

CITIZENS FOR A BETTER EASTERN SHORE

SHORELINE

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GREEN IS THE NEW GOLD *Ecotourism on the Shore*

CBES & Shorekeeper Annual Meeting & Social

Tuesday, April 28, 7 PM
Little Italy, Nassawodox

6 PM: Optional Dinner Hour
(Dinner reservations required)

"PROTECTING and PRIMING our ECONOMIC ENGINE"

Keynote Speaker:

Bobbie Walker

Virginia Tourism Corporation

In Accomack County

Benefits & Impacts of Solar Facility

By Hali Plourde-Rogers

Despite a few reservations regarding the loss of farmland and equipment taxes, Accomack County Board of Supervisors unanimously voted to approve the largest solar project on the East Coast. Solar energy systems use panels to harvest the sun's power and convert it into electricity. Individual photovoltaic panels are connected together to form blocks. Panels track the sun throughout the day returning to a neutral position at night. They are mounted on posts and turf grass is planted underneath. While solar energy production is less harmful than oil, natural gas, and coal and is a less intensive form of development than residential, solar systems are land intensive.

Community Energy Solar's (CES) proposed 80-megawatt (MW) facility, enough energy to power 20,000 homes, would cover a maximum fenced in acreage of 1,054 acres near Oak Hall, VA. According to documents submitted to the Board of Supervisors, there will be several sites spread across 44 parcels. Solar panels will extend over more than 900 acres with approximately 200 acres of land actually underneath the panels and a total footprint (land under the panels and the spaces between) of around 440 acres. Native plants will be planted on the perimeter to shield viewsheds.

Land use exists on a scale from less intensive (open space and agriculture) to more intensive (residential, industrial, and commercial). The parcels in question are currently zoned agricultural. Around 900 acres are actively farmed and the remainder is pines intended for harvest. According to the Accomack County Comprehensive Plan (the Plan), "Agriculture is a major element of the County's culture and economy." Rich Morrison, Director of Planning, and Kristen Tremblay, Assistant Planner, reported, "the County's target outcome for this area in the long-term is to have as little new non-farm development as possible through zoning regulations." However, the County's agricultural zoning designation considers utility scale solar energy projects a conditional use, opening the door for projects like this one. The Plan also notes, "The best farmland is the best land for development," which indicates how difficult it is to sustain an agricultural economy. If farmland is the best land for development, then landowners will receive more income from a higher (developed) use than from farming. Grayson Chesser, a member of the Board of Supervisors, called for "reevaluating the value of farmland because it is becoming more precious all the time."

Accomack County clearly delineates the impacts from solar energy development versus residential development. Morrison and Tremblay note, "The Comprehensive Plan places a significant amount of concern on the impacts caused specifically by residential development and suggests the desire to reduce that amount. In this instance, while approximately 965 acres of land that are currently in agricultural production would be utilized, the impacts typically seen with residential development are unlikely to occur." Solar energy facilities are lower-impact industrial development. Once installed, the County reports there should be "no noticeable noise, no emissions." In addition, Stewart Hall, Director of Public Works said, "I don't think the project will create additional problems related to drainage or water quality." Solar is less intensive than residential development with the added bonus of producing renewable energy.

In addition to being relatively low-impact, there are significant benefits to solar energy. Solar power is renewable. As long as the sun shines, the panels can gener-

See "Solar," Cont'd on page 3

Murray's dedication leads to solutions

A new EMS and Medical Services Foundation is established

By Donna Bozza

In 1908, the Eastern Shore saw its first champion of medical services in Dr. William J. Sturgis, Sr. – known locally as the “Father of the Hospital.” After watching his neighbors dying from the most ordinary of ailments due to their distance from a medical facility, Dr Sturgis dedicated his life to building a community hospital on the Shore. Northampton-Accomack Memorial Hospital opened its doors in 1928, largely due to Dr. Sturgis’ commitment and perseverance.

Not a doctor, but with a career background in the financial industry and as a consultant for Fortune 500 companies, H. Spencer Murray shares the good doctor’s dogged determination to bring lifesaving medical services to his community. In preparation for the relocation of Riverside Shore Memorial Hospital to Onley in fall 2016, Murray recently established the Northampton County EMS and Medical Services Foundation.

A 20-year resident of the Shore, Murray’s new 501(c)(3) nonprofit organization was created to allow community donations and grant funding to support expanded county and volunteer emergency response agencies. The foundation could

help provide for more training, personnel such as EMTs (Emergency Medical Technicians), ambulances, equipment and advanced medical technology.

“We know ambulance travel and turn around times will increase dramatically whether at the new ER [Emergency Room] in Onley or in Norfolk,” said Murray. “If multiple ambulances are in service, a rapid response time to a 911 call may not be available. That is unacceptable.”

Back in 2010 when serving as the District 4 County Supervisor, Murray sat down with fellow supervisor Richard Tankard and pulled maps and calculated the distances Northampton citizens would need to travel to reach the future hospital site or facilities across the bay. Along with Route 13, the county’s many back roads were included in the time estimates. The results of this study led to concerns that getting a patient to an ER during that critical “golden hour” when prompt medical treatment could prevent death would not be possible.

Murray later served on Northampton County’s EMS Task Force, which recommended establishing a foundation such as the one now created.

Murray himself funded the initial establishment of the foundation of which he is president and CEO. He is pleased with its experienced and committed board that includes long-time community leader Furlong Baldwin, John Coker who serves as treasurer and has a background with nonprofits, and attorney Cela Burge.

Along with being an important public health issue, Murray stresses that EMS and Medical Services are essential to the economic well-being of Northampton County. “Without these services we will not attract new residents and businesses, nor have the quality of life we want,” he said.


Though Northampton County can not sustain a stand-alone ER, Murray said the foundation’s long term goal is to establish a stabilization facility in the county. That, along with advances in tele-medicine, could help decrease the number of trips to an ER that are made.



“Paramedics know that some ambulance transports to the ER are unnecessary though they are required to make them if demanded by the patient,” said Murray. “Through use of tele-medicine where a patient is stabilized but able to be seen by video in an ER, some transports may be eliminated. Heart attack, stroke and trauma patients will need transport by ground or air ambulance, but someone having minor difficulty with their medication may not.”

The stabilization facility could conduct other tests that can be transmitted to the ER as well.

Northampton is no different from many rural communities across the country that face the challenge of providing access to emergency care. What is unusual, perhaps, is Murray’s firm dedication – like Dr. Sturgis’ before him – to meeting that challenge.

A spring fundraising campaign is scheduled. For more information contact H. Spencer Murray at hsmconsulting@msn.com or call 757-678-6458. The Northampton County EMS and Medical Services Foundation address is P.O. Box 1374, Eastville, VA 23347. 

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Managing Editor

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Sue Mastyl Joyce Mendel

Hali Plourde-Rogers Dr. Mike Peirson

Production Editor and Design

Sarah Morgan, *Savoy Studio*

Distribution

Danhof VanDyke

How to reach CBES

P.O. Box 882, Eastville, VA 23347

(757) 678-7157

info@cbes.org • www.cbes.org

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ate energy. Solar reduces dependence on nonrenewable energy resources. The Union of Concerned Scientists (UCS) states, “The air and water pollution emitted by coal and natural gas plants is linked to breathing problems, neurological damage, heart attacks, and cancer. Replacing fossil fuels with renewable energy has been found to reduce premature mortality and lost workdays, and it reduces overall healthcare costs.” Although manufacturing the solar panels creates some greenhouse gasses, UCS notes solar energy life-cycle emissions are less than those for natural gas and coal. Solar energy production does not require the endless raw material extraction of oil and gas production. Prices of renewable energy are more stable and an energy system based on these sources is more resilient and reliable. Renewables are less prone to massive failure because they are modular and decentralized.

Renewable energy keeps money circulating in the local economy through jobs, taxes and lease payments. The proposed solar facility will create jobs during construction. Once built, the project will employ a local company to maintain the grounds, which may result in additional jobs or additional work for current employees. The facility will also have a technician. However, it is unclear whether the technician would be a local position or not. Outside of local jobs, renewable energy creates more jobs than nonrenewable sources. In the larger picture renewables support a more healthy and growing economy.

The county will receive an estimated \$100k more in local tax revenue per year from increased real estate taxes. However, a State law aimed at encouraging renewable energy development may prevent the County from collecting revenue from machinery and equipment taxes. “Solar is exempt from the machinery and equipment tax if the project is under 25 MW. Therefore, CES divided this project into four projects of 20 MW each. This hasn’t been approved yet. If the State approves it, then they will not have to pay that tax and it will be lost revenue,” explained Morrison. Other than the loss of farmland, this potential loss of revenue was the Board of Supervisors greatest concern. Chesser pointed out Accomack will not have to provide as many services to the solar installation as to other businesses. But completely eliminating as opposed to discounting the tax on equipment and machinery takes away valuable income that could go toward schools and other underfunded areas of the budget. Morrison said, “The Board of Supervisors directed the staff and Planning Commission to work on ways to make sure the County is getting a revenue stream from projects like these.”

The largest environmental impacts are land use, habitat loss, water use, and use of hazardous materials in manufacturing. With solar facilities, there is less opportunity to share the land with livestock or other agricultural uses than with wind power. However, land use can be mitigated by installing on brownfields, abandoned mines, or transportation corridors. Unfortunately, this is not the case for Accomack. The Board of Supervisors’ greatest concern was the loss of productive agricultural land. The County discovered “the average yields per acre for corn and soybeans in this part of the County are above average.” Because conditional use permits do not expire, this project represents around 1,000 acres that Accomack County cannot count on seeing return to agriculture.

Because of the concern for lost farmland, the County is requiring a decommission plan: Upon abandonment, the “owner and operator shall be jointly and severally liable for the removal of all project equipment and full restoration of the property for agricultural use.” In fact, according to Morrison, if the station stops

producing for a period to be determined, CES will have to pull the infrastructure and return the land to farmland. Morrison added CES pays for decommissioning and restoration. However, if the project is productive, it will likely remain a solar facility.

Anytime large tracts of land are developed, habitat loss and fragmentation become a concern. Agricultural fields may not be the best habitat but they are open, allowing animal migration, and provide some cover and food for wildlife. The proposed project requires nearly 24 miles of fencing, originally chain link fence. Fencing significantly impairs the ability of wildlife to follow natural migration patterns and corridors. Therefore, the County and CES have compromised on using agricultural fencing, which is more amenable to wildlife. The fencing will allow smaller birds and animals to pass through. In addition, CES will leave any identified wildlife corridors open.

The manufacturing process currently uses some caustic chemicals and water. The impacts of these processes on the environment depend on the company and the country of origin. To mitigate these problems, companies are beginning to recycle panels further reducing the waste and raw materials needed.

Increased investment in solar energy infrastructure decreases dependence on more harmful methods of energy production. However, as Grayson Chesser put it, “Good farmland is getting more and more scarce.” The loss of farmland is a good example of why it is important to have other tools in place to protect and preserve farmland and open space from development, such as Purchase of Development Rights programs and conservation easements.

Resources:

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- Union of Concerned Scientists. <http://www.ucsusa.org>
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John H. Price

We note with sadness the passing of John Price, who also served several terms as a director of CBES and played a vital role in the founding of the Virginia Eastern Shore-keeper organization as vice-president of the VES Board.

A World War II Navy veteran, John rose in the executive ranks of Pittsburgh Corning Corp. and retired as vice-president of international operations. He participated successfully in international shotgun competitions and was an avid sportsman. John came to the Shore in retirement and devoted himself to charitable and environmental causes; he was especially proud of his election as an honorary member of the Waterman’s Association. He was an active member of CBES, and served on the *ShoreLine* edit board for many years.

We remember John with affection and regard. He loved the Eastern Shore, and he found in CBES and VES opportunities to contribute to efforts for the conservation and environmental protection of his adopted home.

When County Debt Outpaces Local Pocketbooks

By Mary Miller

Decades ago, Northampton County made the decision to take on millions of dollars of debt. With no taxpayer involvement, no referendum concerning how those millions of dollars would be used, the elected officials made the decision to encumber county finances for the next several decades.

For what? There were legitimate needs then – mostly growing out of previous administrations' failures to maintain buildings and plan for landfill needs. The local county jail was in an unacceptable living condition and the interior had been cited as unfit to accommodate prisoners. After a year of meetings with consultants, the seated Board of Supervisors voted to not just address the immediate dire needs of the county, but to borrow tens of millions of dollars to construct a vast complex of buildings more suited to an urban community 10 times the size of Northampton County. At that time, the Median Household Income in the county was about \$17,500. And waiting in the wings were two school buildings, a middle school and a high school, already starting to show their age and condition.

Now as another budget year approaches, requests for funding by county departments are already nearly \$3,000,000 more than anticipated revenue – the older school buildings have deteriorated further, and structural problems must be addressed now. County financial advisers state that current county debt liability is still about \$38,000,000 with years to go for repayment. Taxpayers can see every day the monumental complex they'll be paying for over the next decades: a regional jail built for hundreds of inmates, barely occupied, but costing over \$1.5 million dollars a year of local revenue to staff and operate; office buildings with empty rooms; a grand administrative complex with ornate chandeliers; and a vast, imposing court complex, elaborately enhanced with stately open spaces, over-designed and unusable, while trial juries meet and deliberate in cramped conditions. And every day taxpayers can drive by the high school with a structurally unsound back wall.

More county debt?

The same county financial advisers that tell officials what good shape the county is in, despite the ongoing debt, have provided scenarios for adding more debt – this time to replace the deteriorating high school. New debt proposed would be about \$35,000,000, would add decades to the repayment time line, and would inevitably raise county taxes – a *lot!* The financial advisers provided comparisons with other, often dissimilar counties, demonstrating how debt is handled on their financial statements, and how Northampton can use the same sort of “debt to total revenue” calculations and still look good on the books.

What's missing, however, is an explanation to the taxpayers that while the total revenue on the books looks like a lot of dollars, and the percentage paid for debt looks reasonable, much of that total revenue comes from outside sources for very specific uses, i.e., schools, courts, etc. The missing explanation is ***the fact that 100% of the local debt is paid only out of locally collected taxpayer dollars.*** So comparing debt to total revenue, which for Northampton County includes large amounts of state and federal restricted funding, is misleading. What needs to be looked at is how much of the local tax revenue, real estate and personal

property taxes, is being spent on county debt. And that's where straightforward comparisons to show how other rural counties handle their revenue and debt, and what the debt is paying for, might be valuable.

Looking at other counties – debt & revenue.

The first step is to find other counties similar enough to Northampton – rural, aging, losing population, and comparable demographics including age and racial balance, within a range of median household incomes but with similar poverty levels, comparable county employment patterns, mostly government, health care and service sector jobs, and with some small, local resource-based industries. Six counties most similar to Northampton in these aspects were on the Western Shore and Southside: Charlotte, Essex, Greenville, Lancaster, Lunenburg and Sussex. Comparisons among similar counties is a realistic way to assess the similarities or differences in the way they each conduct their financial affairs.

Northampton had the second highest real estate tax rate among the seven comparable counties (posted online at \$0.6728 per \$100 of assessed value) and collected by far the highest local tax revenues of the counties sampled – \$17 million. This was almost three times the local tax revenue of the lowest revenue county, Lunenburg (\$6.6 million), and almost twice as much as the average for the comparative counties. This may be due in large part to the high assessed value of property in Northampton – \$2.6 billion, second only to Lancaster County on the Northern Neck (\$3.1 billion assessed value) as compared to the lowest value, Greenville County (total assessed value of \$682 million). Northampton had the third highest debt obligation within those comparative counties – more on that below – and still managed to allocate or spend all the local revenue raised, and keep up debt payments too.

How does this affect debt going forward?

It's complicated. Although Northampton County does not appear to allocate a higher than average percent of local revenue for debt obligations, it's all relative – and currently, dependent on the value of county real estate. It would be important for the county to maintain the high value level of the real estate, since, like most rural communities, taxes on real estate fund the county. Northampton has the natural amenities that attract retirees and second-home owners, who have often made high value investments and who pay equally high real estate taxes. Without that tax revenue, the debt obligation would fall more heavily on county residents who own more modest real estate.

The complicated part involves moving forward. The Board of Supervisors is giving serious consideration to incurring \$35 million in new debt for school construction – and that would mean more local taxes on everyone's real estate. The most revealing thing about the six-county debt and revenue comparison referred to above is this: ***each of the comparative counties which had a higher debt to local tax revenue ratio than Northampton, incurred their debt for school construction.*** They

See “County Debt,” Cont'd on page 5

share a comparatively high debt load with Northampton, but they have new schools – and Northampton has a county complex.

Even though Northampton County has high value property to tax, the cycle of incurring more debt and depending on local tax revenue to pay it is not sustainable. If debt becomes a larger percentage of local tax revenues then more painful choices will have to be made – keep raising taxes, keep reducing services, or both. Wishful thinking about luring business investment to a locality that can’t control revenue flow is just that – wishful thinking. Corporate investors are not usually in the business of looking for counties to rescue from financial instability.

Major decisions ahead.

The chickens are coming home to roost and the piper is waiting to be paid. Northampton has hit a crossroads, a road block, a speed bump, a brick wall – or at best, a challenging opportunity. Deteriorating school infrastructure needs to be repaired, replaced, re-purposed, demolished, rebuilt or restored. Doing nothing, after decades of inattention to maintenance and upkeep, is no longer an option. Any attention to this infrastructure now will probably

be costly and almost certainly will go on the local taxpayer’s bill. Future planning and construction must include the possibility of a changing school population. Projections for Northampton County population overall show a decline in numbers and an increase in age, until at least 2040. The possibility of expanding the facilities and increasing the enrollment at alternative schools in the county must also be a consideration when evaluating the long term needs of the public school system. Years ago the county made the decision between public education’s future infrastructure needs and an extravagant county complex building spree.

The county’s debt obligations stand at \$38 million according to financial advisers. If approved now, new school construction would almost double the debt, to over \$70 million. That’s the type of debt load carried by Chesterfield County and the cities of Richmond and Chesapeake – localities with 20 times the population of Northampton County.

Sources: *USDA Economic Research Service; Weldon Cooper Center for Public Service at the University of Virginia; US Census; Virginia Auditor of Public Accounts; comparative county’s online published financial documents.*



In My Opinion

Northampton zoning proposal still raises questions

A ShoreLine Staff Report

The Northampton Board of Supervisors has proposed a general revision of its zoning regulations. Despite all the passion, energy and intrigue swirling around these zoning proposals we are now down to a simple question: Is this new proposal – coming as it does from a flawed process with minimal citizen input, divorced from the Comprehensive Plan, worked over by both citizen volunteers and developers, tweaked by the Board of Supervisors in reaction to the louder cries of community outrage – after all that, is it better or worse than our current zoning?

Many of us have watched and participated in this debate from an uncomfortable spot. Many people agree that our current zoning in Northampton is a mess. For any who have interacted with the zoning because they want to do something on their property or change something about its ownership, you quickly realize the existing ordinance is excessively complex. It includes a surprisingly large number of zoning districts, each with its own rules, overlapping regulations and permitted uses from prior ordinances, grandfathered non-conforming uses and an overlay of state laws floating on top.

As a result of this complexity, simple projects by well-meaning citizens are often delayed by months as a proposal moves through zoning review, working through the schedules of the Planning Commission and Board of Supervisors meetings. Multiple sets of ordinance rules may be in effect depending on the history of your individual property. It takes a little fortitude to brave the process. It certainly contributes to the perception that “the county will never let you do that” as our stock response to any new proposal. In short, many of us believe that the direction given to Development Director Charles McSwain at the start was good direction – make it simpler, more open to new business proposals, more flexible to modern day needs such as accessory dwellings, etc.

Sadly, the original version of the current proposal coming from McSwain’s department was terrible. It imperiled much of our rural character. It was often easier to understand the original proposal by understanding which individual developer was to benefit rather than how the proposal would meet long term community goals. The list of “by-right” uses was mystifying for everyone. The leadership of the process, Mr. McSwain, lost most of his credibility as an “honest broker” as the details of the proposal were exposed and defended. Sadly, we also have swept up many of our dedicated county staff in the controversy, who often find themselves under attack for motives they did not have.

Many of the changes to the proposal that the Board of Supervisors has adopted have been positive improvements. We know that the Planning Commission and the Board have both tried hard to remove the most egregious parts of the original proposal. For example, we are glad to see the protections of the Bay Act for the seaside back in this proposal, and many by-right land uses have been revised. In the original proposal, it was shocking what uses were “by-right,” particularly in some of the more residential areas. Even in agricultural areas, does anyone really believe that a adding a wastewater treatment plant, or a hospital, or any of the other “industrial” land uses included in the original proposal should be “by-right” without notice to surrounding property owners? Some land has been better fit to the zoning – some residential areas are now properly classified as residential areas. But others would have their zoning changed without explanation of the impacts. There are still disturbing anomalies present such as why is the vastly expanded boundary of the Willis Wharf waterfront village now allowing village uses over a much broader expanse of land? And why was a new zoning district created that apparently only covers a few properties in Oyster and Willis Wharf?

See “Northampton Zoning,” *Cont’d on page 6*

“Northampton Zoning,” Cont’d from p. 5

The minimum width of shoreline allowed on lots has been particularly troubling. The original version of zoning proposed shoreline minimum lot widths of 65 feet which could have destroyed much of the ability of the aquaculture industry to operate, if the county ever developed further. To their credit, the Board of Supervisors recognized the problem and lot widths have been increased. However, the chaotic process leaves inconsistencies that are difficult to understand. For example, new lots in agricultural lands will have a minimum shoreline width of 125 feet. But state guidelines indicate 205 feet as a minimum for the aquaculture industry. Unfortunately, adding the new 205 foot width rather than just sticking to the current 250 feet does not help in simplifying the ordinance. But sadly, this is typical of many of the adjustments when you by-pass good civic process. Without the guidance of the Comprehensive Plan and/or any research-based discussion by the Planning Commission and the Board, we end with more complexity in an already complex process.

Many people have given up their hope to put in place a good and workable zoning ordinance, but as close observers of the zoning process, we offer the following list of issues that are most concerning about the ordinance proposal. We think these must be addressed before the Board of Supervisors finalizes its proposals.

◆ ◆ ◆ ◆ ◆ ◆

Zoning Ordinance “Fixes”

1. Reinstate specific **“District Intent Statements”** for Village, Hamlet, Cottage Community, Commercial, Industrial and Working Waterfront Districts to reflect specific land use policies which would provide compliance with the Comprehensive Plan.

2. **Reinstate Section 154-044** from current zoning ordinance, **“Proffering Conditions...”** because newly permitted zoning density will require county services, schools, EMS stations, recreation, etc., and therefore, requires a mechanism to accept cash and other proffers to offset cost of additional taxpayer funded services.

3. For **Agriculture**:

- Add performance standards for **Intensive Farming Uses, Facilities, Structures and Buildings** to include lot coverage ratio, maximum number of facilities on any one site and ammonia scrubbers to mitigate the impact of greatly reduced setbacks.
- **Remove Migrant Labor Camp** as a by-right use in the Agricultural District because:
 - It is not required by Code to be a by-right use;
 - The Code allows tents, campers and vehicles to be used for dwelling, *and* only one occupant of the camp is required to be a migrant worker;
 - There are no performance standards for this use;
 - Many county residential areas abut the Agricultural District and, therefore, potentially abut a Migrant Labor Camp.

4. For **Residential Density** in Villages:

- Restore separate growth-area sub-Districts (currently V-1) around Villages, with significantly lower density, to provide expansion of Villages with adequate provision for stormwater management, wastewater disposal, drainage, etc – future rezoning to higher density Village (V-2) zoning would allow

- for development proffers to offset the cost of county services;
- Permit by-right residential use in the very limited areas of Village Commercial and Business Districts **only** in mixed-use structures.

5. For **Commercial** and other non-residential Uses in Residential Districts, Villages (residential areas), Hamlets and Cottage Communities:

- Reinstate Minor Special Use Permit; then
- Require Minor Special Use Permit for **low-impact non-residential uses**, with the exception of Home Office or Home Business, in the primarily Residential Districts above;
- Eliminate by-right **“Uses similar to permitted uses”** and make them by Special Use Permit only.

6. For **Industrial** uses:

- Remove from Agricultural zoning districts because there are inadequate performance standards for uses like Research Facilities and Wastewater Treatment Facilities which would jeopardize resources and residential property values.
- Reinstate current Industrial Floating Zone, which includes reasonable performance standards for industrial uses.
- Remove vaguely defined high impact uses and high water uses, such as **“Waste-related”** and **“Prison,”** from the ordinance. New uses can be added through zoning text amendments.

7. **Reevaluate Town Edge Districts** as County growth areas.

8. **Reinstate Mobile Home Floating District.**

- Provide low income housing option;
- Maintain current reasonable and consistent performance standards;
- Provide relief to current Mobile Home Parks from a **“legally non-conforming”** status which would limit their ability to operate.

9. **Shoreline lot widths:** provide consistent shoreline width requirements for all new platted parcels in all zoning districts except Working Waterfront (We suggest the state-recommended 205 foot proposed width for Village/Hamlet Districts.)

10. **Delete the following text** from §154.1-501 *Zoning Administrator Appointed* because the Code does not reflect this condition as part of the statutory obligation of the Zoning Administrator:

“In addition, The Board of Supervisors of Northampton County shall periodically provide direction to the Zoning Administrator through the Northampton County Administrator as to the above authority granted.”

11. **Remove Planned Unit Development (PUD) concept** as was done in Accomack County.

12. **Reinstate “lot coverage ratio”** to preserve open space.

13. **Reinstate Planning Commission review** of special use applications.



“Gatekeeper” provision rescinded. Last month KT let readers know about the Northampton County Administrator’s proposal to include in its *Board of Supervisors Manual* a requirement that all Supervisor contact with the county staff to be channeled through the Administrator. The proposal was passed in January virtually without discussion. However, at its February 10th meeting the Northampton Supervisors voted to reverse its previous decision to accept the “gatekeeper” provision that would have required that all Board member contact and data requests to county staff be processed through the County Administrator. Again, there was no public discussion of this abrupt turn-around, and the vote was unanimous.

This situation is a delicate balancing act. We don’t want Supervisors co-opting the time of county staff for their own purposes (sometimes in the past it’s been to do personal work for that Supervisor) or pressuring county staff for a certain result in a specific situation (as has also happened in the past). But to demand that all staff contact be through the Administrator seems an overstep – now properly corrected.

Still no Town Hall Meetings. Presidents regularly hold press conferences. Federal senators and representatives frequently go home to meet with their constituents. Our state legislators, Lynwood Lewis and Rob Bloxom, communicate regularly through articles in the *News* and the *Post* and by inviting us to public gatherings. All these elected officials keep in touch because they recognize that they have a responsibility to those who elected them to explain their legislative actions and to give citizens an opportunity to express their opinions and to debate issues. That’s the way democracy is supposed to work. County Supervisors, however, with the notable exceptions of Ron Wolff and Granville Hogg, duck those responsibilities. Like a groundhog that has seen his shadow, they go into seclusion after each Board meeting, rarely providing opportunities for an exchange of ideas and opinions with concerned citizens.

CBES conducts Meet the Candidates Forums for all elections for local offices. In the future, candidates for Supervisor seats will be asked whether, if elected, they will hold regular Town Hall Meetings for their constituents. On the principle that if you can’t stand the heat in the kitchen, you shouldn’t become a chef, we believe that anyone who is unwilling to make that commitment should not aspire to be a Supervisor. CBES, furthermore, will work to see to it that those who are elected who have made that commitment actually keep their promise and fulfill their obligation to communicate with their constituents.

Didn’t make the Cut! In spite of Secretary of the Interior Sally Jewell’s statement that “Some places are too special to drill,” the Virginia Eastern Shore didn’t make the cut, and Virginia’s Atlantic waters have been approved for off-shore drilling. This, despite the fact that the Virginia Eastern Shore, which makes up most of the state’s Atlantic coast, is the largest remaining stretch of coastal wilderness on the entire eastern seaboard. The Shore has been recognized by the UN as an International Biosphere Reserve and as a Western Hemisphere Shorebird Network Site. But apparently those things aren’t “special” enough.

In addition to “special” bird habitat, coastal Virginia’s tourism economy, including both birding and beach-goers, brings in \$5 billion annually and the aquaculture industry on the Shore another \$55 million per year. These could all be threatened by a BP-like spill – but currently zero dollars of oil revenue would come to Virginia from drilling off our coast. To get oil dollars, Virginia would have to convince the rest of the country to let us keep revenue from federal waters. While the Shore would likely gain the least from off-shore drilling should such a BP-type spill happen, we would stand to lose the most by far.

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SHORELINE

Community Calendar - March 2015

Note: Please verify times and places prior to attending meetings.

CBES and Other Activities		Accomack County		Northampton County	
Mar 4	VIMS Public Seminar 7:30 PM, Wachapreague	Mar 2	Board of Zoning Appeals 10 AM, Sup. Chambers	Mar 2	Board of Zoning Appeals 1 PM, Conference Room
Mar 10	CBES Exec. Committee 5 PM, CBES Office	Mar 9	Planning Commission 7 PM, BOS Chambers	Mar 3	Planning Commission 7 PM, Sup. Chambers
Mar 12	Shorekeeper Meeting 3 PM, Barrier Islands Center Machipongo	Mar 15	School Board 7 PM, BOS Chambers	Mar 10	Board of Supervisors 7 PM, Sup. Chambers
Mar 17	ES Groundwater Committee 10 AM, Accomac	Mar 16	Board of Supervisors 6 PM, BOS Chambers	Mar 17	Public Service Authority 7 PM, Conference Room
Mar 17	CBES Board Meeting 7 PM, Eastville	Mar 17	Wetlands Board 10 AM, Sup. Chambers	Mar 18	Wetlands Board TBA, Conference Room
Mar 19	UVA Seminar Series 7 PM, Oyster	<div style="border: 1px solid black; padding: 5px; text-align: center;">Northampton County Public Informational Meeting March 5, 7 -10 PM Kiptopeke Elementary School</div>		Mar 24	School Board 5:30 PM, Sup. Chambers
				Mar 24	BOS Work Session 7 PM, Sup. Chambers

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