

Planning Commission

Work Session Agenda

Cape Charles Civic Center – 500 Tazewell Avenue

November 17, 2020 3:00 P.M.

1. Call to Order
 - a. Roll call and establish a quorum
2. Consent Agenda
 - a. Approval of agenda format
3. Order of Business
 - a. Comprehensive Plan update
 - i. Environment
4. Adjourn

Cape Charles Comprehensive Plan Update

Chapter 7: Environment

The Chesapeake Bay, Cape Charles' Environmental Treasure

A meteorite impact crater more than 50 miles wide is located in the vicinity of Cape Charles. The crater was created approximately 35 million years ago by a mile wide meteorite. The impact occurred in an area of Virginia's Tidewater Region Which was beneath the Atlantic ocean at the time. The earth's crust experienced a major upheaval as a result of the meteorite impact. Though the impact crater was only recently discovered in 2000, some scientist have theorized that the impact resulted in the formation of the Chesapeake Bay and its tributaries.

Covering nearly 200 miles from Baltimore, MD to Cape Charles, VA with an average width of 30 miles, the Chesapeake Bay is the life blood of Cape Charles. It is more important to the town's survival than all other environmental components combined. Its tributaries and creeks infuse the area with a sense of health and well-being that is very fragile. Like the blood in our veins, the chemical composition of the salt-water of the bay is very delicate and sensitive to slight variations. The bay is defenseless against unwelcome deposits which occur daily and pollute the water. According to data submitted to the US Environmental Protection Agency (USEPA) in 2014, 80% of the Chesapeake Bay's title segments are partially or fully impaired by toxic contaminants. The November 2019 issue of AARP bulletin contains a special report entitled "The Cure for Everything". With respect to environmental effects on the human body, it mentions that pollution, air and water quality, environmental allergies, and a host of other environmental factors can trigger and sustain inflammation, including damage to the healthy cells in our body. The sudden decrease in carbon dioxide emissions from March 2020 to the present has brought clarity to the atmosphere, vibrant colors to the flora and fauna, and weather patterns reminiscent of 50 years ago. A 1981 report by the American Universities Field Staff details the devastating effects on the South Padre Island (Texas) economy from the blowout of a Mexican oil well in the Gulf of Mexico in 1979. The damage to our local economy from the toxicity of the Chesapeake Bay water could range anywhere from a temporary annoyance such as closing the beach in the summer for a day or two to a significant decrease in the tourist trade and even possibly loss of economic life with our town left as a ghost town, a not uncommon

phenomenon in our country. (The current Covid 19 pandemic is a work in progress whose lasting effects cannot be determined at this time.)

Since the water in the Chesapeake Bay is not partitioned, pollutants which affect the water quality in dumping areas in Accomack county affect the entire body of water. Unfortunately, the pollutants from the poultry-farm based economy interests of our neighboring county to the north, Accomack County, threaten the fishing and wildlife interests of our county (Northampton) and town (Cape Charles). A January 2019 report by Waterfront Law on large poultry farming operations on Accomack County concludes that the massive amount of manure waste generated by large poultry farming operations will increase as poultry farms increase on the Eastern shore with associated environmental harm. In addition, the poultry farms remove significant quantities of ground water from the aquifers that serve as the sole source of freshwater for the Virginian Eastern shore. Nevertheless, the negative impacts to the environment are offset by the economic benefits to residents of the Eastern shore (2019 Waterfront Law report). This report's conclusion reveals the cross-county tensions that exist with respect to the conflicting economies of tourism vs the poultry industry. Thus, a constant, challenging, and delicate balancing strategy must be devised and implemented to ensure that harmful economic impacts from pollutants to the bay and harmful economic impacts from excessive poultry farming restrictions are minimized.

Much effort is being expended by local, county, state and federal governments (e.g., USEPA) as well as charitable organizations to maintain the sustainability of the bay so that crabs, oysters, and clams may flourish, beaches may be populated, and waterman may earn their keep. Environmental Sustainability was mentioned as a concern by respondents in the 2019 town survey. The Waterfront Law report concludes, "Any real progress is more likely to be made at the grassroots level rather than in Richmond or Washington DC. The ways for this to come about include citizen participation in the issuance and/or renewal of permits issued under the ground water management act of 1992, participation in the issuance and/or renewal of the Virginia Pollution Discharge Elimination System (VPDES permits, court challenges if these permits are lenient in ways that contravene the governing statutes and grassroots public pressure."

Environmental Goal #1 – Enhance the Water Quality of the Chesapeake Bay

Objectives:

1. Intensify the monitoring of all measures of the bay's health
2. Take whatever steps are necessary to ensure its continued health.

A Litter Free Town, not to be Taken for Granted

Some say you can't measure charm; others say you can't control the environment. But did you ever see a charming town strewn with litter or did you ever see a litter-free town that wasn't charming? One of the features of Cape Charles that is almost taken for granted is the fact that we are a litter free town. This is due to the extraordinary effort expended by the Town's Public Works and the conscientious efforts of the residents and visitors to ensure that litter is kept to a minimum. As the town's prosperity increases and more control is exerted by the investors rather than the year-round residents, the litter problem is destined to worsen in spite of our best efforts. There are many towns and cities whose property value is 5 to 10 times greater than Cape Charles but whose sidewalks and streets are covered in debris of various sorts. There is a danger that increased population density and greed will breed littering and, unless vigilance is exerted by those committed to maintaining the charm of the town, this precious amenity will vanish, almost overnight.

Environmental Goal #2 – Appearance

Objectives:

1. Continue to provide adequate refuse bins and regular emptying by the Town's Public Works staff.
2. Purchase a streetsweeper for the town.
3. Along with the town's healthy living signs, provide signs requesting all to help protect our environment by proper disposal of trash.
4. Ensure that seasonal vendors such as food trucks take adequate measures to minimize litter associated with their services.
5. Continue to maintain the litter-free appearance throughout the town.

Drinking Water Quality, Taste and See

The Eastern Shore's ground water resources were shaped in part by the meteorite impact. Sediment layers in the area were fractured as a result of the impact. This is believed to be partially responsible for the presence of salt in the Eastern Shore's groundwater. Scientists are currently studying the impact crater and the possible ways the area's groundwater has been affected.

As Cape Charles continues to grow, open space activities will have an impact on the use and quality of water resources. Potential adverse effects include increased nutrient, set up in, and toxics runoffs during storms and flooding. The town of Cape Charles must be aggressive and balancing the land use with the water quality. It is unlikely that state programs will provide the means to address water quality issues. However, local stormwater management programs can begin to address current and future water quality issues. The quality of the drinking was mentioned several times in the 2019 town survey.

Environmental Goal #3 – Water Quality

Objectives:

- 1, Promote use of water conservation measures among town residents and businesses, maintain and protect extensive wetlands in and around the Chesapeake Bay. Consider giving residents credit on water bill for conserving water.

2. Improve the quality drinking water. Review water quality improvement initiatives in neighboring communities to discover potential improvement methods.

Water's Edge, Water Seeks its Own Level

Cape Charles will continue to preserve the integrity of and accessibility to the water's edge. Preserving the integrity and accessibility the water's edge is critical to maintaining the quality of life within the town.

Environmental Goal #4 – Maintaining Beach and Harbor

Objectives

1. Control dune, beach, and shoreline erosion
2. Enhance the beach as an amenity for residents and visitors.
3. Improve access to the town harbor.
4. Preserve the integrity and accessibility to the water's edge.

Environment Goal #5 – the Environmental Estate

Objectives

- 1 Provide protection for the environment including but not limited to protecting wetlands and other natural resources from erosion and ensuring the shoreline structures are maintained and erosion is minimized.
2. Protect open space.
3. Protect the shoreline from erosion through existing laws and regulations.
4. Minimize adverse impacts of gas or oil drilling and development activities on the Chesapeake Bay and consequent adverse effects on public health, safety, welfare, i.e., the charm of the town.

5. Continue active participation in RAFT.

Other Natural Resources, Protecting the Environment

Critical wildlife habitats such as wetlands, natural areas, and the public beach, are present within the town's boundaries and nearby. The town's concern for its natural resources is illustrated by projects to maintain the beach as well as participation in Virginia's Clean Marina program. Land-use policies must continue to include the importance of the local environment to protect these resources for present and future generations

RAFT (Resilience Adaptation Facility Tool) is a significant initiative to address water related environmental impacts. Raft features three components to create a comprehensive tool for Cape Charles. The first is a scorecard to provide an overall assessment of community resilience to flooding while remaining economically and socially relevant. The second component is a workshop for community leaders to use to develop an action checklist. The third component is ongoing assistance during implementation of the checklist both in the form of technical assistance and assistance in obtaining funding. Due to the importance of RAFT participation, a complete description is included as Appendix __.

The Barrier Islands, a Vital Barometer

Miami Beach, the Outer Banks, Ocean City, all great success stories, yes? Not so fast. Global warming and its accompanying rise in sea level are sobering reminders that barrier islands play a key role in protecting the mainland from nature's ravishes. Cape Charles is fortunate to be the beneficiary of visionaries who realized the importance of keeping the barrier islands undeveloped. As a result, 133,000 acres of barrier island real estate are protected from development. As recent history has shown, the barrier islands have experienced significant adverse weather effects from storms, nor'easter's, and hurricanes. Due to the location of the barrier islands, the impacts of future storms become valuable predictors of mainland devastation in the years to come. The town of Cape Charles will be carefully examining the scientific data from the ongoing Barrier Island research to forecast impacts on the town and plan accordingly.

Virginia officials have laid out what they call a science-based roadmap to combat climate change in sea level rise in the Commonwealth. Virginia Coastal resilience master planning framework, release by Governor Ralph Northam last week, lays out the core principles of the commonwealth approach to Coastal protection an adaptation and will serve as a blueprint for implementing Virginia's first project driven Coastal resilience master plan by the end of 2021.

Starting in early 2021, Virginia will have a dedicated source of funding, about 50 million a year, to help localities prepare for sea level rise and flooding

Summary

Situated at the southern end of the Eastern Shore of the Chesapeake Bay, Cape Charles has been called the jewel of Northampton County. Its recent growth reflects sensitivity to the natural environment in which it was established. The town's environmental resources contribute to its charm; they provide both a small town atmosphere and a naturally beautiful street scape.

Environmental protection to include water quality, erosion and sedimentation issues is a collaborative mission Northampton county, the state of Virginia, and the federal government.

It is a not uncommon experience in small towns for environmental concerns to be overlooked in the process of budgeting and establishment of capital improvement programs. This is not to say that other items in the budget are not important but as our current situation attests, a relatively minor change in the environment including the quality of the water in the Chesapeake Bay could have devastating economic effects on the town. Putting a priority on environmental issues will help to generate economic activity and provide and improve quality of life both now and in the future.

APPENDIX

Resilience Adaptation Feasibility Tool (RAFT)

100 Year Floodplain Map

Soils Map