cross Keys Battlefield.

# COUNTY APPROVES

## BROAD CHANGES TO LAND USE RULES

ROCKINGHAM supervisors passed a sweeping revision of the county's zoning ordinances on April 23, after nearly seven years of review. The updated ordinances provide protection for farms and forests and a new district for small rural hamlets, and close zoning loopholes that could have allowed for controversial projects in rural areas, such as shale gas drilling or a theme park.

The new zoning rules will guide how the County grows. Requests for new residential development rezoning in areas designated for agriculture will be restricted to land within the growth boundaries around existing towns and Harrisonburg. The change will channel new homes to communities where costly public services already exist, better preserving productive farms, forests and battlefields.

A new Rural Village district offers a promising opportunity to craft guidelines for small-scale new businesses that will fit the existing fabric of tiny villages and crossroad communities, like Port Republic and Singer's Glen. CAP is encouraging supervisors and county planners to start work soon to define the new district.

Overall, the updated zoning makes a closer connection between the community's vision and goals outlined in the Rockingham comprehensive plan. CAP participated throughout the revision process, with an eye on how the zoning changes can best preserve Rockingham County's rural lands, distinctive towns, traditional rural economic sectors and high quality of life.

## STATE RESTRICTS LOCAL DECISION-MAKING



RICHMOND legislators continue to impose one-size-fits-all land use rules. Rockingham County could lose oversight over commercial events and retail sales on local farms July 1, when new state rules on agritourism zoning go into effect depending on definitions of key terms in the law. Legislation introduced by state Sen. Richard Stuart (R-Stafford) passed both houses nearly unanimously and was signed by Governor McAuliffe in March, despite strong opposition from Rockingham and other top farm counties, CAP and other conservation groups.

The legislation hamstring local governments from any oversight of on-farm retail sales, special events and "usual and customary" activities unless the local government can demonstrate a "substantial impact on the health, safety or general welfare" of the public without defining these vague terms.

Lack of definition leaves county governments to comb through existing ordinances to guess at what changes might be needed to comply. The law is so broad it could allow nearly any

commercial activity on agricultural land, with little connection to the farm's production and without consideration for potential conflicts with neighboring landowners. That, in turn, could actually erode local and regional farm vitality over time through over-commercializing of working lands. CAP and Shenandoah Valley Network will look for ways to support Rockingham County to meet the mandates while protecting traditional agricultural uses.



CAP board members From left: JC Huber, George Rohrer, Timothy Jost, Lee Good; Seated: Sara Godshall, Bethany Versluis Fairfield (not pictured: Bob Boisture)



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JUNE 6TH marked the beginning of Friendly City Food Co-op's 4th year as a community owned, full service grocery store in downtown Harrisonburg. Congrats to the co-op for three great years of connecting local farmers and producers to the community and best wishes for many more.



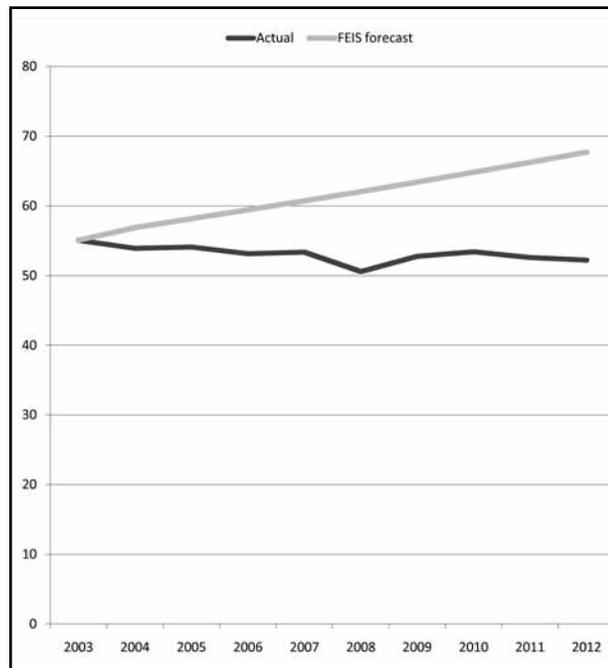
### Sandum Named to Bike Committee

Rockingham Supervisors in April appointed CAP Director Kim Sandum to a three-year term on the Rockingham County Bicycle Advisory Committee, which makes recommendations on bicycle and pedestrian issues.

## MORE I-81 UPDATES: VDOT Proposal to Overbuild I-81 Relies on *Flawed Traffic Forecast*

The Virginia Department of Transportation (VDOT) greatly overestimated the traffic projections that are used to justify the costly and destructive 2007 plan to widen I-81 to eight or more lanes through most of the corridor, according to a new study commissioned by the Shenandoah Valley Network (SVN).

The I-81 plan forecasted annual traffic growth of two percent and total volume between 2003 and 2012 of 23 percent. In reality, traffic volume dropped by an average of five percent over this period, according to the study by Smart Mobility Inc. transportation consultants.



“The apparent insistence of VDOT in ignoring current traffic trends and current

**Traffic on I-81: Actual vs. VDOT 2007 Plan Forecast**  
(daily average, in thousands) for more information: [www.svnva.org](http://www.svnva.org)

research, and instead assuming that traffic growth is going to not only return to rates observed 20 years ago, but also to catch up from the past no-growth decade, is without any basis. VDOT needs realistic traffic forecasts for the study area. It appears highly unlikely that realistic traffic forecasts will justify widening I-81,” states the Smart Mobility report.

CAP and SVN are calling on state transportation officials to reopen the I-81 plan, fix the flawed traffic projections and reconsider less costly alternatives with fewer negative impacts, such as smaller scale safety and congestion improvements on the highway, increased rail freight to divert trucks from I-81, increased safety and speed limit enforcement, and improved local road networks to connect to I-81.

## COMING SOON! Final GW Forest Plan

Look for our email alert in June or July, when the U.S. Forest Service is expected to release the final George Washington National Forest management plan. We will let you know immediately whether federal officials heeded local requests for a ban on shale gas drilling (fracking) to protect the forest's extraordinary resources.



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**VISIT OUR UPDATED WEBSITE!**  
[www.preserverockingham.org](http://www.preserverockingham.org)

**INSIDE:**

*VDOT Holds Local Hearing  
County Revises Land Use Rules  
State Mandates Agritourism Zoning  
Latest I-81 News  
Forest Plan Due This Summer*



## **BURNETT: *Build On the Valley's Strengths***

Three years ago, CAP Executive Director Kim Sandum first met Augusta County's energetic economic development chief, Dennis Burnett, a strong supporter of rural economic assets like agriculture and tourism. CAP applauded Burnett and his team last year when the governor announced that milk products giant Shamrock Foods was building a \$50 million plant near Verona, a boon for the region's dairy farmers. So it was great news last fall when the Shenandoah Valley Partnership hired Burnett as the new executive director expanding his work into Harrisonburg, Rockingham and beyond.

"Today's marketing requires really great assets beyond local workforce, road and rail access, and industrial sites," said Burnett. He considers whether prospective businesses will be compatible

with the region's rural, cultural and historic assets. He said that traditionally, economic developers and land use planners were often in conflict, "but today, those with a shared vision come out ahead."



"We're looking for companies that share our vision, too," Burnett said. "When they ask about the things our communities value – energy conservation and recycling, rebuilding downtown, or recreation, open space and other rural amenities – along with workforce training and plant sites, we sense there will be a good fit," he said.

The Partnership relocated recently to the 1920's-era ice manufacturing plant that fills a block near the Harrisonburg's old railroad track. Learn more about the Partnership at <http://www.shenandoah-valley.biz>

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ALLIANCE FOR  
PRESERVATION**

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