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Agency seeks delay on stormwater rules

By Alex Bridges

FRONT ROYAL -- Virginia localities face a June deadline to start managing and monitoring storm runoff from new construction projects under stricter environmental regulations.

But the Northern Shenandoah Valley Regional Commission in Front Royal plans to ask the Department of Conservation and Recreation for a deadline extension so the agency can help area towns and counties develop stormwater management programs.

The Warren County Board of Supervisors on Tuesday received an update from Jill Keihn on the agency's efforts. Keihn, the agency's natural resources program director, said the deadline to adopt a stormwater management program as approved by the Virginia Soil and Water Conservation Board is June 13.

State code allows a locality to seek a one-year deadline extension to craft such a program provided the jurisdiction has made "substantive" progress toward its development, Keihn explained. Localities or, in this case, the Regional Commission, must submit documents to the DCR by April 1 outlining the progress. As Keihn explained, the county must identify who would administer and oversee its program. The county should present a preliminary draft of the ordinance. The third criteria is to show substantive progress calls for the locality to create a draft staffing and financial plan.

As Keihn noted, the documentation presented to the Soil and

Water Conservation Board should show what the county plans to consider over the next year and a half in order to create a stormwater management program.

The Soil and Water Conservation Board, at its meeting in June, plans to address and consider all localities included in the extension request, Keihn said.

Martha Shickle, the Regional Commission's executive directory, would file the request on behalf of the county, Keihn said.

If granted the extension, local government implementation of stormwater management programs would take effect July 1, 2014.

The commission received a grant through the DCR in November to submit documents for an extension on behalf of Warren County. The commission has worked with county staff and consultants - the Center for Watershed Protection and the Environmental Finance Center - to develop a stormwater management program and to complete the steps to reach "substantive" progress and meet the requirements for the extension. The Center for Watershed Protection also has been working with Taryn Logan, planning director for the county, on the matter.

In the past few years, local government officials and elected leaders have expressed concern about the new requirements. Government officials have said the state is passing responsibility to monitor storm runoff from construction to localities. Such action means local governments would bare much of the cost to implement programs and to make sure developers follow regulations pertaining to the control of storm runoff. Localities can collect fees associated with the related permits issued to developers, but elected leaders have said such increased charges ultimately drive up the cost to build homes and would lead to

higher housing prices.

Some localities are investigating the possibility of combining stormwater management regulations with erosion and sediment control regulations, Keihn said. Such a move could reduce the workload for staff and streamline the permitting process, she said. Warren County may seek this option, Keihn said.

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