

Mountain Resources Commission
March 19, 2010, 1:00-3:00 PM
Blue Ridge Parkway Destination Center
Milepost 384, Blue Ridge Parkway
Asheville, NC

MEETING SUMMARY

Members in Attendance:

George Santucci, Max Hopper, Charles Vines, Jim Coman, Bill Gibson, Rodney Locks, Ruth Ann Suttle, Wayne Abele, Maxine Dalton, Tommy Jenkins, David Gantt, Chuck McGrady, Tom Massie, Angie Chandler

Others in Attendance:

Sen. Joe Sam Queen, Judy Francis: NCDENR, Phil Francis: Blue Ridge Parkway, Joe McKinney / Linda Giltz / Bill Eaker: Land of Sky Regional Council, Betty Huskins: Ridgetop Associates, Paul Ressemeyer: Environmental Consultant

Call to Order

Judy Francis, acting as staff to the Commission, called the meeting to order at 1:00 PM.

Welcome & Introductions

Judy Francis introduced herself and told the group she has been involved in land use planning for over twenty years and currently works for the North Carolina Department of the Environment & Natural Resources in the Asheville office. She provided Commission members with a copy of the NCDENR Strategic Plan and said she will be providing staff support to the Commission.

Jay Leutze said he is a resident of Avery County, is involved with the Southern Appalachian Highlands Conservancy, is a free-lance writer, and has a law degree. He has been involved with a number of the land trusts working on conservation and acquisition projects in the western region. He also assists conservationists with obtaining political support and money from the Land and Water Conservation Fund. He thanked Senator Queen for sponsoring the legislation that established the Commission.

Senator Joe Sam Queen explained that he represents the 47th district in the western region. He sponsored the legislation to establish the Commission, which was supported by the membership of the western delegation. He is an architect and a farmer.

Tommy Jenkins said he was a professional realtor from Macon County. He serves as Chairman of the Advantage West Board of Directors, he is a former state senator, and has also served on the NC Environmental Management Commission.

Charles Vines introduced himself as the Mayor of the Town of Bakersville and the Mitchell County Manager. He is also a veteran and was appointed to the Commission by the High Country Council of Governments.

Maxine Dalton told the group that she is a resident of Madison County and a retired psychologist. She represents the NC National Parks, Parkway, and Forest Development Council on the Commission.

Bob Shepherd explained that though he is retired after a long career in local and regional government, he is now acting as the interim town manager of Columbus. He is also a Board member of the Blue Ridge Parkway Foundation and has served on the Riverlink board of directors.

Angie Chandler introduced herself as the Executive Director of the Blue Ridge National Heritage Area and mentioned that the Commission's enabling legislation specifies cooperation with the heritage area.

Tom Massie told the group he is a Jackson County Commissioner, a staff member of the NC Clean Water Management Trust Fund, an ex-officio member of the NC National Park, Parkway, and Forest Development Council, and worked on the Year of the Mountains Initiative.

David Gantt introduced himself as the Chairman of the Buncombe County Commission and a practicing attorney. He has many land use planning and preservation interests and expressed his pleasure in working with the other Commission members.

Ruth Ann Suttle told everyone she is the current Vice-Chair of the Burke County Commission and is a retired state government employee who now works in the insurance business.

Wayne Abele said he is also a Burke County Commissioner, and he is representing the Western Piedmont Council of Governments. He is a restaurant owner in Morganton.

Max Hopper introduced himself as the Mayor of the Town of Earl in Cleveland County and is representing the Isothermal Planning and Development Commission. He is a Western Carolina University alumnus and has seen many changes over the years, and not all of the changes have been good.

Rodney Locks explained that he has been in the region for over 20 years, and now serves on the Brevard Town Council. He also is the current President of the NC League of Municipalities.

Jim Coman introduced himself as a long-time employee of the Buncombe County Planning Department, an agency that has rigorous slope development policies. He is also a member of the Soil & Water Conservation Board and the Mountain Lakes RC&D.

George Santucci explained that he is the Executive Director of the National Committee for the New River and he is very familiar with land trust work. His organization began as an advocacy group opposing a dam project. They were ultimately successful - the river still flows free – and they now focus on conservation and restoration on the New River.

Bill Gibson said he has been the Executive Director of the Southwestern Commission (Region) for 36 years. He has a passion for land & water conservation and believes that land use policy should reflect those values.

Harris Prevost told the group he was from Hazelwood, and has worked at Grandfather Mountain for 38 years. He worked closely with Hugh Morton, and has been involved in the NC Travel Industry Association and Advantage West.

Chuck McGrady said he is the Executive Director of the Youth Camp Association, serves on the Land of Sky Regional Council Board, is a trustee of the NC Clean Water Management Trust Fund, is a lifelong conservationist, and is currently running for a state legislative seat.

Parkway Visitor Center

Angie Chandler welcomed everyone to the parkway visitor center; a LEED certified building that has been open three years. It is the result of a partnership between the Blue Ridge National Heritage Area, the National Park Service and Eastern National. The facility distributes information about what is available for visitors in communities along the parkway in twenty-five counties in North Carolina. There are approximately 30 volunteers working in the visitor center. She provided Commission members with copies of the appendices to the Blue Ridge National Heritage Area Management Plan and Environmental Assessment. She explained that the document had a good inventory of the natural and cultural attributes of the region.

Phil Francis, the Superintendent of the Blue Ridge Parkway, welcomed the Commission members. He has worked at Great Smoky Mountain National Park as the Deputy Superintendent, was a participant in the Year of the Mountains initiative, was a friend of Hugh Morton, and loves these mountains. He stated that county development plans are critical to protect natural and economic values. The Parkway has 17 million visitors a year who spend 2.3 billion in adjoining counties. Over 90% of them come to see the views. Visitors will not come here if the views continue to be impaired. We have to protect this special place. It's our home. The Parkway staff does have data to share. There are 29 watersheds along the Parkway that need protection.

Comments from Senator Queen

Senator Queen expressed his pleasure at seeing the Commission meet and have such distinguished members. The legislation is about preserving mountain regions which are a state and national treasure. The mountains are a critical part of our economy, and we have a lot to protect. It will take collaborative planning to establish a stewardship plan for the future. There are many challenges with development, ridge law, clean stacks, etc. This bill was approved without funding, but he hopes to have appropriation in the future. He

stated that the General Assembly will listen to the Commission. The Commission can provide recommendations to local, regional, state, and federal entities.

Jay Leutze mentioned that many people worked hard on the legislation, which was approved at the very end of the 2009 legislative session.

Overview of Enabling Legislation

Judy Francis provided a PowerPoint presentation with an overview of the statute that established the Commission. The presentation emphasized the following points:

- Two entities were established – the Commission and a Technical Advisory Council
- Appointments made by House, Senate, Governor, and by-right seats
- Geographic boundary is the western 25 counties
- Potential focus areas might include slope development, ridgeline protection, climate change adaptation, scenic character, past regional efforts, legislative barriers, etc.
- The Commission is advisory in nature, will provide a forum for discussion and consideration of technical information, will provide recommendations to elected bodies, and may develop tools and funding opportunities for implementing their objectives in the mountain region.
- Commission members are expected to attend regular and special meetings, provide a communication channel with various constituencies, work with the technical council that they will appoint, and maintain honest and open communication with each other.
- The Commission may accept and disperse funding through a designated fiscal agent. They may also enter into contracts, sue and be sued, and perform any lawful acts to fulfill its mission.

Contact Info and Talking Points

Judy Francis provided the Commission members with contact information for each of them as provided by the Governor's Boards and Commissions staff. She asked them to review the materials and send her any necessary corrections so she can get the information updated. She also provided the Commission members with a handout of talking points regarding the Commission and their enabling legislation for their use with media contacts.

Strategic Planning Workshop

Judy Francis then reminded the Commission that they had established a date, May 14, to hold their strategic planning work session. The event will be held at the North Carolina Arboretum in Asheville. It will consist of a facilitated discussion and laying out a timetable to achieve short and long term goals. She was able to obtain a small grant from the Community Foundation of Western North Carolina in the amount of \$1925.00 to cover the expenses of hiring a facilitator, renting the room space, and catering the lunch. Suzi Berl will be the facilitator and she is very experienced working with groups focused on land use and conservation. George Santucci said he had worked with Suzi Berl previously and that she was very good and will keep the group focused. Judy said that

NCDENR had established a budget line to accept the money and act as the fiscal agent on behalf of the Commission.

Judy Francis asked for a motion to accept the grant of \$1925.00 from the Community Foundation to be dispersed by NCDENR to cover the expenses of the strategic planning work session. Bob Shepherd provided the motion which received a second from Tom Massie. The motion was approved by consensus.

Commission Leadership

Bill Gibson began by saying that he and Tom Massie had discussion concerning all the talented members appointed to this Commission. There is certainly a lot of passion for the Commission's mission, but he felt the one who particularly stands out and has worked hardest to translate that passion into action is David Gantt.

Bill Gibson made a motion to elect David Gantt as Chairman of the Mountain Resources Commission. The motion received a second from Jim Coman and was unanimously approved by the Commission. David Gantt said he was honored to serve as Chairman and he would like to get meetings scheduled soon and placed on his calendar.

Tommy Jenkins then placed the name of Harris Prevost in the form of a motion to serve as the Mountain Resources Commission Vice-Chairman. The motion received a second from Maxine Dalton and was approved unanimously by the Commission.

Discussion of Future Meeting Protocol / Dates / Locations

David Gantt began a discussion to discuss meeting protocol and procedures. The Commission members agreed to the following:

- Meetings will be conducted with respect for other members and guests.
- Commission members will practice active listening.
- There will be a written agenda for each meeting. Judy will coordinate with the Chairman to prepare this well in advance.
- The mission / purpose statement developed at the strategic planning work session shall be placed on each meeting agenda for the members to review.
- All meetings shall comply with relevant open meetings laws.

Maxine Dalton stated that we can each be respectful while understanding that we won't always agree. Max Hopper suggested that electronic communication would be best. David Gantt said that hard copies should go out for the next meeting, but we should determine at the strategic planning work session if future communications can be primarily electronic. Rodney asked if the Commission was subject to the Statement of Economic Interest (SEI) requirement. Judy said she had been told by the General Attorney's office that the Commission did not have to comply with SEI reporting at this time.

George Santucci said he would like issues to be decided by the whole group rather than sub-groups. There was general discussion about consensus versus majority decision-

making. The Commission members agreed that consensus is preferred, but some decisions may ultimately depend on a vote of the majority.

David Gantt said he would like the agenda to go out at least two weeks in advance of the next meeting. The agenda should have a place for “New Business” and “Other Business” at the beginning of each meeting with a vote for “changes or additions to the agenda” in order to accommodate things that may come up just prior to the meeting.

The Commission members determined that Fridays seemed to be the best day for meetings and preferred the meetings to be in the morning when possible. Members would like to try and hold monthly meetings for first 6 months, and then bi-monthly after that. Members also would like to hold meetings in different places around the western region rather than in just one place. Max Hopper said he would like to try and minimize any overnight travel. David asked Judy to send out meeting options for after the strategic planning work session and clarify attendance policy for Commission members. All agreed that the length of meetings should be two hours unless it is specified in advance that it will run longer.

Jim Coman thanked NCDENR for their willingness to provide staff to support the Commission.

Adjourn

There being no further business, Rodney Locks made a motion to adjourn which was seconded by Harris Prevost. The motion passed unanimously and the meeting adjourned at 2:55 PM.