

## Presentation to Community Participation Team

May 4, 2020 Building F Board Rm 4-6pm

### **Friends of Forge Road and Toano:**

**Origins:** Friends of Forge Road and Toano (FORT) is a nonprofit group founded in 2004 by concerned citizens in Upper James City County. We now have approximately 75 paid members. Our members have served on the Planning Commission, Chesapeake Bay Board, Wetlands Board, James City County Historical Commission, and the Purchase of Development Rights Committee.

**Mission and Goals:** We are working with other neighborhood associations and various County groups to promote the preservation of rural lands, enhance awareness of the area's historic significance, and support agri-tourism. Our mission is closely aligned with the goals of the former Purchase of Development Rights program.

### **A Sample of Accomplishments:**

1. Obtained approval from the Board of Supervisors for the 2006 Toano Streetscapes and Design Guidelines study to provide direction for future improvements in Toano, which is designated as a Community Character Area. This study has since been used as a starting point for the restoration of the historic village of Toano and its recent designation as a National Historic Commercial District.
2. Secured funding from James City County for the two "Welcome to Toano" signs and landscaping in the median across from James River Equipment.
3. Created two booklets "Welcome to Toano" and "Burnt Ordinary - Toano Center of Trade and Industry". Two members wrote and provided photos for these booklets.
4. Established a Neighborhood Watch program for Forge Road.
5. Participate in the Adopt-A Highway program for Forge Road, Little Creek Dam Road and Lakeview Drive.
6. Prepared a "Times in Toano" photo exhibition which depicts photos of the early life, farmhouses and commercial buildings from the 18<sup>th</sup>, 19<sup>th</sup> and early

20<sup>th</sup> century. These photos are now displayed in the Martin Store, being restored by Jack and Jeff Wray.

7. Prepared numerous letters to the editor and presentations at the JCC Board of Supervisors meetings to retain the rural character in project designs for Whitehall, Colonial Heritage, Uncle's Neck, and Brickyard Landing.
8. Provided support for the Purchase of Development Rights (PDR) program which has conserved 944 acres of land in James City County. Note: this number includes use of Greenspace funds for the Gilley property consisting of 243 acres.
9. Adopted Little Creek Dam Park.

### **Desired Future Outcomes:**

The goals of the Purchase of Development Rights program have, to-date, been threefold. The program can be used to protect active farm land and agricultural activities, to preserve view sheds and scenic vistas, and to protect against over development of sensitive areas. These goals have been reiterated in previous Comp Plans but not one of these goals can be met without adequate funding and staff. Additional recommendations for the preservation of rural character in the upper county are also included below:

Accordingly, Friends of Forge Road and Toano respectfully urges:

1. Reinstatement of funds and staff\* to the PDR program. We believe this is critical if James City County (JCC) is serious about the preservation of rural lands. The last purchases authorized by the BOS was in 2015, likely using a combination of general and VA Department of Agriculture and Consumer Services funds. \*With regard to a PDR administrator, the Board of Supervisors authorized the creation of an Assistant Director of Community Development Position on January 14, 2020.
2. Consideration of a bond referendum to complement direct funds from JCC Note: JCC has an AAA bond rating which enhances its sale of bonds because of a low risk of default. Even with the current uncertainty in the bond market, we believe that a referendum is the only way to ensure sufficient capital to offer property owners sufficient compensation for their development rights.

3. Designation of certain roads such as Forge, Greensprings and others as having scenic value that needs to be preserved. One way could be establishing a 400 foot scenic easement along those roads with compensation for the willing landowners. A model for this action might be the following. In 2019, Forge Road LLC requested an amendment to an existing conservation easement. The amendment expanded the protection of view sheds along Forge Road and resulted in the County gaining an additional 675 linear feet of protected view shed along the Forge Road Community Character Corridor.
4. Recognition that the preservation of rural lands would complement the revitalization of the Village of Toano which would enhance the economy of the Upper County.
5. Re-establishment of the Rural Economic Development Committee and creation of a matrix of rural economic development uses (exs. Equestrian facilities, alpaca farm, eco-tourism- historic sites, fishing, kayaking, and agri-tourism – brewery, vineyards, corn mazes). Note that some of these activities are already established.

Respectfully,

Linda Rice

President, Friends of Forge Road and Toano