

City of Alexandria, Virginia

MEMORANDUM

DATE: APRIL 3, 2015

TO: THE HONORABLE MAYOR AND MEMBERS OF CITY COUNCIL

THROUGH: MARK B. JINKS, ACTING CITY MANAGER *m*

FROM: NELSIE L. BIRCH, DIRECTOR, OFFICE OF MANAGEMENT AND BUDGET *NLB*

SUBJECT: BUDGET MEMO #13: CITY MEMORANDUM OF UNDERSTANDING WITH NORTHERN VIRGINIA CONSERVATION TRUST

This memorandum responds to questions from Councilman Wilson regarding the City's Memorandum of Understanding (MOU) with the Northern Virginia Conservation Trust (NVCT).

The City began working with the NVCT in 2005, operating under an annual MOU, the most recent of which is detailed in this memo. Through the Open Space Master Plan, one of the open space preservation tools recommended was conservation easements on private property. In 2004-2005 the City researched options and determined that, through their ability to provide outreach and education and legal advice and required monitoring for conservation easements, NVCT would be able to help the City protect open space (NVCT holds the easements and related responsibilities, rather than the City).

- 1) *I understand that the City provides \$50,602 annually to the Northern Virginia Conservation Trust (NVCT) from the Capital Improvement Program under a recently approved MOU. What services does the City receive for this MOU?*

Per the annual MOU, NVCT's responsibilities are to:

- Assist the City with its implementation of its Open Space Master Plan by pursuing opportunities to acquire or help the City acquire fee simple, conservation easements, or other real property interests and provide technical assistance in the implementation of the City's environmental plans and policies. Examples include ongoing discussions with the owner of the Clermont Cove property (a priority open space site), receipt of donated land along the Potomac Watershed (South Alfred St.), as well as organizing and leading park and natural invasive removal events throughout the City.
- Maintain the terms and conditions of its conservation easements held with public and private landowners within the City through landowner engagement, stewardship activities, and easement enforcement.

- Conduct outreach and engagement related to conservation and open space, to include supporting existing City efforts. NVCT co-sponsored the City's Open Space Festival in May 2014 and held a conservation/outreach event which the Mayor and Vice Mayor attended in January 2015.
- Coordinate its activities with the City's Open Space Coordinator to include regular meetings and the development of an annual work plan to implement this MOU. NVCT and the City will review the annual work plan at the start of the period covered by this and subsequent MOUs, and routinely in its regular meetings. NVCT and the City may modify the work plan throughout the year to meet the goals of this MOU. NVCT will provide a report on its operations in Alexandria within 30 days of the expiration of the term of this MOU.
- Where applicable, coordinate press releases and media coverage of mutually beneficial projects with the City.
- Provide the City with a copy of its Annual Report and financial audit when available.

2) *What performance standards are associated with the appropriation of this money?*

NVCT and City staff develop and agree upon an annual work plan for NVCT. NVCT staff meets quarterly (or more often if needed) with the City Open Space Coordinator to go over the status of the work plan. The City acknowledges that some of the work may take multiple years to complete, as landowners consider the conservation easement process and/or with challenging negotiations. NVCT prepares an annual report based on the work plan, as well as a semi-annual update (copies of their FY2014 Annual Report and the March Semi-annual Report as included as Attachments 1 and 2).

3) *During the past 5 years, what land conservation (fee simple acquisition or conservation easement) activities have NVCT performed within the City of Alexandria?*

For the past two years NVCT has been in ongoing discussions with the property owners of the 15 acre, Clermont Cove property. In addition, NVCT is closing on a 3.6 acre property located at 1205 South Alfred Street in the mudflats of the Potomac (and often submerged at high tide). They also annually visit and monitor their other six conservation easement properties in the City to ensure compliance.

4) *Is this money more appropriately provided via the Operating Budget versus the Capital Improvement Program?*

To date, open space related efforts are funded by the CIP (Open Space Fund) as they relate to the acquisition and protection of open space, as well as improvements to that new open space. The majority of the work done by NVCT under its MOU with the City includes seeking acquisition, protection of and improvement to additional open space in Alexandria, so the decision was originally made to fund the MOU from the Open Space Fund. Along with the annual MOU, the quarterly capital projects status report allows opportunities for

City Council to receive updates on the status of their work with the City. Therefore, staff believes is appropriate for the annual costs to budgeted in the CIP.

ATTACHMENTS:

Attachment 1 – NVCT Alexandria Annual Report FY 2014

Attachment 2 – NVCT Alexandria Semi-Annual Report FY 2015

**cc: Emily A. Baker, P.E., Acting Deputy City Manager
James Spengler, Director, RPCA
Laura Durham, Open Space Coordinator, RPCA**



Northern Virginia Conservation Trust

Annual Report to the City of Alexandria

Fiscal Year Ending June 30, 2014

2014 marked the Northern Virginia Conservation Trust's 20th anniversary of connecting Northern Virginia's residents to the outdoors and permanently protecting the region's natural and cultural resources. We are pleased to provide this report of the year's highlights under the Memorandum of Understanding between the City of Alexandria, Virginia and the NVCT for the period July 1, 2013 to June 30, 2014.

Land Stewardship

NVCT's policy is to monitor its properties at least annually to ensure compliance with the terms of conditions of the conservation easements and provide landowner assistance where able. NVCT's stewardship staff successfully monitored its five easements, met with landowners, and noted no concerns:

NVCT Stewardship: Easement Monitoring, City of Alexandria, Fiscal Year 2014

Date	Property	Acreage	Assessed Value
December 2, 2013	214 West Alexandria Avenue (Siegel-Hufty)	1.37	\$2,971,854
May 8, 2014	1900 Russell Road	0.36	\$163,807
May 8, 2014	403 West Masonic View Avenue	1.91	\$3,335,931
May 8, 2014	3104 Russell Road (Kust property)	2.83	\$1,014,592
June 3, 2014	514 North Quaker Lane (Battery Heights)	2.87	Not applicable
Total Acreage		9.34	\$7,486,184

Land Conservation Prospects

As part of its Scope of Work, NVCT assists the City of Alexandria in implementing its Open Space Plan, to include considering properties for fee acquisition or conservation easement. NVCT has a number of potential sites in its pipeline, each in various stages of completion, and continues to work with landowners, City staff, and its partners to identify new opportunities to increase permanently protected open space in the City. Highlights of these prospects since NVCT's 2014 mid-year report include:

101 Clermont Avenue (Clermont Cove) – 14.5 acres: NVCT continues to locate a suitable appraiser willing to appraise this unique property. Negotiations with the landowner, Norfolk Southern, will be reopened once a reliable value can be determined.

1226 N. Pegram Street – 1.0 acre: NVCT determined that the landowners are not currently interested in a permanent conservation easement. NVCT continues its regular outreach and landowner engagement.

1205 S. Alfred Street – 3.6 acres (New in FY 2014): NVCT is in negotiations with the landowner to acquire a fee simple interest in this wetlands property. NVCT is waiting on the landowner to decide how to proceed on a Phase I environmental assessment. NVCT is expected to acquire the property in FY 2015.

635 Upland Place – 1.0 acre (New in FY2014): City staff met with the landowners in May 2014 about placing a conservation easement on the wooded portion of the property prior to selling the property. NVCT continues to follow up with the landowner.

Parkfairfax: NVCT continues to work with Parkfairfax representatives to explore conservation opportunities. The landowner's interest dropped after learning of the financial commitment inherent to perpetual stewardship. NVCT has scheduled additional meetings with City staff for the first quarter of FY 2015 to discuss ideas for land management in coordination with Parkfairfax staff.

Plan Review: In addition to specific land conservation prospects, NVCT staff provided technical input to the development of the City's draft Open Space Plan and its draft Fort Ward Management Plan.

Outreach and Education

NVCT's service to Alexandria includes ongoing education and outreach to the City's residents, land owners, government staff, and interested stakeholders on a wide range of environmental topics.

In 2013, NVCT's Explore and Restore program was expanded in order to better meet the strategic direction of the organization. While the name "Explore and Restore" is no longer used, its purpose – connecting Northern Virginia's residents to open space and nature and promoting responsible stewardship – continues. Our outreach and communication planning now includes a focus on reaching a more diverse audience, adopting the latest innovations in urban land management, and forming relationships with a wider network of professional planners, land managers, and others to further the goals of the jurisdictions we serve. Our efforts in Alexandria over the past year include:



Environmental Cleanup and Restoration: NVCT staff continued its successful partnership at Dora Kelley Park and led monthly cleanup events from February to June 2014. In addition, NVCT hosted two invasive species management workshops (Fall 2013 and Spring 2014) at the Kust Easement Property to benefit the students of Howard Gardner School and the Fairfax and Arlington/Alexandria chapters of the Virginia Master Naturalists.

Alexandria's Earth Day Festival: NVCT participated in the City's Earth Day celebrations on April 26, 2014 at Ben Brenman Park. Our staff spoke with over 100 visitors on issues such as invasive species management, outdoor recreation opportunities, sustainable urban gardening, and NVCT's ongoing efforts to assist the City.



Alexandria's Open Space Festival: In coordination with City staff, NVCT assisted in the planning of the first annual Open Space Festival at the Four Mile Run Park Conservatory Center on May 31, 2014. Events included a public comment period on the City's draft Open Space Plan, an NVCT-led park cleanup and scavenger hunt, followed in the evening by refreshments and NVCT's presentation of the documentary film *Green Fire*.

Appraisal Institute, Northern Virginia Chapter Continuing Education: NVCT presented at the Appraisal Institute's May 2014 meeting to an

audience of member appraisers, developers, and real estate professionals working in Alexandria and the Northern Virginia Region. Topics included an overview of land conservation, particularly in urban settings, tools used in land conservation such as easements, fee acquisitions, public policy, legal authorities, how land trusts and the appraiser community work together to accomplish land conservation goals, easement valuation, and professional standards and practices. The 90-minute course was approved to fulfill the Appraisal Institute's continuing education requirements.

Virginia Theological Seminary and NVCT Board Meeting: NVCT held its quarterly Board meeting in June 2014 at the Virginia Theological Seminary, with Vice Mayor Allison Silberberg, representatives of the City government and VTS in attendance. The Rev. Dr. David Gortner and Mr. Steve Slominski were the featured speakers and presented on VTS' new Green Seminary Initiative, long-term campus planning, and sustainability efforts. As a result of this meeting NVCT is working with VTS to develop an ongoing relationship for NVCT to advise the VTS and the Episcopal High School on conservation initiatives and environmental planning.

International Academy, T.C. Williams High School: The International Academy (IA) at TC Williams is a relatively new program in Alexandria City Public Schools designed for high school students that are recent immigrants to the United States. The students are learning English while working towards an on-time high school graduation. On April 25, 2014 the International Academy held their first



annual Community Stewardship Day. Groups of 20+ students were assigned a City of Alexandria park to work in. NVCT staff co-led the Chinquapin Park site with Mark Kelly of the Ford Nature Center. 30 students worked for nearly three hours removing invasive vines and restoring a piece of the walking trail.

Landowner Connection: As a part of its landowner assistance efforts, NVCT produced and distributed two editions of its stewardship newsletter, *Landowner Connection*, to its landowners in January and June 2014. *Landowner Connection* is one way NVCT maintains its relationships and includes topics such as celebrating its 20th anniversary, introducing its new Executive Director and professional staff, providing tips for nearby outdoor recreation, stewardship and new land protection efforts, additions to the NVCT portfolio of protected lands, invasive species management tips, and landowner stories. The next addition is planned for the Fall of 2014.



NVCT Supporting Activities

New Staff Hires: Between August and October 2013, NVCT hired seven professional staff to include two land conservation specialists, two land stewardship specialists, a communications coordinator, and an administrative coordinator.

Staff Development: NVCT's staff routinely attends training seminars, events, and continuing education to better serve its customers and the public. Select events from Fiscal Year 2014 include the national Land Trust Alliance Rally in New Orleans, LA; the annual meeting of the Virginia United Land Trusts (VaULT) in Williamsburg, VA; the Virginia Department of Historic Resources Civil War Preservation Symposium in Richmond, VA; the 25th annual Environment Virginia conference, Lexington, VA; biannual Regional Natural Resources Management Group Meeting in Alexandria, VA; Monthly coordination with Potomac Watershed Roundtable; the National Park Service's annual Partnership Summit, Glen Echo, MD; the Yale School of Forestry's Conservation Finance Camp, New Haven, CT; and numerous webinars, public meetings, and seminars.

Accreditation Renewal: In Fiscal Year, NVCT continued the process to renew its accredited status



through the Land Trust Accreditation Commission. The Commission, an independent program of the national Land Trust Alliance, was created to build and recognize land trusts of the highest professional integrity, foster public confidence in land conservation, and develop national standards of practice for the land conservation industry. NVCT was the first such land trust accredited in Virginia and the Washington,

DC metro area in 2008. The accreditation process is ongoing at the start of Fiscal Year 2015.



Northern Virginia Conservation Trust

Semi-Annual Report to the City of Alexandria

1st and 2nd Quarter of FY2015

2014 marked the Northern Virginia Conservation Trust’s 20th anniversary of connecting Northern Virginia’s residents to the outdoors and permanently protecting the region’s natural and cultural resources. We are pleased to provide this report of recent highlights under the Memorandum of Understanding between the City of Alexandria, Virginia and the NVCT for the period July 1, 2014 to January 31, 2015.

Land Stewardship

NVCT’s policy is to monitor its properties at least annually to ensure compliance with the terms of conditions of the conservation easements and provide landowner assistance where able. NVCT’s stewardship staff successfully monitored its five easements in the first half of CY14, but continued to keep in contact with the landowners throughout the remainder of year.

As a part of updating easement documents to ensure accuracy and up to date information, NVCT periodically writes Present Conditions Reports (PCR), which are updates to the Baseline Documentation Report written at the time of easement donation. One property received a PCR in the first half of FY15.

NVCT Stewardship: Present Conditions Reports, City of Alexandria, Fiscal Year 2015

Date	Property	Acreage	Assessed Value
November 18, 2014	514 North Quaker Lane (Battery Heights)	2.87	Not applicable

Active Land Conservation Prospects

As part of its Scope of Work, NVCT assists the City of Alexandria in implementing its Open Space Plan, to include considering properties for fee acquisition or conservation easement. NVCT has a number of potential sites in its pipeline, each in various stages of completion, and continues to work with landowners, City staff, and its partners to identify new opportunities to increase permanently protected open space in the City. Highlights of these prospects since NVCT’s FY 2014 annual report include:

101 Clermont Avenue (Clermont Cove) – 14.5 acres: Discussions continue between NVCT and Norfolk Southern; however, options for acquiring the property remain limited.

1205 S. Alfred Street – 3.6 acres: NVCT is in negotiations with the landowner to acquire a fee simple interest in this wetlands property. NVCT ordered a Phase I Environmental Assessment and no items of concern were noted. NVCT is expected to acquire the property in FY 2015. Title work is underway. NVCT is scheduled to begin landowner outreach to 1201 S. Alfred St. (3.7 acres) in Spring 2015.

Monticello Park Prospects: NVCT and the City of Alexandria are in the process of evaluating the conservation potential for properties surrounding the park. NVCT will conduct formal outreach to landowners in Spring 2015.

Outreach and Education

NVCT's service to Alexandria includes ongoing education and outreach to the City's residents, land owners, government staff, and interested stakeholders on a wide range of environmental topics.

NVCT's outreach and communication program focuses on reaching diverse audiences, adopting the latest innovations in urban land management, and forming relationships with a wide network of professional planners, land managers, and others to further the goals of the jurisdictions we serve. Our efforts in Alexandria over the past six months include:

Environmental Cleanup and Restoration: NVCT staff continued its successful partnership at Dora Kelley Park and led monthly cleanup events from July to September 2014. These events will be resumed in March 2015. In addition, NVCT hosted a group of dedicated volunteers on National Public Lands Day (September 27, 2014) at the Polk Avenue property, and an invasive species management workshop (November 4, 2014) at the Kust Easement Property to benefit the students of the Howard Gardner School.

Photography Contest: In Fall 2014, NVCT held its first annual Photography Contest for conservation easement holders. All of NVCT's easement holders were invited to participate in an amateur photography contest, highlighting the beauty of conserved land via two categories – *Favorite Spots* and *Enjoying Nature*. This year's prizes highlighted Alexandria businesses, including Bilbo Baggins Wine Café and Restaurant and Artfully Chocolate. An Alexandria easement holder won first prize in the *Enjoying Nature* category with a photo entitled "Fawns".



National Public Lands Day volunteers at the Polk Ave property



"Fawns", Winner of the Enjoying Nature category in NVCT's first annual photography contest.

Aldo Leopold Read-a-thon and Green Fire showing: In celebration of the 128th birthday of legendary



Community members gather to celebrate legendary conservationist, Aldo Leopold, at the Burke Branch Library.

conservationist Aldo Leopold, NVCT organized a read-a-thon of Leopold's most famous work, "A Sand County Almanac". This event was held at the Ellen C. Coolidge Burke Branch Library in Alexandria. Special guest readers, including Mayor William Euille, Vice Mayor Allison Silberberg, former Senator Patsy Ticer, and others, read excerpts from Leopold's book. The read-a-thon was followed by a showing of *Green Fire*, which tells the story Leopold's life and explains how his revolutionary ideas are still influencing the conservation movement today.

Stewardship Connection: As a part of its landowner assistance efforts, NVCT produced and distributed two editions of its landowner newsletter, *Stewardship Connection*, in September and December 2014. *Stewardship Connection* is one way NVCT maintains its relationships with landowners and includes topics such as announcing the photography contest, alternatives to salt for de-icing walkways and driveways, providing tips for nearby outdoor recreation, stewardship and new land protection efforts, additions to the NVCT portfolio of protected lands, invasive species management tips, and landowner stories. The next quarterly issue will be released in late March.



NVCT Supporting Activities

New Staff Hires: Since July of 2014, NVCT has welcomed two new staff members to the team – Xiaoxiao Wu, our Administrative Coordinator, and Katie Busch, a Land Stewardship Specialist.

Staff Development: NVCT's staff routinely attends training seminars, events, and continuing education to better serve its customers and the public. Select events from the first half of FY 2015 include the national Land Trust Alliance Rally in Providence, RI; the Potomac Watershed Partnership Winter 2014 Information Exchange, Stephens City, VA; the Virginia United Land Trusts meetings, Richmond, VA; Virginia Conservation Network 2014 Lobby Day Preview, Richmond, VA; Monthly coordination with Potomac Watershed Roundtable; and numerous webinars, public meetings, and seminars.

Accreditation Renewal: In September 2014, the Northern Virginia Conservation Trust was awarded renewed accreditation by the Land Trust Alliance Accreditation Commission. The Commission, an independent program of the national Land Trust Alliance, was created to build and recognize land trusts of the highest professional integrity, foster public confidence in land conservation, and develop national standards of practice for the land conservation industry. NVCT was the first such land trust accredited in Virginia and the Washington D.C. metro area in 2008.

