

A scenic view of a river flowing through a forested area. The river is surrounded by lush green trees and rocks. In the background, a bridge spans across the river. The sky is blue with some clouds.

Chatham County Environmental Review Advisory Committee

Annual Report
2022 - 2023

Environmental Review Advisory Committee

Current Members:

Elaine Chiosso, Chair
Alicia Koblansky, Vice-Chair
Jeannie Ambrose
Adam Ayers
Amy Brooks
Diana Hales
Heather Holley
Conner Jarvis
Mary Beth Koza
Laura McKelvey
Rachel Pheneuf
Frank Stiles

7 meetings held between July 1, 2022- June 30, 2023

Mission and Purpose

The mission of the Environmental Review Advisory Committee (ERAC) is to:

- Advise the Board of Commissioners on environmental policy and related county ordinances, including the watershed ordinance.
- Conduct special projects, as assigned, to protect the environment.
- Assist County staff with review of required state and federal environmental permits for projects in the county.
- Partner with towns in the county and other interested governmental agencies on mutual concerns related to the environment.

ERAC also serves as the Watershed Review Board which is empowered to make decision on these matters:

- Appeals of decisions of land use ordinances by administrative officials, and
- Variance requests to vary or modify the regulations or provisions of an ordinance due to practical difficulties or unnecessary hardships in the way of carrying out the ordinance.
- Recommendations to the County Commissioners on amendments to the Watershed Protection Ordinance.

ERAC Accomplishments



Environmental Impact Assessment Reviews

- **In February 2023, ERAC reviewed the EIA for the Goldston Cricket Fields application and deemed it incomplete**, with many questions raised. After discussion ERAC voted unanimously and found the EIA for the proposed Goldston Sports Cricket Fields to be incomplete and inadequate. Public input and knowledge of local conditions was helpful in raising issues not covered in the consultant's EIA.
- **In June, 2023, ERAC reviewed and discussed the EIA for Savannah Ridge development and considered it to be acceptable**, but asked that the questions and comments raised in our review be addressed.

Watershed Review Board

UDO Chapter 9 Watershed Protection Review

- In April 2023, ERAC reviewed and discussed Chapter 9, Watershed Protection of the new UDO that is included in the ReCode Chatham. The discussions brought up concerns about changes, confusing language, and questions on different sections of the chapters. Notes and comments on the draft were prepared for a future meeting with members of Planning Staff.
- In May 2023, ERAC discussed the notes and comments on Chapter 9 of the UDO draft with members of the Planning staff. These questions and answers can be found in the minutes from this meeting.



Inter-Advisory Committee Work

Tree Protection Working Group

- From May of 2022 until Dec 2022, three members of ERAC were elected to be part of a new inter-advisory committee Tree Protection Working Group to come up with recommendations for rules to protect and retain tree canopy coverage as new development increases in Chatham County. This Working Group was approved by the Board of Commissioners for a 6 month period. It included ERAC, the Planning Board, the Climate Change Advisory Comm. and Grand Trees of Chatham members.
- ERAC members discussed the draft recommendations at their September and October 2022 meetings. The final recommendations from the Tree Protection Working Group were presented to the Board of Commissioners at the December 6, 2022 meeting. Guidance was offered to the County in regards to protecting and maintaining a tree canopy as part of the Unified Development Ordinance.

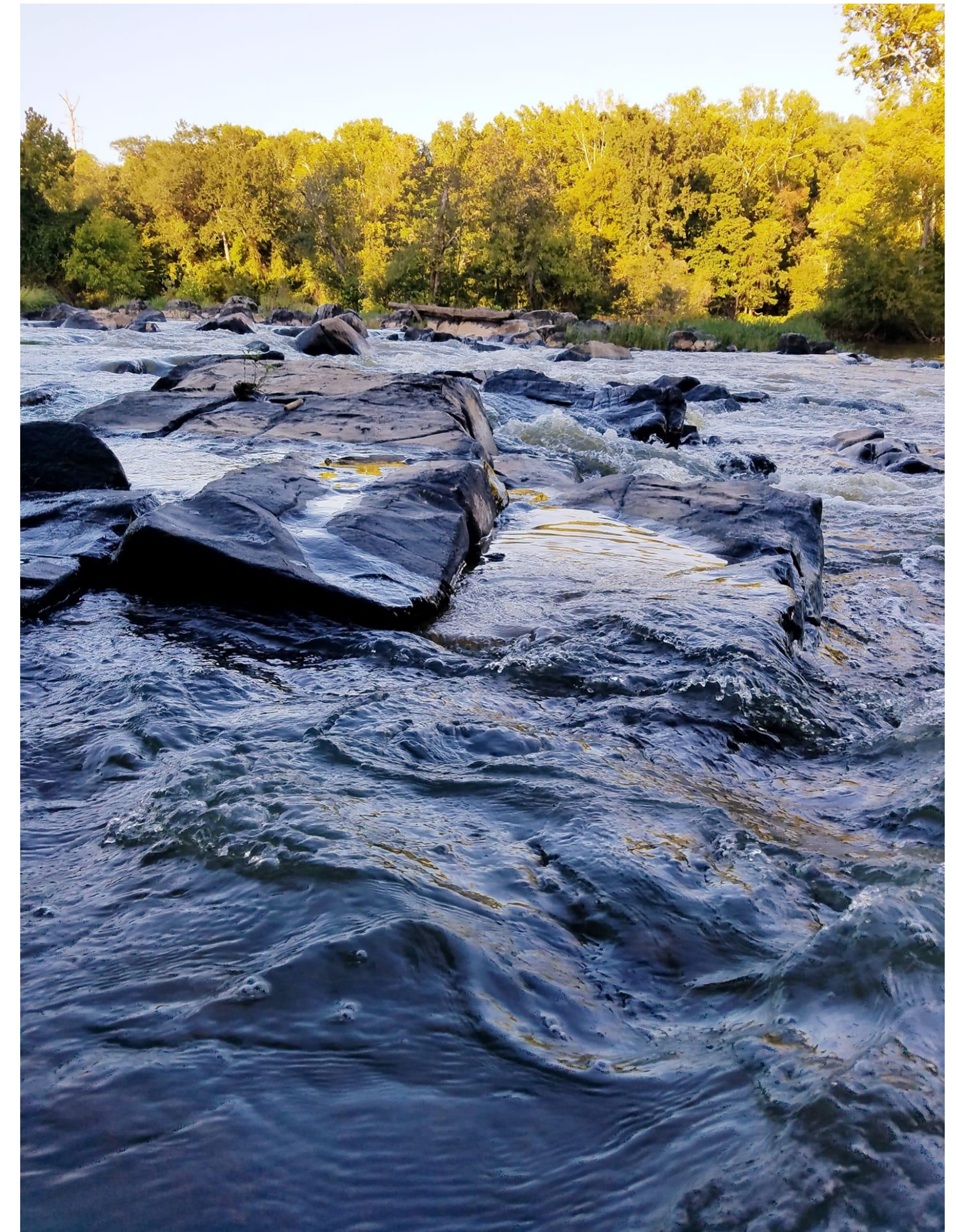
ERAC Liaisons

- With the goal of more communication and partnerships between advisory boards and committees, ERAC appointed 2 members to attend Planning Board and Climate Change Advisory Committee meetings and make reports to ERAC.

Barriers and Challenges

The Environmental Review Committee addressed the problem of low attendance at our meetings in 2021- 2022 by reviewing the county's Advisory Board policy on attendance, and asking ERAC members to commit to following it. This, along with turnover on the committee, has seemed to solve the situation and the necessary quorum of members have been present in the past year to accomplish our goals.

We thank the Board of Commissioners for appointing members who have the time and knowledge to serve on this advisory board.



Recommendations

- We appreciate the support of the Board of Commissioners to create and appoint inter-advisory board/committee members to task forces to better tackle key environmental issues for the county.
- We encourage the BOC to request ERAC to provide advice on development and pollution issues that are in addition to the EIA reviews and Watershed Review Board recommendations. For example, topics such as water quality in our rivers and lakes, industrial pollutants, sedimentation issues and biodiversity and more could be taken up by ERAC if the BOC wishes to have our input on these issues.

We are here to serve you.

Thank You

We are grateful for the support of the **Watershed Protection Director, Rachael Thorn**, along with **Planning Director Jason Sullivan** and UDO consultants for the expertise they provide, and to **Holly Squires** as our excellent recording secretary.

