

CITIZENS FOR A BETTER EASTERN SHORE

# SHORELINE

*A Journal of Natural Resources, Public Affairs and Culture on the Eastern Shore of Virginia*

TM

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## Let's Talk Chicken

Submitted by Jay Ford, Virginia Eastern Shorekeeper

With new poultry grow houses coming to southern Accomack near the county line and proposed zoning in Northampton County that would open the door for additional expansion southward, the Eastern Shore needs to have a conversation about the poultry industry. In order to understand recent changes in our poultry grower landscape, we have to talk about Maryland.

Maryland has been wrestling with the problem of more poultry litter than the land can handle. The excess litter has resulted in over-application to fields and excess nutrients making their way into the waters of our region.

A March, 2015, report from the US Geological Survey found that, "On the Eastern Shore, the concentrations of nitrogen in groundwater, and nitrogen and phosphorus in surface waters, are well above natural levels and *are among the highest in the nation.*" The report went on to state, "The disproportionately large nitrogen and phosphorus yields from the Eastern Shore to the Chesapeake Bay are *attributable primarily to agricultural activities* but are also influenced by natural hydrogeologic and soil conditions."

**Virginia's Eastern Shore is the logical choice to move grow operations in order to get ahead of regulations that will make poultry litter management increasingly expensive in Maryland.**

At the end of March, a compromise was reached, and Maryland will begin to regulate the use of poultry litter on farmland, which in turn will aid in the cleanup of our waters. This process has an implementation date of 2022.

Given the location of the processing facilities, at this point the market takes over. Virginia's Eastern Shore is the logical choice to move grow operations in order to get ahead of regulations that will make poultry litter management increasingly expensive in Maryland. It is important to note that the environmental impact from grow operations is *not* primarily generated at the grow houses themselves, but rather it is a cumulative effect of concentrating facilities in a particular region.

Many a farmer will tell you that using poultry litter is how they introduce organic material and needed nutrients to their fields, and to a certain point that is not a problem. The primary risk to our waters arises when our litter output exceeds the absorption capacity of our lands.

So as we look to the north, the Eastern Shore has to ask itself, "How are we going to avoid repeating the mistakes Maryland has made?"

In order to make a clear decision, let's consider the economic impacts as well. Expanding the footprint of grow houses on Virginia's Eastern Shore *only creates a handful of new jobs*; however, it protects many that already exist. Visit any grow house and you can see it is not a labor-intensive operation when considering the number of

See "Chicken," Cont'd on page 3

# Small changes can equal big impacts

## Will poultry houses actually benefit Northampton?

By Art Schwarzschild

*Art Schwarzschild is an Environmental Scientist and Director of the University of Virginia's Anheuser-Busch Coastal Research Center and Long Term Ecological Research Station in Oyster. He has been active in his Willis Wharf community and Northampton public affairs. The following piece is excerpted from a recent letter to the Northampton Board of Supervisors.*

Some of the changes Northampton County is proposing for its zoning ordinance appear to be relatively minor but may actually have significant impacts on the county. For example, reducing set-backs and increasing allowances for the amount of impervious surface permitted in the agricultural zoning district may seem like a small thing, but these changes will open the door for the introduction of high density industrial poultry farming in Northampton County. Would this actually benefit the county?

Several years ago, Sam Long, Jr., served on the Board of Supervisors. At his urging, a working group was formed to investigate the potential for tweaking the zoning code to make it easier for chicken farms to operate in the county. I served as a science adviser to this working group.

At the time of the working group's

meetings, representatives from both Tyson and Purdue indicated their desire to expand operations into Northampton County with an initial goal of installing 50 chicken houses between Exmore and Eastville. Both companies indicated that they require a grower to have a minimum of 4 chicken houses, with each chicken house a minimum of 30,000 square feet, in order to ensure sufficient production to support a farm. Therefore, installing 50 chicken houses in Northampton County would equate to a maximum of 12 family farms.

Northampton's zoning code currently requires a minimum of 20 acres for chicken houses along with the ability to meet all set-back requirements from water bodies and neighboring properties for such a farm. Company representatives found this unreasonable and suggested that a farm with 4 (or more) chicken houses could be sited on a property of only 12 acres.

The Director of Planning, at that time, indicated that the zoning ordinance allowed a maximum of 15% impervious surface on Agriculturally zoned properties in order to protect the recharge of groundwater resources. The committee calculated how much land would be needed to maintain this 15% coverage limit with four 30,000 square foot poultry houses plus the associated compost building, loading pad and other structures required by Tyson and Purdue in order to operate a poultry farm – the result was 20 acres.

By eliminating the 15% impervious surface limitation in the Ag District and reducing required set-backs, the proposed zoning changes would give Tyson and Purdue exactly what they said they need in order to bring high density, industrial poultry farming into Northampton County, thereby opening the door for a minimum of 50 chicken houses to be located between Exmore and Eastville.

But, remember, fifty chicken houses equates to a maximum of 12 family farms, and according to Tyson and Purdue, these farms **would only employ the owner/operator and not generate any additional full time jobs**. Consider what would happen to property values and, therefore, real estate tax revenues for residential properties located near these poultry farms. Would the taxes generated from the farms outweigh those lost due to reduced property values?

Also, compare the potential revenue from the 12 farms to that generated by our current Aquaculture industry with clam and oyster hatcheries. Hatcheries generate dozens of jobs, and the cooperating clam and oyster growers generate hundreds more. Should the county put this entire industry at risk in order to add 12 poultry farms with no additional employees to the county revenue stream?

Some will suggest that there is no environmental risk involved, and that we should expect poultry farmers to follow all the required rules and regulations. But who will inspect and enforce these regulations? Does the county staff have such inspectors? If not, will there be funds to hire such a staff inspector?

Potential storm damage should also be considered. When Hurricane Fran hit the coast near Beaufort, NC, it caused wide scale flooding over 40 miles inland from the coast. Hog farms in the Kinston area were flooded, and even those that had met or exceeded all regulations discharged hog waste and drowned animals into nearby water bodies. Water quality in the Neuse River was massively altered. Algal blooms, including the outbreak of *Pfiesteria piscicida* (fish killing bloom that also impacted human health) occurred, causing massive fish kills and closing all major fisheries for a period of months. Shellfish harvesting was banned and the fisheries in the Neuse River and Pamlico Sound have yet to fully recover from this incident which took place over 15 years ago. And Hurricane Fran was not a particularly large storm. Consider what a similar storm could do here in Northampton County which is less than 10 miles wide.

For all these reasons, Northampton Supervisors need to carefully consider the multitude of zoning changes they are proposing, and make sure they are fully aware of the potential impacts these changes may have on the county before voting them into place. The county needs more revenue, but it is important not to act in a penny-wise and pound-foolish manner. Zoning codes should be designed to build on our strengths like traditional agriculture, aquaculture and tourism, while reducing risks of costly damages from storms and coastal flooding.



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**“Chicken,”** *Cont'd from p. 1*

personnel needed (although the work itself is plenty intensive). One to three people are able to handle most of the duties needed to bring the birds to market at a grow operation.

Also important is that these are often not the kinds of jobs that lift people out of poverty, a point Northampton County should consider closely when deciding on the future of its zoning code. A study by the National Contract Poultry Growers Association and the U.S. Department of Agriculture suggested that *71 percent of growers whose sole source of income was chicken farming were living below the poverty line.*

Perhaps most importantly, poultry companies bear no responsibility for the waste created at their grow houses because the growers are technically contractors, though they work exclusively for one poultry company or another. This arrangement means that the grower is responsible for the tons of manure and other waste their facilities produce. By and large, these growers responsibly follow the guidelines set out under the law to properly house and compost their waste materials. However, two factors cannot be mitigated: the necessary impervious surfaces and the volume of poultry litter produced. These factors are what we need to focus our attention on when considering the question of chicken house expansion.

Impervious surfaces create stormwater runoff, carrying nutrients and sediments into our delicate waterways. Additionally, when sited in certain areas these hardened structures prevent recharge of the aquifer that relies on rainfall permeating the soil to keep the Shore supplied with fresh water.

The poultry litter is often spread on local farm fields. This only becomes an issue when we have more litter than the land needs, and many are quick to say we are not there yet on Virginia's Eastern Shore. However, planning for this eventuality is something we need to do now rather than when the problem is here.


Each of our counties faces decisions in the immediate and near future that will help shape the future of the poultry industry on the Eastern Shore. For Northampton County those decisions should be easy. The risk presented to our booming aquaculture industry in exchange for a handful of jobs makes the prospect of grow houses untenable. The few grower jobs created cannot possibly balance the ledger when one considers the effect on land values, tourism, aquaculture, and ultimately the water quality of our region. However, ***growing chickens is considered a by-right activity on land zoned Agricultural, so Northampton County must retain the lot coverage limits and setbacks in the current zoning code.***

In Accomack County, the decisions to be made are far more complex. Growing chickens provide many people with jobs directly through the processing facilities and grow operations, and indirectly through support services, most notably farmers who grow feed. There is no question that poultry is a major driver of the Accomack County economy. However, market forces will inevitably increase grow operations south of the Maryland state line and closer to the Northampton line as we have just seen with the new Tyson seaside grow operation.

Two major issue areas should be on the minds of Accomack leadership. First, what does too much poultry litter look like for Accomack and ultimately the Eastern Shore of

Virginia? Knowing the amount of litter the agricultural lands can responsibly use is the best indicator for the number of grow houses we can responsibly support as region. Not addressing this question will put us on a path to recreate what has happened to the north.

The second question for Accomack has to do with the siting of these operations. As pressures to increase density grow, so will the instances in which developments, schools, and waterways are in close proximity. As a member of the Accomack Board noted recently, poultry farms are different from agricultural farms. Many communities are beginning to have a conversation about siting these facilities, which are in many ways more similar to light industry than agriculture. Again, as a by-right activity, helping to steer the growth of these facilities can only be effected through the planning and zoning process, and I hope that Accomack leadership empowers the Planning Commission to begin considering the matter.

We on the Eastern Shore have an opportunity to address market forces before we are swept away by them. Let's seize the opportunity to show how a community responsibly balances the push and pull between industry and natural resources. I hope that years from now, someone in Maryland will be looking south at us and saying, "They got it right." 

## Archaeology Day

Visitors often wonder about the history of the region as they drive the byways of the Eastern Shore, and now both residents and visitors have the chance to visit some of the oldest historical sites in the region.

**Eastern Shore Public Archaeology Day**  
**9:00 AM on Saturday, May 16**  
**Palace Theater in Cape Charles**  
**Free and open to the public**

The morning program includes speakers from James Madison University, the USDA Forest Service, the Virginia Department of Historic Resources and others covering such subjects as priority sites for research, the archaeology of watermen, and threats to archaeological resources.

Afternoon attendees may visit local sites including Cape Charles Museum, Arlington tomb and mansion site, Barrier Islands Center & Museum, Eyre Hall archaeological site, Eastville Court Green, Pear Valley Yeoman's Cottage, Ker Place and the Makemie Memorial where docents will be on hand to interpret the sites and answer questions.

For more information contact the Northampton Historic Preservation Society at 757-999-1299.

Event sponsored by: Archaeological Society of Virginia, Chesapeake Bay Archaeological Consortium, Dept of Historic Resources, USDA-Forest Service Passport in Time, George Washington and Jefferson National Forests, James Madison University, Northampton Historic Preservation Society.

# Northampton BoS Reviews Info Meeting Comments

By Mary Miller

Three days before the Board's March 30 work session, Northampton Supervisors were given the 256 pages of written comments from the public to review. They were also provided with a 16-page staff review of some of the comments. Following is a summary of discussion as the Board dealt with these public comments.

- The first issue: "waste disposal" definitions. There had been wide-spread public opposition to the vague wording which appeared to allow for everything from paper recycling to hazardous waste and chicken manure incineration. (See KT, page 6, "Waste" by any other name?? It's still garbage..." for details.)
- The Board then reached a consensus that Special Use Permit applications would be reviewed by the Planning Commission. After a public hearing, the Commission would recommend action to the Board – the process currently in place. There was concern about the cost of a recent permit to locate a mobile home. The Board can set fees for county services.
- A lengthy discussion about whether or not adjacent property owners should have a right to be informed, and then allowed to have input, on nearby development. The rezoning proposal makes many new commercial and recreational Uses by-right in Residential neighborhoods and, therefore, requires no public hearing or comment. Economic Development Director McSwain gave an *impromptu* lecture on "property rights" from the development perspective. But no mention was made of the Virginia Code requirement that zoning changes must factor in the conservation of property values and the most appropriate use of land. No changes were made to the rezoning.
- Planned Unit Development (PUD) Districts, with no design criteria and no PUD Ordinance included in the rezoning, were opposed by many property owners. The Zoning Administrator stated that the county currently has several floating districts allowing for mobile home parks, industrial parks, etc. and which already have design criteria in place, and which will be removed from the proposed rezoning. Supervisor LeMond stated that there should be "no design criteria" for PUDs, and the Board agreed.
- Current Town Edge (TE) Districts, supported by at least three of the incorporated towns, were inserted by unanimous consensus into the rezoning draft. Again, the conversation was led by Supervisor LeMond, who agreed that the county should consult with the towns about new development on adjacent lands. There will be discussions soon with each town about the TE Districts.
- Concerns about new development along Rt. 13, which lies on the sole-source aquifer recharge area, were dismissed since little new Commercial zoning was being mapped along the highway.
- Removal of lot coverage ratios, the amount of impervious surface permitted on a parcel, was addressed in the context of the exception of single family dwellings to new State stormwater regulations. See "Lot Coverage—why it matters," on page 5.
- The Zoning Administrator's proposed new authority to permit Uses similar to those already allowed was questioned in many of the written comments. The Board left that provision unchanged, but may request a monthly report of any new uses.
- Removal of "Prison" as a permitted use was replaced by "Jail"

– and defined as a county-operated facility. This discussion prompted two Board members to take a few minutes of "personal privilege" and state their opinions that the county would be economically better off now if a state maximum security prison had been allowed to be built near Bayview, in the 1990's. See KT. Page 6, "State prisons vs. current county prosperity."

- Comments objecting to zoning changes on specific parcels were reviewed.
  1. A parcel on Mockhorn Bay, squarely in the middle of a Residential-5 zoning district and changed to Agricultural at the owner's request, was proposed to be re-zoned back to R-5.
  2. Three AG parcels, completely surrounded by residential zoning near Silver Beach, and for which both the owners and neighboring parcel owners requested residential zoning, were left as AG. Supervisors Hubbard and LeMond stated that the county had enough lots now.
  3. And several property owners in the Kiptopeke Hamlet requested that their neighborhood be rezoned to residential. The Board will wait for a staff recommendation.
- Many comments asked for a side-by-side comparison of Uses by District – current zoning compared to proposed rezoning. The County Administrator said that a comparison would be very time consuming. It was unclear if a comparison document would be produced. Minutes state the Board had concluded "that this analysis was not needed."

Although all 123 public input comments were listed in a chart, and many of those were repetitive, there was discussion only on about 20 specific items – those listed on the staff's report. There was little in-depth discussion on any of them. It was unclear if the staff would be asked to provide recommendations on the remaining comments.

Inserted into the middle of the staff report, but unlisted in the public comment chart and with no apparent connection to the review of public comments, was "Item #16: New use: Event Venue." This was a two-page addition to the proposed rezoning, generated by county staff, including a definition, an Ordinance Section number, "performance standards" (most referring to existing state and county regulations) and a Section change to the proposed rezoning Off-Street Parking requirements. The Use is described as a commercial use, buildings and structures, tents and stages, in a permanent location, with outdoor events set back 300 feet from residential property lines – and would require a Special Use Permit in Agricultural, Commercial, Industrial and Residential-3 and -5 Districts. Overnight accommodations may be approved as a separate use on the property. A proposal for a Use of such undetermined size and scope, on parcels as small as three acres, permitted in residential districts and with no previous publication or opportunity for public input on the new Use, appeared unusual even for the current irregular rezoning process. The Board put off action on this item.

At the close of the meeting, Chairman Hubbard advised that the Board "should try to understand the Uses." Supervisor Trala responded: "We should review them again." It was unclear whether the Board intends to continue to review the remaining public comments at a future meeting. The County Administrator stated that comments could continue to be submitted.



# Lot coverage limits – why they matter

By Mary Miller

It's a simple concept. A zoning ordinance may set a maximum amount of impervious surface (often known as the Impervious Surface Ratio) for lots and parcels of land – in other words, the amount of the parcel that can be paved over or covered with structures or other hard surfaces like swimming pools, patios, decks, driveways, etc. The community as a whole is usually well-served by the addition of the resulting open space that impervious surface limits provide because natural stormwater absorption by lawns and fields and the avoidance of drainage onto roads and adjacent properties is desirable. In addition, when a locality depends on a sole source aquifer for its potable water, as the Eastern Shore does, it is critical to protect the best groundwater recharge areas from excessive impervious surfaces. And when a locality needs clean surface water to support one of its key industries, aquaculture, then lot coverage limits help reduce stormwater runoff into those essential water resources.

Northampton County has lot coverage limits in its current zoning ordinance. But the proposed rezoning removes those protections. The justification for removing those limits is that the new Stormwater Management Regulations would provide the same safeguards as currently contained in the county's "Standards for Lot Coverage." They don't.

At first, the state's new stormwater regulations required a formal, legally enforceable Stormwater Management Plan for all new land disturbing projects – even though they did not include lot coverage limits. However, last minute changes created exemptions to the new rules:

- new single family residences which disturb less than one acre of land and which are not part of a common plan of development, and
- most other land disturbing activities that disturb less than one acre of land.


The exemptions mean that when county rezoning eliminates all lot coverage limits, then most land disturbing activities of less than one acre won't need a Stormwater Management Plan. In an attempt to provide a way for local government to mitigate this, the Department of Environmental Quality (DEQ) has published an "Agreement in Lieu of a Stormwater Management Plan – Single-Family Detached Residential Structure" which the county may require.

The "Agreement" is self-regulating. It *suggests* that stormwater runoff be "minimized to the maximum extent practicable." But enforcement will be at the state level – not by the county – and does not contain lot coverage limits, so any property owner harmed by runoff from adjacent properties will have to deal with the DEQ in Richmond. The "Agreement" provides no objective criteria to define a violation – and it has no specific provisions for proper drainage and stormwater management for many of the low lying areas typical of the topography in Northampton County. The county does require this "Agreement" for the exempted activities, although it does not participate in enforcement.

The new regulations will permit Chesapeake Bay Protection Act counties (including Accomack and Northampton) to reduce the land disturbance threshold to 2,500 square feet in order to

require that a Stormwater Management Plan must be in place. Northampton is exploring that possibility.


Also exempt from creating a Stormwater Management Plan are "livestock feedlot operations." The EPA has defined feedlot operations, and since the Virginia Code has not redefined this activity within the context of new stormwater regulations, a reasonable assumption would be that the EPA definition is accepted for regulatory purposes. Broiler (poultry) facilities are listed, and are defined as "*agricultural operations where animals are kept and raised in confined situations.*" The only ways that counties can mitigate impacts from this use is through maximum lot coverage and setback standards.

The Northampton Board of Supervisors declined to retain the existing "Standards for Lot Coverage" in the proposed rezoning. However, they may be considered during discussion of the Bay Act ordinance. 

## Poultry Houses vs. People Houses

In a recent letter to the Northampton County Supervisors, real estate developer Eileen Kirkwood objected to the location of eight poultry houses adjacent to her Waterside Village subdivision just north of Exmore in Accomack County. She states that the applicants are a Tyson employee and a property owner from Princess Anne, Maryland, and this ownership does not fit Accomack's "family farm" definition. Maps are provided which appear to show the project located about ½ mile north of the county line in the Parting Creek watershed, site of much of the Northampton's aquaculture industry.

In an email to then-Board Chair LeMond, Kirkwood requests that the Northampton Board contact Accomack County, defining this project as "an industrial use which could jeopardize Northampton's major [aquaculture] industry." Sales data is provided which shows a sharp decline in lot prices after poultry houses were built next to a subdivision near Melfa.

Current Northampton County setbacks from poultry houses offer protection for homeowners and surface waters – ranging from 1,000 feet from Hamlets to 1500 feet from Villages, Cottage Communities and Town Edge Districts, to 2000 feet from Towns and tidal waters. Proposed rezoning would decrease those setbacks to 500 feet. 

## CANCELLED E-TRASH 4 CA\$H

*Unfortunately, circumstances beyond our control have forced us to cancel this fundraiser.*

# Keeping Track

**Prisons vs. Prosperity.** We understand that two Northampton Supervisors recently lamented in a public meeting the county’s decision back in the mid-1990s not to allow a state prison to be built here. What’s happened to the counties which were included in the state’s prison building boom over the last 30 years? Did the promises of jobs, economic development and state-provided benefits meet expectations? Not so much.

And not for many rural counties. Localities were looking at prisons as economic engines back then, and Northampton County’s refusal to take the bait in 1993 was considered Wise County’s windfall. By the middle of the decade Wise county had not one, but two, so-called “Super Max” prisons. Greenville, Buchanan and Mecklenburg Counties, all rural, had one state prison each, and the correctional system was often the largest employer in the county.

Then the prison population started to fall off – court imposed sentences became shorter, the crime rate fell and in the midst of lawsuits against the Commonwealth for unacceptable treatment of inmates, other states took back their farmed-out prisoners.

Former Governor McDonnell closed the Mecklenburg prison, nearly bankrupting the town of Boynton. The town relied heavily on the prison’s sewage payments to support their town budget, and was left with a \$1.4 million debt for sewer lines to the prison. One of the Wise County prisons was downgraded, causing layoffs and long-term unemployment. The state prison in Pittsylvania County closed less than ten years after it was built, and a brand new facility in Grayson County has never opened.

How have the residents of these rural “prison counties” fared? Over the past several years Wise, Buchanan, Greenville and Mecklenburg counties remained near the bottom in state poverty rankings. The *per capita* income in these four “prison counties” and Pittsylvania County was as much as 20% lower than in Northampton. And in spite of high numbers of corrections employees, the unemployment rates for many prison economy counties was up to 4% higher than Northampton’s over the past several years (*perhaps suggesting out-of-area workers*). Inmates of course, are not factored into these figures.

The Virginia Department of Corrections has not proven to be a reliable partner in many rural counties. Northampton County leaders made the decision two decades ago to forego a one-industry economy, thereby avoiding the pitfalls other localities are facing now. The subsequent growth of the county’s asset-based local economy, especially aquaculture and tourism, has demonstrated an option for diversity that many rural counties with few assets, have been unable to achieve.

**“Waste” – by any name, it’s still garbage.** The current Northampton zoning ordinance carefully defines all the ways the county handles its waste disposal needs – sewerage treatment, recycling, convenience centers and the landfill. The proposed county rezoning tries to redefine, and apparently expand, the role of “waste” in the county through several changes.

- First proposed change: **“Waste-related.** Matters dealing with domestic, commercial and industrial waste.”
- Second proposed change: **“Waste management.** The collection, source separation, storage, transportation, transfer, processing, treatment and disposal of waste or resource recovery.”

The Board of Supervisors reached consensus on the second change above, which includes a “resource recovery” phrase, without seeming to realize it was a reworded version of the first try. They agreed that this change would address the large number of comments opposing this open-ended language. It doesn’t. The Resource and Recovery Act (RCRA) allows private handlers and disposal concerns to operate incinerators and waste treatment facilities.

While the current ordinance provides several ways to handle county waste, the new definition opens wide the doors to commercial and industrial waste disposal operations – no matter what it is, no matter where it comes from. No details, no performance standards, no impact review on ground or surface water, and no impervious surface limits are listed in the proposed zoning for any new, for-profit waste enterprises.

If the county intends to responsibly manage its own waste needs, here’s the only definition needed:

**Waste disposal** – to provide for the management, operation and expansion of the county’s waste disposal needs to include: waste water treatment facilities; county-owned and operated convenience centers for the collection and transfer of county solid waste including recyclables; temporary hazardous waste collection events; and the existing county-owned sanitary landfill.

Any other commercial or industrial waste-related Use would logically come forward as an application for a zoning text amendment, for a clearly defined Use, with appropriate performance standards, as part of a specific proposed project.



## “Executive Director’s Corner,” *Cont’d from p. 7*

for getting the unintended consequences before the Board. The Board unanimously voted to bring the issue to public hearing and, for all intents and purposes, slam-dunked \$22,000 back into county coffers.

One goal at CBES is to help Eastern Shore citizens get involved in our local government – for reasons amply demonstrated by Mr. Meyers. His efforts helped grease the wheels to facilitate the democratic process for the benefit of “we the people.” So yes, you can “fight city hall.” We as citizens can bring better information to our elected leaders and help them make better decisions for the benefit of us all.

**Author’s Comment.** *It’s interesting to note that in 1939, the film Mr. Smith Goes to Washington was banned by fascist states in Europe. Why? They were afraid it showed that democracy works.*



## Registration open!

**23rd Annual Between the Waters Bike Tour**

Saturday, October 24, 2015

Bi-coastal biking bliss

Register online at [www.cbes.org](http://www.cbes.org)

*Exec Director's Corner*

# “Mr. Smith” Goes to Eastville

By Donna Bozza, CBES Executive Director

I never bought the defeatist cry, “*You can’t fight City Hall!*” Chalk it up to repeatedly watching the earnest Jimmy Stewart play the patriotic idealist in *Mr. Smith Goes to Washington* during my formative years. To suggest we have no say in our governance is to feed apathy – the sit-on-your-hands approach that sucks the power out of a democracy. Effective democracy requires the active participation of people in their government.

However, it’s easy to understand that battling bureaucracy can take the fight out of the most inspired Mr. Smith. It’s critical that “we the people” don’t lose sight of the fact that we *can* make a difference and, for the collective good, we should. Affecting change is no more easily accomplished than in local government, especially in a rural area like the Eastern Shore. Here we can discuss a town councilman’s vote with him over the cabbage in the produce aisle or have face time in a pew with our Supervisor.

At a recent Northampton Board of Supervisors meeting, the audience watched the Board grappling with the shortfalls of the proposed FY 2016 Budget. Sitting there next to a citizen who is a permanent fixture at county meetings, it was clear to all that we were on the path to a tax hike – the only question was how much of an “ouch.”

At an earlier meeting, the County Administrator had reported that twice a year billing was, after last year’s delay, finally going into effect in time for a June tax deadline. Brought on in an apparent effort to relieve county residents of the Scrooge-like one-year tax hit in December, there was no financial incentive for the county to adopt bi-annual billing. In fact, it soon surfaced that the change would cost the county an additional \$22,000 a year.

During a myriad of suggested cost savings, including having inmates paint the interior of the county courthouse, we waited. However, neither the Board nor the County Administrator sprang to their feet shouting, “Eureka, I’ve found \$22,000!”

After the meeting, the aforesaid citizen, Bob Meyers, and I

approached the bench and asked why yanking the semi-annual billing wasn’t being considered. Chairman Rick Hubbard stated it was too late in the billing process to do that this year – But was it?

The next morning I wasn’t doubting the Chair’s word but with the old reporter in me combined with CBES charge to “ask questions,” I brought this question to both the County Treasurer and the Commissioner of Revenue’s office. The conversations were brief. In essence, it wasn’t too late in the process. Both offices were feeling a herculean pressure to meet the bi-annual billing deadline without any additional staff support. I asked if there was money already spent or anything that would impede pulling the plug? The answer from both offices was “No.”

Mr. Meyers took this a step further and met with both offices to clarify key points. Along with cost savings other issues came to light, including the penalization of the very citizens the twice a year billing was implemented to help, those who struggle every year to pay their taxes. A nonpayment or underpayment in June would slap an immediate 10% penalty plus interest on the unpaid balance. Additionally, the potential June billing had created computational problems for many mortgage companies and generated thousands of irate phone calls to the Treasurer’s office. Both Commissioner Anne Sayers and Treasurer Cindy Bradford reiterated that the early collection that some counties do in Virginia because of insufficient cash flow was a non-issue for Northampton County.

With this information in hand, Mr. Meyers alerted each member of the Board of Supervisors via email and even hand delivered information over Easter weekend since time was of the essence.

At the Board’s final budget work session after Supervisor Larry LeMond explained why he for one had previously supported the semi-annual billing, he tipped his hat to Mr. Meyers

See “Mr. Smith” Cont’d on p. 6

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## CBES Membership 2015

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City \_\_\_\_\_ State \_\_\_\_\_ Zip \_\_\_\_\_ - \_\_\_\_\_

My volunteer interests are: \_\_\_\_\_

Enclosed is \$ \_\_\_\_\_ for the following:

- \* \_\_\_\_\_ Regular Membership (includes *ShoreLine*) \$ 25
- \* \_\_\_\_\_ Life Membership (includes *ShoreLine*) \$ 500
- \* \_\_\_\_\_ Optional additional tax-deductible contribution of \$ \_\_\_\_\_
- \* \_\_\_\_\_ *ShoreLine* subscription without CBES membership \$ 25

For our membership records, please tell us how many there are in your home 16 years or older: \_\_\_\_\_

Citizens for a Better Eastern Shore  
P. O. Box 882  
Eastville, VA 23347-0882

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**RENEW YOUR  
MEMBERSHIP NOW!**

# SHORELINE

## Community Calendar - May 2015

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

CBES and Other Activities		Accomack County		Northampton County	
<b>May 6</b>	<b>VIMS Public Seminar</b> 7:30 PM, Wachapreague	<b>May 6</b>	<b>Board of Zoning Appeals</b> 10 AM, Sup. Chambers	<b>May 4</b>	<b>Board of Zoning Appeals</b> 1 PM, Conference Room
<b>May 12</b>	<b>CBES Exec. Committee</b> 5 PM, CBES Office	<b>May 13</b>	<b>Planning Commission</b> 7 PM, BOS Chambers	<b>May 5</b>	<b>Planning Commission</b> 7 PM, Sup. Chambers
<b>May 14</b>	<b>Shorekeeper Meeting</b> 3 PM, ES Chamber of Commerce, Melfa	<b>May 19</b>	<b>School Board</b> 7 PM, BOS Chambers	<b>May 12</b>	<b>Board of Supervisors</b> 7 PM, Sup. Chambers
<b>May 19</b>	<b>ES Groundwater Committee</b> 10 AM, Accomac	<b>May 20</b>	<b>Board of Supervisors</b> 6 PM, BOS Chambers	<b>May 19</b>	<b>Public Service Authority</b> 7 PM, Conference Room
<b>May 19</b>	<b>CBES Board Meeting</b> 7 PM, Eastville	<b>May 21</b>	<b>Wetlands Board</b> 10 AM, Sup. Chambers	<b>May 20</b>	<b>Wetlands Board</b> TBA, Conference Room
<b>May 21</b>	<b>UVA Seminar Series</b> 7 PM, Oyster			<b>May 26</b>	<b>School Board</b> 5:30 PM, Sup. Chambers
				<b>May 26</b>	<b>BOS Work Session</b> 7 PM, Sup. Chambers

[www.cbes.org](http://www.cbes.org)