

Minutes

Falls of the James Scenic River Advisory Committee
Reedy Creek Nature Center, 4001 Riverside Dr., Richmond, VA 23225

Meeting: January 15, 2026

Call to Order: 12:05pm

Presiding: Katie Schmidt, Chair

Attending Committee Members: Katie Schmidt, Ralph Hambrick, Greg Velzy, Shawna Shade, Jim Hill, John Heerwald, Will Isenberg, Tricia Pearsall, Alex Dahm, Lynn Crump. **Attending Community:** James Vonesh (Associate Director, SLSS Undergraduate Studies and Professor, VCU), Penelope Davenport (James River Park System Outdoor Education Program Supervisor)

Minutes: December 18, 2025 - approved

Current Issues:

- **Committee Updates:**

- New steering committee was confirmed unanimously at the last meeting. Katie, Will and Christina have yet to meet to distribute tasks, but will meet, then report back at February meeting. Katie stated that she would like to establish broader information sharing for the Committee as well as review each Committee member's contribution and establish measurable said goals/objectives to that contribution for the upcoming year.
- Lynn added that the relationship between the Falls Committee and DCR may change significantly with the new administration (noting that Samantha Wangsgard, Chief Environmental Planner, DCR and the DCR Director had both resigned and that Josh Bateman (our Scenic Rivers liaison) had not been allowed to come to our meetings in the past) may become more active in the future.
- Lynn also added that this Committee may want to become more active with other Virginia Scenic River Committees and River Groups as proposal for a US Wild and Scenic Rivers nomination is considered.
- Will suggested that a goal of the Committee might be to cross pollinate ideas both local and statewide. John Heerwald added that we very much need statewide advocacy to continue building the Scenic Rivers program in Virginia
- Lynn clarified that as an advisory committee we can weigh in on State/Local Legislation but not through DCR. In the past, a Statewide Scenic River Committee had been very active in lending policy support and hopefully we can lend that support for new rivers eligible or listed for Scenic designation particularly as they are legislated for 2027.
- Will suggested that we take a position with DCR that our committee is supposed to be advising them as to regional river policy and conditions. Katie asked who we should be talking to at DCR. It was the general consensus that we wait and see what happens with a new DCR director and with a new Scenic Rivers Program Director before seeking conversation with DCR. Will also mentioned that the Virginia Town Hall listing is a great way to stay in touch with what is going on with various Virginia environmental agencies around the state. Tricia added that the Agenda and Minutes of the Falls of the James Scenic River Advisory Committee are supposed to be posted on that forum but seemed to not have been listed for 2025. We were listed before that year and are listed for 2026. (<https://townhall.virginia.gov/l/meetings.cfm>) Greg & Will volunteered to track the listings of the Town Hall to notify the Committee of pertinent events.
- Katie stated that she had called each of the Committee members on the list and asked about their continued participation and suggested that if a member had not attended 4 meetings in a row, they be listed as inactive. She said that Nathan Burrell and Anne Wright had asked to step down. Lynn added that if they are resigning they should send a letter to DCR notifying them of that change.
- Katie suggested that Penelope Davenport and James Vonesh should be on this committee. The form for application is attached below these minutes. James declined stating that he had the interest just not the time. There was also mention of Kelly Powers with Timmons, Inc.
- Katie stated that she wished for the Committee to become more effective and to do so and move forward we should have Committee goals. Jim Hall suggested that Committee members should attend more City Public Meetings both to monitor, be seen and develop subsequent actions regarding the James River.

- Tricia mentioned that the Committee might benefit from the institutional knowledge of Lynn Crump, John Heerwald and Ralph Hambrick as each has been involved in or knows the history of the 54 year tenure of this group and its evolution both as protector and watchdog for the James River in Richmond + its relationship with both City and State governments. Katie suggested that we capture an exchange, perhaps as a forum, on video/audio and plan that for the Fall 2026.
 - Need to reschedule space for the following months' meetings (5th floor conference room is booked by the UDC (Urban Design Committee) on these dates:
 - April 16
 - July 16
 - October 15
 - Reedy Creek will most likely not be available these days due to programming. We are hoping to meet at the DPU conference room for at least 1 of these 3 meetings.
- **CRLC Richmond Updates:** Parker Agelasto, *Executive Director, Capital Regional Land Conservancy* – not present.
 - **VA Scenic Rivers Update:** Joshua Bateman, *Environmental Program Planner, DCR*
 - Lynn said that an effort was underway to provide GIS mapping of all Virginia Scenic River segments and proposed segments thereof, but this had not been vetted yet.
 - **Scenic Virginia Updates:** Lynn Crump, *Viewshed Project Manager*
 - Lynn reported that there had been a Board of Directors turnover and the organization was focusing on three efforts for the year.
 - Scenic Photo Contest
 - New Treasured Viewshed Regulations
 - A Fall Symposium on Scenic River Issues
 - **James River Park Update:** Andrew Alli, *JRP and Richmond Trails Superintendent* (not present but sent report)
 - JRP Update – See November/December 2025 Report attached to this e-mail
 - Highlights include Pumphouse Tour for the Mayor, Texas Beach Bridge Update, 22nd and 42nd St Stair tread repairs, Belle Isle Wedge Building demolition, etc.
 - **JRA Update:** Justin Doyle, *Director of Community Conservation, James River Association* (not present but sent link)
 - Mayo Bridge Update: <https://www.richmonder.org/heres-richmonds-first-crack-at-designing-a-new-mayo-bridge/>
 - **American Rivers:** Katie Schmidt, *Director, Dam Removals Project, American Rivers*
 - Katie reported that she is working on tackling lowhead dam regulations and working with Pat Calvert to seek potential options for Virginia. There are perhaps thousands in Virginia. It is very early in the process as the inventory, largely by volunteers, is not consistent, and there is no shared inventory.
 - Signage is needed as well as portage routes for all these dams plus funding for removal of those which no longer serve any purpose.
 - James Vonesh brought up that the Virginia Lakes and Watershed Conference would be held March 7-10, 2026 at the DoubleTree by Hilton Hotel, Richmond-Midlothian.
 - **DPU/RVA H2O Updates:**
 - Scott Morris will officially be our liaison with DPU
 - Alex Dahmn stated that there are about 2 more weeks on The Tredegar Street Project, then DPU will be out of there.
 - **Friends of James River Park Report:** Shawna Shade, *Office Administrator, Friends of the James River Park*
 - Shawna said that all was going well. They were still in process of reviewing applicants for the Executive Director position.
 - Also working on the Belle Isle play area.
 - **Brown's Island Renovation Update:** Alex Dahm, *Operations Manager, Venture Richmond*
 - Fencing is up and the project has been officially mobilized. They are starting removal of 70 invasive trees and a few natives, but planting 200 native trees to restore the riparian buffer.
 - Brown's Island WILL be open for Folk Festival next Fall.

- T-Pott access widening (on Brown's Island side) is underway.
- Ralph Hambrik asked about the possibility of designating/identifying a hiking loop using Brown's Island to the 14th Street Bridge and around. There was some discussion and about putting up fencing near the Norfolk-Southern Rail Bridge to prevent people from throwing scooters and the like into the river there. To be continued. Alex will try to notify Mr. Lewis Evans, DPW.
- **JROC:** Greg Velzy (President – James River Outdoor Coalition)
 - A conundrum concerning signage and recognition involving funding/gifts/contributions from profit/not-for-profit concerns has arisen over a JROC funded pumping station project, and JROC is looking for guidance. This led to much discussion. Penelope offered that signage had been made by Parks and Rec thanking CSX for allowing JRP fencing on their land and JRP refused to put it up. It would be nice to have a boiler plate policy but it doesn't exist. More thought and research is needed because there are now many instances of developers making/supporting parks to further enhance their properties.
 - Another issue was brought up concerning proposed neon/ tickertape-like signs giving river-level information. The general discussion revealed that they were perhaps not necessary as the audience needing the information probably already had it through a phone app, etc.
- Reviewing meeting frequency/dates for 2026 – not addressed
- **Richmond Riverfront Planning:** Marianne Pitts, *Deputy Director, Dept. of Planning & Development Review, City Of Richmond* - Not present.
 - Code refresh meeting on Draft #2 was 1/14/26

New Business:

- January 23, 2026 – 9:00AM - A Presentation + Tour will be given by Dick Helms, Historian, about the early history of the industries, land holdings and canal/spillway structures along the James River's southside – particularly around the 22nd Street Tower area. Please meet at Reedy Creek Headquarters for the Presentation.
- This afternoon at 4pm (January 15, 2026) – the Fireside Chat with Tara Lohan to discuss her recently published book *Undammed* about dam removals across the country. Katie will send out more information.

Open Discussion:

Adjourn: 1:30 pm

Next Public Meeting: February 19, 2026

Meetings usually begin at 12:00 noon in the Conference Room on the 5th floor of Richmond City Hall. Meetings are scheduled for the THIRD Thursday of each month. All meetings are open to the public. If you are not now receiving e-mail meeting notices and wish to receive them, please provide your name and e-mail address to kschmidt@americanrivers.org. If you would like to be removed from the list, so indicate at the above e-mail address.



BOARD RESUME

600 E. Main Street, Richmond, Virginia 23219

Congratulations on your interest in appointment to one of the State's Scenic River Advisory Committees. PLEASE COMPLETE THE FOLLOWING FORM. The information will be used to provide administrative support to the Committee and to provide information for reports on the Committee's activities. You may attach additional information you wish to bring to our attention.

Position (name of board/commission/committee) _____

Term of appointment _____ to _____

Name _____
last first middle

Home address _____
street city zip

County _____

Occupation _____

Business address _____
employer name address city zip

Home phone _____ Cell phone _____

email _____

I prefer to be contacted: _____ at home _____ at work

Best way to reach me: ___ phone ___ fax ___ email

Education _____

Date of birth _____ SS# _____

Information relevant to this position

Riparian landowner ___ yes ___ no Area resident ___ yes ___ no

Continued on back.

Please describe in brief the experience, interests, board memberships, civic activities (offices held, honors, etc) and other background information which qualify you to serve in this position. You may attach a resume or additional materials.

Are you aware of any conflicts of interest or other reasons that may preclude your serving on this local Scenic River Advisory Committee? Please explain.

Signature _____ Date _____