2017 General Assembly Update

March 15, 2017

The General Assembly adjourned, as scheduled, on February 25, 2017; the legislature returns for one day on April 5 to act on the Governor’s proposed amendments and vetoes to both general legislation and the budget.

For perspective, a reminder of VIRGINIAforever’s successes over the last two years:

- 2015: $20.7 M for land conservation, water quality, agriculture BMPs
- 2016: $201 M for land conservation, water quality, agriculture BMPs – an especially successful year, given a major bond issue (note: bond issue was aimed at State Parks’ infrastructure, not land acquisition or water quality improvements)

In 2017, the Governor and General Assembly had a $1.5 B budget shortfall to close, so VIRGINIAforever’s expectations for funding increases were tempered, especially as the Governor proposed significant cuts to balance the budget, including cuts to VIRGINIAforever priorities.

- 2017: a mixed bag, simplified as follows:
  - $16 M for Ag BMPs (some existing money, some money transferred from one account to another)
  - $1 M for Battlefield Preservation Fund in FY2018 (but also a $208,000 cut in the fund for FY17)
  - Requirements to study funding needs for Resource Management Plans as well as ways to stabilize future funding for agriculture BMPs
  - Language clarifying previous land acquisition restrictions for Natural Area Preserves
  - No additional money for Stormwater Local Assistance Fund
  - No additional money for the Virginia Land Conservation Fund – indeed, a cut in FY2018, though the Fund’s $4.5 M balance for next year remains health compared to recent years
  - No additional money for the Farmland Preservation Fund – indeed, the Governor’s proposed cut to this Fund was upheld in the budget

What’s next? To prepare for a 2018 rebound, VIRGINIAforever will continue monitoring the State’s revenues, meeting with key legislators, and preparing our case for the 2018 General Assembly session.

To learn more about VIRGINIAforever and our legislative priorities, please visit www.virginiaforever.org or follow us on Facebook at www.facebook.com/ourlandourwater.