



Comments to RockCo BOS re Rezoning Request at Mauzy I-81 Interchange

August 24, 2022

David Brotman – Executive Director, FNFSR

I want to thank the Board for its sincere consideration of what is in its hands tonight, and how the investments and interests of the County and its residents will be affected by this decision.

My interest has been that you each have a clear understanding of what Smith Creek is, and how, and how much, the County is invested in the well-being of both the Creek, and the landowners it serves.

The site under consideration slopes entirely toward Smith Creek, which runs within 1500-feet of its edge. Although over 100,000 streams drain into the Chesapeake Bay, Smith Creek is one of only three to be selected as Showcase Watersheds for the whole 6-state, 64,000 square mile region. For twelve years now, Smith Creek has been a demonstration site for the entire Bay watershed – informing farmers and communities throughout. Millions of dollars and years of labor have been devoted to building partnerships with Rockingham County landowners, proving expert help, and covering much of the cost as our farmers adapt their practices to include water quality as a new target yield.

The Smith Creek Partnership is a group of more than 40 Land Trusts, Federal and State Agencies, Universities, Farming Organizations, and Non-Profits, (and the City of Harrisonburg) – many with offices in the County – was formed for this purpose. Many have offices in the County. Because of their extensive work, Smith Creek is known as the Showcase of the three Showcases, and this year, the group secured another \$1Million grant.

The results are important locally. Cleaner water means healthier fish populations, lower drinking water costs, better and safer recreation in our creeks and rivers. But to be clear, all of this investment – in dollars, relationships, the efforts and costs of changing farming practices – all of this, is to demonstrate to the entire Chesapeake Bay region how a community can work together and support our farmers to improve water quality. If we want healthier, more productive streams, rivers, and Bay, we have to partner locally, find what works, and share our results with others.

The Partnership's clout brings gains to the County in jobs, support to its farmers, cleaner waters, and in knowledge and adaptations that give us a leg up in agriculture. Over 150-Counties in the Bay Region look to Rockingham for what works. Risks that we might place on Smith Creek, are placed on the whole twelve-year investment, and on what the entire Bay region can learn.

Because of our hole-filled geology, a business zone – so close to Smith Creek – would raise concerns about risks to Smith Creek's water quality (AND quantity). Water- and pavement-intensive businesses would exaggerate those concerns greatly. Rezoning this land for any business purpose has the potential to put all of the County's investments into the Creek at risk. I urge the Board not to table, but to decline this rezoning request, and to invite even more understanding of its roles and opportunities in the regionally important work with Smith Creek and our farmers.