

Application Form

Profile

Prefix Austin First Name Shenk Middle Initial _____ Last Name _____ Suffix _____

austin.i.shenk@gmail.com
Email Address

1260 Weavers Rd Home Address Suite or Apt _____

Harrisonburg City State VA Postal Code 22802

How many years have you been a resident of Harrisonburg?

0

Home: (607) 738-0624 Primary Phone Alternate Phone _____

USDA-NRCS Employer Job Title Soil Conservationist

Demographics - *(Submission of this information if voluntary and will not subject you to any adverse treatment should you chose to not complete)*

Ethnicity

Caucasian/Non-Hispanic

Gender

Male

What is your age?

30-40 years old

Are you reapplying for a current position you hold? *

No

Which Boards would you like to apply for?

Environmental Performance Standards Committee (EPSAC): Submitted

Interests & Experiences

Austin Shenk

Please tell us about yourself and why you want to serve.

Why are you interested in serving on a board or commission?

I have a strong conservation background relating to natural resource conservation on private lands that I think could be useful as a committee member. I have been looking for ways to be more involved in my community, and see applying for the Environmental Performance Standards Committee as a way I can contribute back to the community. I like being an informed citizen and feel that being on a city committee would keep me up to date with long-term plans for Harrisonburg. I hope to be part of the solution for moving Harrisonburg into a more sustainable future. I recognize that funds are not unlimited and that thorough planning is needed in the design process in order for environmental projects to be successful in the long run. Environmental improvements can be complex and involve many different opinions on how to address an issue. It is always my goal to be a thoughtful listener and to respect the opinions of others, even if they don't align with my own. I like to thoroughly review the information about a project before making an informed decision on the matter.

What other interests or concerns do you have regarding the community?

I have been looking for a way to be more involved in my local community. I came to deeply appreciate Harrisonburg and the surrounding Shenandoah Valley while attending Eastern Mennonite University as an undergraduate. This place has always felt like home since living here in college. I have lived and worked for years outside the Shenandoah Valley, but always had the goal of moving back here one day. I was very happy to accept a job here in Harrisonburg and move permanently back to Rockingham County in 2020. I may live just outside of city limits, but the majority of my shopping and social life occurs in Harrisonburg and I am legitimately interested in the well being of this wonderful place. I was always impressed how diverse and vibrant Harrisonburg seemed with such a wide background of cultures represented here. I enjoy spending time and working in Harrisonburg and genuinely want to help out the wider community. I have volunteered multiple times for the Blacks Run Cleanup and enjoy the feeling of being able to help out the community with small acts of service. I also have volunteered for multiple tree plantings. During my time at EMU, I learned from classmates (including Jakob zumFelde now of Harrisonburg Public Works), and professors about the Northend Greenway project that was in the planning stages. As an outdoors enthusiasts, I believe strongly in safe and accessible walkways for pedestrians and cyclists. I am a firm supporter of bike lanes and sidewalks throughout the city and believe that these services should be expanded to lower income neighborhoods to improve people's access to safe transportation networks. I especially support projects that are both good for the environment, as well as improving the quality of life for residents. Other topics that I feel passionate about or think need addressing in Harrisonburg include: recycling access, composting options, resident solar, rain gardens from roof runoff, improving water quality of Blacks Run, urban tree expansion to address heat sinks in the city, providing green spaces, improving local food access, long-term mitigations from the effects of climate change, and having environmental improvements that are fairly distributed across all socio-economic groups in the city.

What relevant experience or education do you have to this board or commission?

I have a background in Environmental Sciences and Socio-Economic Development and have worked in the conservation field for the past 8 years. Both my educational and professional experiences have shown the importance of community involvement and support in making long lasting and meaningful changes on projects. My primary job duties center around working with private landowners to install conservation practices on their land to improve and sustain natural resources. I possess a strong background in ecological sciences, especially related to plants, pollinator plantings, soil health, protecting water quality, and invasives species control. Both my educational and professional experiences have introduced me to a myriad of environmental issues facing both our local communities, as well as the wider world. While I know that I can't fix all these issues, I will do my best to assist in whatever capacity I can to help address at least some of them on a small scale.

Please list any past or present community involvement e.g. City Council, Boards and Commissions, Citizen Academy, etc. in Harrisonburg or elsewhere:

I have not served on an official Committee before, but have attended multiple local Soil and Water Conservation District board meetings during my time working in NY, WV, and VA. I work closely with the Shenandoah Valley Soil and Water Conservation District on projects in Rockingham and Page Counties. During high school, I took part in a Youth in Government program in which students were trained in simulated local government board meetings.

[Austin J. Shenk Resume.docx](#)

Upload a Resume

EPSAC Applicants only

Question applies to Environmental Performance Standards Committee (EPSAC)

City Council is seeking EPSAC members to represent broad stakeholder interests within the city. If you will be participating on the EPSAC as a representative of a business, group, or organization, please provide the name of the business, group, or organization and indicate what stakeholder category the group represents. If more than one, please list all. A. Residents, civic leagues, homeowners associations. B. Institutional and tax exempt entities including colleges and churches. C. Business community including residential, commercial and industrial property owners, malls, and business groups. D. Professional engineers, real estate developers, and construction contractors. E. Special interest groups that represent economic development, environmental or outdoor recreation. F. Others, education professionals from the local schools and city staff: PLEASE CHOOSE ONE FROM THE DROP DOWN BOX *

G: none

Question applies to Environmental Performance Standards Committee (EPSAC)

Name of business, group or organization you would represent?

Not an official representative of a group

Bike/Pedestrian Subcommittee Applicants only

Austin I. Shenk

• 1260 Weavers Rd.

● Harrisonburg, VA 22802

● 607-738-0624

austin.i.shenk@gmail.com

Education

Eastern Mennonite University, Harrisonburg, VA

Bachelors of

Arts (May 2012)

Major: Environmental Sustainability: Environmental Science concentration

GPA: 3.81

Minors: Biology / Socio-Economic Development

Magna

Cum Laude

Relevant Coursework: Sustainable Agriculture, Advanced Ecology and Field Biology, Conservation Biology, ArcGIS 10, Entomology, Environmental Toxicology, Natural History of the Shenandoah Valley, Zoology

Oregon State University, Online E-campus Program, Corvallis, OR

(Fall 2016)

Relevant Coursework: Introduction to Plant Biology, Soil Science

GPA: 4.0

North Carolina State University, Online E-campus Program, Raleigh, NC

(Summer 2017)

Relevant Coursework: Wetland Soils

GPA: 4.0

Work Experience

Soil Conservationist (GS-09)

July 2020-

current (40 hrs/week)

Natural Resources Conservation Service, Harrisonburg, VA

- Actively worked with landowners to develop conservation plans to address resource concerns through the NRCS 9 step planning process
- Delivered Farm Bill Programs and CTA assistance both individually and as part of the Harrisonburg work unit
- Accomplished at developing NRCS Environmental Quality Incentive Program (EQIP) contracts
- Provided oral and written communication to applicants to explain complex financial assistance programs
- Aided District Conservationist in training and mentoring two Soil Conservationist Pathways Interns and two Conservation Field Assistants from the Shenandoah Valley Conservation Collaborative
- Demonstrated proficiency at developing job sheets on a wide variety of NRCS conservation practices
- Showed ability to pay attention to detail and record site checks with suitable Con-6 notes and pictures
- Competently utilized Conservation Desktop, CART, Protracts, Toolkit, and NRCS specific forms (ex. CPA-52) and provided technical support to other NRCS employees in the use of these programs
- Proficient in obtaining and identifying on-site and off-site technical data and the inventorying natural resources
- Ensured that collection of natural resource inventory followed all applicable National and State procedures

- Showed willingness to provide technical assistance to other Federal and State agencies to further strengthen FPAC working relationships and to achieve shared program and mission goals
- Participated in educational outreach events at various Rockingham County and Harrisonburg City public schools, an Area FFA Forestry competition, and an Envirothon competition

Soil Conservationist (GS-09)

June 2018-July

2020 (40 hrs/week)

Natural Resources Conservation Service, Chatham, VA

- Delivered Farm Bill Programs and CTA assistance both individually and as part of the Chatham work unit
- Aided District Conservationist in training and supervising a Soil Conservationist Pathways Intern
- Instructed Pathways Intern in protocols and procedures of natural resource inventory to ensure accuracy
- Provided conservation planning assistance to other Area III NRCS service centers in CREP and ECP programs
- Served on the Natural Resource Inventory Area III field team for FY 2019 and FY 2020
- Assisted landowners in providing technical advice to address soil and water quality resource concerns
- Ensured all EQIP Best Management Practices were installed to NRCS standards and specifications
- Assisted District Conservationist in meeting all program deadlines and independently developed Excel documents to track progress and completion of work and program goals
- Demonstrated proficiency at plant identification and worked with Private Lands Biologist to provide CTA plant and insect identification for landowners
- Followed up with landowners in a timely manner and actively sought feedback from landowners on the effectiveness of the installed conservation practices
- Provided technical assistance to landowners on the Web Soils Survey program and reviewed the importance of soil health with both landowners and groups of schoolchildren
- Participated in office outreach events at the Pittsylvania County Ag Day, Career Day, VA Cattlemen's Association Field Day, and VFGC Winter Forage Conference

Soil Conservation Technician (GS-07)

November 2015-

June 2018 (40 hrs/week)

Natural Resources Conservation Service, Petersburg, WV

- Aided with preliminary engineering surveys to prepare for designing water development conservation practices
- Established rapport with landowners while providing technical assistance to implement conservation engineering practices
- Exhibited ability to plan and provide technical assistance to agency partners such as FSA, WV Division of Forestry, and Trout Unlimited to implement CREP and other stream restoration projects
- Utilized FA Tracker to ensure conservation plans followed in accordance to contract schedule
- Participated in national beta testing for the Conservation Desktop program
- Showed enthusiasm and willingness to learn about a wide variety of conservation and engineering practices
- Awarded Invasive Species Specialist designation for local NRCS work unit from the District Conservationist
- Demonstrated ability to keep personal work space, as well as shared office spaces, clean and well-organized to ensure a more productive and professional working environment

Conservation Planner

November 2014-

November 2015 (40 hrs/week)

Steuben County Soil and Water Conservation District, Bath, NY

- Aided in surveying for strip cropping, terraces, tile line, and diversion ditch layouts with use of a laser level
- Exhibited ability to work on various Best Management Practices for Steuben County SWCD and NRCS
- Demonstrated ability to plan and implement riparian forest buffer planting projects
- Showed ability to work independently on Wetland Reserve Program monitoring
- Assisted in preparing Prescribed Grazing Management documents and Tier II inventories

Available References:

Jim Jarvis

District Conservationist, Natural Resources Conservation Service, Bedford, VA

Phone Number: (434) 266-3086

Email address: James.Jarvis@usda.gov

Bryce Yoder

Civil Engineering Technician, Natural Resources Conservation Service, Harrisonburg, VA

Phone number: (540) 534-3068

Email address: Bryce.Yoder@usda.gov

Derek Zerkowski

Resource Conservationist, Natural Resources Conservation Service, Bath, NY

Phone number: (607) 776-7398

Derek.Zerkowski1@usda.gov