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PRESENT: Dr. Charles W. Curry, Chairman
Charles C. Schooley, Vice Chairman
William Bashaw
Bruce M. Bowman
Kitra A. Shiflett
Larry C. Howdyshell
Betty Jo Hamilton
Mark Grove
Larry Shiflett
Dale L. Cobb
Beatrice B. Cardellicchio-Weber

ABSENT: Garland Martin
Clay Hewitt

VIRGINIA: Meeting of the Agricultural Task Force Committee held on Thursday, December 8, 2005, at 7:00 P.M., in the County Government Center, Verona, Virginia.

Chairman Curry welcomed everyone and thanked them for coming. He stated that he hopes all have had a chance to review the report. He stated that on February 24, 2005 the Agricultural Task Force was convened by the Chairman of the Board of Supervisors. He stated that a goal was provided for them to identify challenges that are facing the agricultural industry in Augusta County and recommend ways to promote and preserve a strong agriculture economy over the next several decades. He stated that the committee received input from other localities, had brainstorming sessions, met with consultants, visited other localities, identified threats, opportunities, strategies, ranked them, and proceeded with their work in a priority order. He stated that tonight the citizens have before them the report of the Agricultural Task Force that identifies the findings and conclusions that the committee came to along with recommendations for the Board of Supervisors. He stated that all of the findings were voted on and supported by majority of the committee as well as the recommendations. He stated that following this meeting the Agricultural Task Force will have at least one more meeting depending on what the committee hears tonight and consider those recommendations for changes or additions to the Task Force Report. He stated that tonight's session is important because the committee would like to provide the Board of Supervisors the best possible advice. He stated that he will be giving a brief overview of what is in the report. He stated that he will not justify the findings or cover everything but just highlight some conclusions in the study. He stated that the committee thinks that there are good reasons to be pro-active, interested, and concerned about the agricultural economy and the challenges and threats that face it over the next several decades.

Chairman Curry stated that the first section deals with Agriculture Leadership. He stated that the committee realized as they worked through the report that there is a lot of work to do and someone needs to do it. He stated that the committee believes that it is important to establish an Agriculture Industry Council and a director to provide leadership and to carry out the recommendations if indeed they are going to be implemented. He stated that the committee has looked at some of the

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other studies done in other areas. He stated that counties that have had an Agricultural Task Force like this and have created leadership have had some degree of success. He stated that those counties that have not created leadership have not had much success.

Chairman Curry stated that section two deals with Competition for Agricultural Land. He stated that there is significant competition. He stated that development is a main issue. He stated that the Comprehensive Plan Survey identified rapid development as the worst problem facing the County with over 1,000 acres a year going into development. He stated that the sizes of lots have increased significantly. He stated that the committee looked especially at the lots in Exclusive Agriculture which has increased about three acres over the last nine years.

Chairman Curry stated that section three deals with Ordinance Changes. He stated that there are a number of recommendations dealing with ordinance revisions to limit lots, revisions to the Family Member Exception ordinance, eliminating lot creation through Boundary Line Adjustments, requiring Special Use Permits for dwellings in agricultural zones, and initiating reciprocal setbacks. Chairman Curry stated that section four deals with Purchase of Development Rights. He stated that currently there has been a lot of discussion on this topic. He stated that this is a tool that is out there across the County. He stated that it appears to have some potential for the preservation of agricultural land and is being used successfully in some places. He stated that the County has set aside some money for this program. He stated that they recommend a program be established but not before an appropriate infrastructure is in place. He stated that he thinks a lot of work needs to be done. He stated that this will require leadership and structure. He stated that other Counties that have this in place have someone to manage the structure and provide leadership.

Chairman Curry stated that section five deals with Taxation. He stated that the Commissioner of Revenue is interested in changing the revalidation of land use from an annual process to six years and the committee is recommending it. He stated that sliding scale land use taxation is an opportunity to save a little money on land taxing and it is voluntary. He stated that this is available by the state. He stated that it is not implemented in the County at this time and they are recommending it. He stated that there are significant issues with rollback taxes. He stated that this is another reason to have a strong agriculture leadership to assure that farmers know what is specifically involved in programs like this. He stated that there is not a lot of opportunity to shift the tax burden to more appropriate sources currently in the legislative but there are recommendations encouraging our County to be pro-active in seeking legislation. He stated that accounting for revenue does not mean auditing. He stated that showing farm and non-farm resource sources for the County so that decisions can be made that might impact agriculture with a clear understanding of the sources of revenue and the impact that it might have on revenue sources. He stated that cost of service studies have been done but not by the County. He stated that this is important from farm and non-farm revenue to understand and to inform the studies as to where the tax dollars come from.

Chairman Curry stated that section six deals with Agricultural Events. He stated that Augusta County is fortunate to be in both state and national agricultural events. He stated that there are many events held in Augusta County and many of them are listed in the report. He stated that one of them is the Market Animal Show which is the largest event east of the Mississippi River. He stated that it demonstrates significant youth interest in agriculture yet the committee has identified

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that other localities have a more appropriate facility for large agricultural events than Augusta County. He stated that the committee does not have any recommendation on that particular section but there are some findings.

Chairman Curry stated that section seven deals with Education. He stated that there is a full array of support services that are itemized in the report. He stated that there are professional organizations including Extension. He stated that the committee did note that there has been a reduction in enrollment in the agriculture education in recent years. He stated that with many people without agriculture backgrounds moving into Augusta County there seems to be a significant lack of accurate information that is getting out to the non-farm public.

Chairman Curry stated that section eight deals with Agriculture Vitality. He stated that farming requires a tremendous capital investment and that is escalating. He stated that the numbers in the report came from census figures. He stated that these are generic figures and each individual operation is different. He stated that product prices are unpredictable. He stated that some areas where there appears to be improvement is in agri-tourism and agricultural diversity and they have made some recommendations dealing with those issues. He stated that there needs to be marketing leadership for agricultural products.

Chairman Curry stated that section nine deals with Succession of Farms. He stated that the average age of a farmer is 57 years old. He stated that most of the farms will be under different ownership and different management. He stated that farming economics is a factor along with farm types. He stated that Dr. David Kohl used the formula 30-30-30-10 over the next several decades. He stated that 30% of our traditional family farms will scale down, 30% will exit, 30% will stay about the same, and 10% will grow. He stated that he hopes that when Dr. Kohl made those predications he was not considering a proactive County like Augusta County that is looking at its agriculture industry and hopes that the County could prove him wrong. He stated that Dr. Kohl's figures are not optimistic. He stated that escalating land values have resulted in more land being rented and leased for agriculture production. He stated that land availability is competitive among farmers and agriculture enterprises. He stated that there are several recommendations dealing with things to help improve the succession of farms from one generation to the next both from a structural and educational standpoint. He stated that the Extension office had an excellent program on farm succession and he was able to participate in that. He stated that the County needs many more of those kinds of activities.

Chairman Curry stated that section ten deals with Tradition and Heritage. He stated that Augusta County has a strong tradition of agriculture. He stated that 93% of the land is available for agricultural zoning in Augusta County. He stated that while some of the information in the report may appear to be threatening, there is reason for optimism. He stated that Augusta County has a rich historical heritage and many of the historical facilities and places are in agricultural zoning and the committee does have some recommendations dealing with identification of those and encouraging preservation.

Chairman Curry stated that section eleven deals with Nuisances to Agriculture. He stated that some of these items little can be done. He stated that the committee did have findings relative to

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threats from disease, weather, and predators. He stated that there are some recommendations to some of these issues.

Chairman Curry stated that section twelve deals with Other Suggestions. He stated that this is a miscellaneous category. He stated that conservation easements are a significant tool and there was some concern from the Agricultural Task Force that land under an easement stay in agricultural production. He stated that educational programs for both easement holders and farmers might help. He stated that farm labor is identified as being in short supply. He stated that recent legislation on the agriculture enterprise districts might have some potential if funded by the state for assisting with that concern for new and expanding agricultural production enterprises.

Chairman Curry stated that is an overview of the report. He stated that there is a list of the membership of the committee on the screen and if the citizens would prefer to provide written comments or to talk with someone individually between now and next Thursday night, your views would be considered in the committee's final deliberations. He stated that the committee would like to thank the Board of Supervisors for giving them this opportunity. He stated that this has been a growth experience and it is important that the Board has shown a foresight to establish a Task Force and showing the interest to preserving the agriculture economy. He stated that he would like to thank the Shenandoah Resource Conservation & Development Council for providing a grant which the committee has used for some of the expenses of the Agricultural Task Force in visiting other Counties and he appreciates their support.

Chairman Curry stated that they are only making a recommendation to the Board of Supervisors. He stated that if any ordinance changes are going to be made there will be public hearings at the appropriate time. He stated that the committee would like to hear what the citizens like or dislike about the findings and recommendations and if there are any additions. He stated that the committee's role tonight is to take notes and listen.

Mr. Andre Viette, stated that he has been a member of the Farm Bureau and the Board of Directors four different times and more recently have seen all of the work that this committee has done. He stated that green space used to be the first issue in keeping Augusta County green. He stated that he is concerned about why this report needs to be done so fast. He stated that when you talk about something as complex as this issue it is difficult to do this quickly. He stated that farms are different all over Augusta County. He stated that his farm is his family equity. He stated that the biggest equity is the land that farmers own. He stated that if a farmer is forced to sell a piece of land to pay the mortgage it is serious. He stated that the farms are devalued because of these ordinances on those farms that are closer to Verona, Staunton, Waynesboro, and Stuarts Draft. He stated that he does not agree that the largest lot should be three acres. He stated that the committee is taking away value from the farmers. He stated that he does not agree with giving lots to only children. He stated that some farmers have a cousin or a nephew running the farm and sometimes the farmer wants to give to his wife. He stated that if he could only cut a lot off of his farm every five years he would be 100 years old before he can pay his mortgage. He stated that these are very limiting factors. He stated that he understands that the committee is trying to preserve agriculture but you cannot force agriculture. He stated that his land is rented. He stated that the committee needs to look at the economics of farming. He stated that there are some real problems with property values. He stated that if the provisions in this report get approved they would devalue the land. He

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stated that he was looking at the negative aspects and was not looking at the positives. He stated that the report is very positive. He stated that he will forward more detailed comments on these topics. He stated that he has four children and one stayed on the farm. He stated that one of the main items is that the family member exception should not be limited to children. He stated that there are abuses on subdividing property anytime someone finds a way to get around it. He stated that he hopes this committee does not rush the report and listen to the other points of view that take a lot of input and consideration.

Mr. Gerald Garber stated that he would like to thank the amount of time each of the committee members put into this report. He stated that it would appear that Chairman Curry would be in favor of the leadership position and if a lot of these things would be implemented that is probably necessary. He stated that while the leadership position might be necessary and would require more support. He asked that Chairman Curry look at that very carefully because he knows that he is very conservative with his views. He stated that in section two the Comprehensive Plan Survey states that 67% said rapid development is a problem, 59% said loss of agriculture is the second worst problem, 65% said that they would be willing to pay more taxes to protect agriculture, and 65% said that they would be willing to pay additional taxes to increase incentives for farmland. He stated that if there is any chance that the questionnaire showed how long you have lived in Augusta County. He stated that he wondered how many people have been here less than five years and he is wondering how many of them really mean it. He stated that two quick positive items that he sees is under section three under the Comprehensive Plan Survey stated 71% of the people would support higher density, smaller lots, and flexible neighbors. He stated that many people are concerned about how many new neighbors that they are going to have. He stated that if we can put them in places that are least offensive to eating up large pieces of land it will help in what this committee is trying to do. He stated that he road around the County a lot this weekend thinking about this report. He stated that when a house is put in the middle of 20 acres the 100 acres around it is messed up for farming purposes. He stated that the house is not compatible. He stated that there is no worse abuse of development in Augusta County than through the Family Member Exception. He stated that he has told Ms. Frye that the County will run out of farmers before we will run out of farms. He stated that if they were to have a job fair and tell kids they can do whatever they want to do but there is a catch, you have to sign a note for \$500,000, agree to work 70-80 hours a week, and get paid less than minimum wage but you can do whatever you want to do. He stated that according to the numbers that is what is being required if you want to farm in Augusta County. He stated that \$43,000 income - \$3.2 million investment in a cow/calf operation and he does not know how that would be paid back. He stated that he noticed that 42% gross less than \$5,000 and 30% gross less than \$25,000. He stated that 67% gross more than \$250,000. He stated that he does not see how you could full time farm and do less than that. He stated that 4% of that is full time farmers. He stated that there are exceptions to all rules. He stated that there are people who can do corn mazes, pumpkin patches, hay rides but there is only room for a few enterprises. He stated that maybe the director is needed to help the part time farmers according to the numbers. He stated that the part time farmers need to get a job which is what the people who want to preserve land think is the enemy. He stated that he knows that a lot of people think the enemy to young farmers is the price of land and if land is in a PDR it will not be developed but it will not keep the price of land down. He stated that it might keep the land from being \$50,000 an acre but it will not keep it from being \$6,000 an acre. He stated that there are people with money that want land under PDRs. He stated that the rural category of Augusta County will only be preserved

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by the part time farmers. He stated that the weather is one of his biggest problems but there was no solution to it. He thanked the committee for all their work.

Mr. Larry Weeks, 430 Baynes Road, Waynesboro, stated that in the passed few years he has spoke with the Board of Supervisors about farming issues and controlling residential growth. He stated that next year he will serve as the President of the Augusta County Farm Bureau Federation. He stated that tonight his remarks are his alone. He stated that he wants to thank the Board of Supervisors for setting up this committee. He stated that he wanted to thank the committee on all of their hard work. He stated that he did read the report in its entirety. He stated that the report downloaded perfectly the first time and he wanted to thank the committee for the formatting of the report. He stated that this is a challenging undertaking. He stated that he agrees with everything in the report. He stated that the he thinks the committee did an outstanding job of addressing the issues and recognizing the challenges. He stated that many of the challenges need to be addressed at the state level. He stated that the committee addresses a lifestyle farm. He stated that he breaks farming down into three categories. He stated that he has been all three. He stated that him and his wife bought calves and it was a learning experience. He stated that he was a hobby farmer. He stated that these types of farmers are not worried about the incentives. He stated that the second group is the tax right off farmer. He stated that as he migrated from being a hobby farmer, buying cows and sheep, it became a good tax right off. He stated that this is a heavy capital investment. He stated that the last five years he put a strong emphasis on being a profitable farming operation. He stated that last year they dispersed the cattle herd and they are now a full time sheep operation. He stated that now they are looking at the money and what they could do to make it a profitable enterprise. He stated that it is easy to ignore the hobby farmers. He stated that it is easy to help the full time farmers because they need the help. He stated that nationally, state, and locally only 2-5% of farmers are 100% farmers. He stated that there are very few 100% farmers. He asked how the middle group could be addressed. He stated that the committee talks about agri-tourism. He stated that he has talked about eco-tourists in Waynesboro. He stated that many people come up to the area to ride bikes in the countryside. He stated that not only is the agri-tourist good for the economy but so is the eco-tourist which is the joggers, runners, and bicyclists. He stated that he would like to discuss education. He stated that one of the things the Farm Bureau did was a change in the structure to bring additional funds into Augusta County. He stated that next year he would like to do more things in the community to get people more aware of agriculture. He stated that there are many enemies when it comes to farming and we need to help start educating the public on agriculture. He stated that is why he helps support agriculture in the classroom. He stated that the County needs programs to address children and the adult population.

Mr. Tom Stanley stated that he represents the team of Agriculture Extension Agents that serve Augusta County. He stated that his comments are available as an Executive Summary in the back. He stated that if anyone is interested in reading the supporting data, it is available at the Extension Office. He stated that he would like to express thanks to the Task Force for their efforts and time. He stated that his comments are a compilation of his and his colleagues. He stated that the rural character of Augusta County can be said to rest on two pillars. He stated that one is the rural conditions and the other is profit-driven commercial agriculture. He stated that Augusta County enjoys a diverse and vibrant agriculture industry encompassing poultry, dairy, beef, grains, hay,

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vegetables, fruit, ornamental plants, timber, horses, sheep, and goats. He stated that the following six salient points are the most important:

1. Augusta County will best adapt to the regional, national, and global market trends by further development of its production of milk, ornamental plants, high quality identity-preserved grazing livestock, fresh vegetables and fruits, and hardwood timber. It is the profitable management of these enterprises that allow them to persist. Locking-our housing development will not, by itself, preserve farming.
2. The poultry industry will probably be very important for the next 10-20 years to sustaining full time family farms in Augusta County. It is not likely that Augusta County will see expansion of contract poultry production. Market competition combined with environmental and development pressure will likely put poultry in Augusta County at a disadvantage in the years ahead.
3. Dairy farming is the enterprise most important to sustaining our infrastructure for agriculture and thereby supporting other agriculture enterprises.
4. Opportunities in agri-tourism, certified organic products, and direct marketed value-added products will be important for some individual farms. It is unrealistic to expect a large number of our farms to convert to enterprises significantly different from those that are currently conducted in Augusta County. Therefore, if commercial agriculture is going to remain the vibrant local industry it is today, the production of high quality forage crops (pasture, hay, silages) must continue to dominate our rural landscape.
5. Viable commercial farming operations in Augusta County are in jeopardy because they do not have a plan to meet the needs of retiring farm operators or to transfer the farm business to another operator. Farmers need to be supported in developing plans for their retirement and strategies that insure the land remains in commercial agriculture production if they so desire.
6. Large areas of "green space" in Augusta County, especially woodland, are suffering from neglect. There is an ongoing need to educate landowners on how minimal management of woodland and pastures can yield significant long-run benefits for the landowner and the community in terms of productive pastures and valuable timber.

Mr. Stanley stated that they have identified three recommendations for the committee. They are as follows:

1. The establishment of a Purchase of Development Rights program has the potential to greatly benefit the preservation of productive agricultural land for use in commercial agriculture production. Extension urges the County leadership to explore the many different ways PDR's can be implemented including "Conservation Lease Agreements" for 15, 20, and 40 year periods. This will provide landowners an array of options and result in more total acres remaining available for commercial farming than if permanent easements PDRs are the only option available for landowners.

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2. The proposed Director of Agriculture Development could be a valuable asset in helping Augusta County attain its goal of supporting an economically and environmental sustainable agriculture. Extension urges Augusta County to clearly delineate the priority missions of the Director of Agriculture Development. Extension believes that these priorities should be: 1. The implementation and oversight of PDR's and other farmland protection measures; 2. Enforcement of zoning and ordinances intended to support agriculture and 3. Advocacy in agriculture policy issues at the local, state, and federal levels.
3. Virginia Cooperative Extension stands ready and is the organization best equipped to deliver research-based information and educate landowners, farms, and all citizens in Augusta County. Extension hopes Augusta County will continue to consider the Virginia Cooperative Extension as the lead agency for delivering educational information related to agriculture and rural societal issues.

Mr. Bobby Whitescarver, 120 Trimble Mill Road, Swoope, stated that he would like to commend the committee. He stated that they did a lot of work in a short period of time. He stated that he would applaud the findings and recommendations and he would like to offer some suggestions or additions to the Principles and Assumptions in the front that may help strengthen it. He stated that all of our water begins here and all of the land area is in the Chesapeake Bay Watershed. He stated that the Chesapeake Bay Commission found an 8% increase in the watershed resulting in a 40% increase of impervious space. He stated that an increase in population does not mean a bunch of people. He stated that it means that we are paving over a lot of space. He stated that all of the impervious space is all of the concrete and asphalt where rainfall equals 100% runoff. He stated that farmland can absorb a lot of water. He stated that the number one priority of the farm is production but he would like for readers of the report to realize that farmland produces much more than just money in the farmers' pocket. He stated that a farm produces water, a home to wildlife, and forests. He stated that farmland is the largest carbon sink in the world. He stated that it is very important to keep the farmland for the economy and the health of the land. He stated that on page 22 the committee lists assets for the County and one should be USDA office. He stated that he agrees that land use tax is good but he does think there are some issues with land use taxation. He stated that there are people getting land use taxation that probably should not get land use taxation. He stated that the County should look at this issue and adjust that so that the full time farmers get the most use out of the tax and maybe have sliding scale land use taxation. He stated that he commends the committee for recommending the installment PDRs. He stated that he was at the meeting when the gentleman from Albemarle County spoke and stated that the farmers earning most of the income from the farm got the largest PDR price and farmers that did not get any income from the farm did not get much money or zero money from the program. He stated that he likes that idea because the full time farmers should be rewarded.

Mr. Robert Heizer, 2210 Middlebrook Road, stated that in 1980 he bought 102 acres. He stated that seven years ago he bought 62 acres. He stated that he is 54 years old and his social security is not a lot. He stated that if you can sell one lot every five years and if he ends up in a nursing home the farm will be split in half. He stated that he would like to leave the farm to his daughter. He stated that he feels that the ordinance is fine the way it is as one lot per calendar year. He

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stated that the ordinances are too tight. He stated that what the committee is trying to help they may hurt in the long run. He stated that there are not too many large tracts in the County. He stated that the committee is trying to protect the farmers now but what about the next generation. He stated that he would like to pass the farm to his child.

Mr. Rick Shiflet, 177 Eidson Hill Lane, stated that he wanted to thank the committee for all of their time. He stated that he was surprised that the committee came up with as many recommendations as they did. He stated that the report is very good. He stated that he would like to add a few things that the committee could consider. He stated that the number one priority is to establish an agriculture council and an agriculture director. He stated that we cannot do this piecemeal. He stated that he would like to see cluster development enacted with ordinances when we are considering lots in agriculture land where if you had more than one parcel and there was one lot per parcel they could be backed against each other. He stated that to limit residential sprawl the County should commit to community re-development not community development as the Board says now. He stated that the County has not recognized Exclusive Agriculture with any kind of benefits. He stated that there needs to be incentives for people in Exclusive Agriculture to keep their land in Exclusive Agriculture as well as to make up for the less lots that could be created as the committee proposes. He stated that he agrees that Family Member Exception is the greatest abuse. He stated that there needs to be a minimum acreage requirement. He stated that a 100 acre lot with five kids, lots are created, and now there is a subdivision there and somewhere the County needs to draw the line. He stated that he commends the Board of Supervisors for setting aside the money for a PDR program. He stated that the County needs a program that is flexible. He stated that it should depend on the soil. He stated that the County needs to protect the prime soil that the County has. He stated that any Boundary Line Adjustment that leads to a new lot should have a fee attached to it. He stated that he questions the \$0.27 for commercial and industrial and whether that considers the tax exempt status and the entire infrastructure that it took to get those people to come in. He stated that the \$0.27 is misrepresented on the industrial side. He stated that they do not know how agriculture is going to change in the County. He stated that there is a lot of technology out there and the County needs to keep their land open and all of their resources open. He stated that we need a natural resource survey in our watersheds and there should be a limit based on the resources available. He stated that he hopes that the Board of Supervisors does act on the final recommendations from the committee.

Mr. Larry Grubb, 183 Summerdean Road, Middlebrook, stated that he bought seven acres in 1987. He stated that he redid the farmhouse. He stated that he has no County services on his property. He stated that all of his property has road frontage. He stated that all around him is Exclusive Agriculture. He stated that his taxes are almost \$10,000 and acre. He stated that residential development is a net loss to County finances. He stated that you should be able to cut one lot off a year and it should be an acre of land. He stated that he has six kids and he will not be able to give all of his kids an acre. He stated that he loves the country. He stated that the government should not take the people's rights away unless the County is ready to pay the farmer fair market value for it.

Mr. Charlie Huppuch, 81 Fort River Road, stated that he is the Chairman of the Forestry Committee for the Soil & Water Conservation District. He stated that one area that the committee was lacking in the program was forestry which is important. He stated that it is a valuable component. He

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stated that the forest is important as far as the air and water quality. He stated that a lot of farmers and wood lot owners do not do well as far as managing their wood lots. He stated that many of them have sold forest products at much lower prices than they could have gotten if they would have had a quality inventory and quantity. He stated that if they had a professional plan made for them they could use the wood lot for the best advantage. He stated that he would recommend that the Director of Agriculture Development should work with the Department of Forestry and Cooperative Extension Services to better inform forest owners how to manage their forest for better economic values while using best management practices to protect their land.

Ms. Kathy Holm, PO Box 60, Verona, stated that she would like to congratulate the Augusta County Task Force for the detailed and thoughtful job they did in preparing these recommendations. She would strongly encourage the Augusta County Board of Supervisors to consider and act on them, not just put them on a shelf. She stated that she was immediately very impressed when the first thing the Task Force did was to call on the County to lay out an organizational framework and establish the necessary leadership to support the agricultural industry in Augusta County. She stated that the idea of creating an Agriculture Industry Council and a Director of Agriculture Development is critical to focus attention on strengthening and supporting agriculture in the County. She stated that the recommendations to amend the Comprehensive Plan and amend and tighten the ordinances to help shrink the number of lots created on land zoned for Exclusive and General Agriculture were excellent. She stated that recommendations to using sliding scale zoning and by looking to add more flexibility and diversity for uses in agriculture zones to meet changes in public demands and interests were also very good. She stated that she appreciated the call for regular cost community service studies to be done in the County. She stated that section nine contained some excellent recommendations and strategies for transition management and the investment in the long term viability of agriculture by looking into the next generation. She stated that one area that needs additional consideration is section four. She stated that she was really pleased and impressed that the committee recommended creating a PDR program. She stated that by using installment purchase agreements and calling for dedicated and permanent source of funding to sustain the program would have a large impact. She stated that while the Agricultural Task Force focuses on agriculture, she would urge the County to keep the door open to protect other kinds of land that the County might deem important which might include water source protection, historical properties with significant acreages, etc. She stated that the mechanics of determining which properties can protect could be worked out in a ranking system that the County would come up with. She stated that there is no language promoting Agricultural Forestal Districts in the County. She stated that while they do not offer permanent protection. She stated that they have a lot of benefits. She stated that they maintain the community of agriculture, Board of Supervisors take them into account when considering rezoning requests, and in some Counties they are regularly renewed and offer some kind of long term protection. She stated that people should know that they are one important tool for agriculture land protection and maintaining the strength of agriculture communities. She stated that she was a little disturbed at the end by some references to stop conservation easement abuse. She stated that agencies and organizations that hold easements such as Virginia Outdoor Foundation and Valley Conservation Council would not agree to hold and easement that does not meet IRS regulations. She stated that she would suggest that any abuse is the abuse of the tax code and not the easement. She thanked the Task Force for all of their hard work and thoughtful consideration of these difficult issues.

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Mr. John Eckman, Valley Conservation Council, 17 Barristers Row, Staunton, stated that he really appreciates the work that the committee put into this report. He stated that the draft report demonstrates a thorough review of many of the issues facing Augusta County and other parts of the Valley today. He stated that he has comments that he will hand out to the committee. He stated that he recognizes that the committee's task is focused on the vitality of the agricultural economy and not on land use in general. He stated that many of the recommendations will improve land use policy for all. He stated that the recommendations might be strengthened if the agriculture community can continue to build alliances with others concerned with agriculture, forestry, natural heritage, water quality, tourism, and general rural heritage. He stated that all of these communities are facing issues that are sometimes beyond their control and together perhaps those challenges could be turned into opportunities. He stated that he and Sara Hollberg have some general points:

1. Recognition that overall development pattern has to change if we're to protect rural areas.
2. A multi-pronged effort is needed. Effective zoning is the foundation, but also important are economic incentives, tax policy of all kinds, education, estate planning, and coordinating with other initiatives.
3. Farmers need PDRs and other economic incentives. It's not farmland without farmers.
4. A structure of agriculture leadership and ongoing input is needed.
5. Zoning and other policies need to be brought into alignment with goals.
6. Flexibility for on-farm businesses (and why not in all agricultural zones) is important
7. Agriculture Enterprise District should be considered.

Mr. Eckman stated that the forestry perspective should be brought into this report. He stated that the Agriculture Forestal District should be included in the report. He stated that these are voluntary. He stated that he has a concern with the open space cluster design and it should be not used to increase overall number of lots and is generally not advised because it still brings residential development into agricultural areas. He stated that will not solve the overall problem. He stated that the PDR program should be expanded and not lose sight of the other benefits of land conservation and how that might be compatible with a viable agriculture economy. He stated that there could be some funding sources for PDRs to include cultural resources (battlefields), water quality, soil conservation, source water protection, and forestry. He stated that he would suggest that the language be dropped entirely or hope that the committee clarify the meaning on conservation easement abuse. He stated that the abuses with the tax code that are sometime associated with conservation easements is a large concern. He stated that he will leave the zoning comments for the committee to read through and he appreciates all of the committee's efforts.

Chairman Curry asked Mr. Eckman to explain cluster development.

Mr. Eckman stated that cluster development is a great technique to the houses that are there but is not always a great technique to preserve larger scale farmland areas. He stated that might create more subdivisions in areas that are not appropriate. He stated that on a site specific basis it could be a great tool. He stated that if you want to cluster your least productive soils that will make a lot of sense.

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Ms. Hamilton stated that the citizens should look at the minutes regarding the conservation easements and see the discussions the committee had and how they came up with the language that they did.

Chairman Curry stated that the minutes should clarify the wording. He stated that there was concern about loss of agricultural land use with conservation easements falling out of agriculture production. He stated that the committee should take a look at clarifying that statement. He stated that he would appreciate input on that.

Mr. Eric Shiflet stated that one day he hopes to be a full time farmer but right now he is a tax assessor. He stated that educating citizens who are thinking about coming to the area is important. He stated that land value has either doubled or tripled since the Augusta County assessments. He stated that land value has nothing to do with development. He stated that several Counties that have PDR programs and conservation easements show that it does not make any difference with keeping the land values down. He stated that people cannot afford land and it is only going to get worse.

Mr. Wes Kent, Weyers Cave, stated that he is a young full time farmer in Augusta County. He stated that he moved from Rockingham County five years ago. He stated that Rockingham County is sad and he does not know what is happening there. He stated that he is glad to be living in Augusta County because of the way that it is right now. He stated that he has opportunities with his neighbors and they work together. He stated that PDRs are very important. He stated that he was able to purchase the farm at fair market value. He stated that he has to milk 100 cows, he has a poultry operation, semi-large beef operation, with himself and a part time employee to make the mortgage payments. He stated that he has aged a lot in five years. He stated that this is worth it to him and it is in his blood. He stated that he hopes his child will farm. He stated that he needs to have a larger farm in the future in order for his operation to grow. He stated that he has traveled through FFA and the problem in Augusta County is the same as all over the United States and if there is no farmland there will not be food and fiber locally grown. He stated that the first way to protect the food supply is to protect the farmland.

Chairman Curry asked if any of the committee members wanted to make any comments at this time?

Mr. Larry Shiflett stated that just because land is a conservation easement does not mean that it will be conserved for agriculture. He stated that quite often when you talk to someone about a conservation easement the first thing they say is how many houses do you want to put on this land and how much land do you want to set aside. He stated that it is a self defeating thing. He stated that they are not as straightforward as they seem.

Mr. Larry Howdysshell stated that this has been a very interesting process. He stated that Chairman Curry has been doing a great job. He stated that he has lived on a farm all of his life and there has been a lot of changes in farming. He stated that in order for farmers to be viable you have to have it in your blood and you have to love dealing with the land. He stated that he has seen Rockingham County land going for \$19,000 an acre and it stayed in farming. He stated that it is tough to make everyone happy with the process. He stated that there is land issues, growth issues, sustainable

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agriculture, and try to bring youth into farming but first you have to have the love of the land. He stated that the committee spent long hours doing this and the committee has a good report. He appreciates the citizens coming out tonight to express their views.

Chairman Curry stated that he would ask the Task Force members to review what they have heard and anyone who has any more information to get it to them. He stated that the next meeting will be Thursday, December 15, 2005 at which time the committee will reconsider some of the items mentioned and add any items to the report.

There being no further business, the meeting was adjourned.

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Chairman