A Comprehensive Plan does not have the weight of a legal document, but it does contain guidelines for county policy decisions, including future changes to the Zoning Ordinance, which is a legal document. For months, the Draft of the proposed new Comprehensive Plan was buried all layers deep, through an unmarked maze, on the County website – interestingly labeled “Repaired.”

Six years in the writing, it presents a picture of a county on a downward slide – rural, isolated, no jobs, inadequate education, with an aging population, poverty-stricken, untrained workforce, strained town/county relations, no assets and little hope. Much of the rewritten Introduction is based on 6-year-old input, especially on a report by a defunct committee that relied heavily on an extremely limited phone survey. It barely mentions that any organized public input was cut off in 2012, in the middle of the worst recession since the Great Depression. The most frequently mentioned solution in the Draft to almost every problem is to rewrite the county’s Zoning Ordinance.

Almost 2 of the past 6 years were spent doing exactly that. The Planning Commission abandoned work on the Comprehensive Plan and actually rewrote the Zoning Ordinance. Loudly opposed by the community, and not supported by official studies or data, the rewritten Ordinance was nevertheless adopted by a lame-duck Board of Supervisors. It was amended out of existence by a new Board 4 months later.

Scores of pages of recommendations were recently provided by a Stakeholder’s Group – some are acknowledged but often are not incorporated in strategies. And many of the excellent recommendations from the Northampton County Competitiveness Assessment, particularly the promotion and marketing of the county’s assets, have largely been ignored by the Commission.

Interestingly, this new Draft appears to mimic the ill-fated zoning rewrite. Written without professional guidance or expertise, it includes many arbitrary changes, unsupported recommendations, and editorial conclusions – and the Draft often appears to reflect individual views of Planning Commissioners.

Some Proposed Draft Details

Land Use

- **Eliminates**: Six current zoning districts and inserts 3 new ones
- **Eliminates**: Hamlet District – used by many rural counties in Virginia to recognize small residential settlements of historic or diverse cultural importance – Hamlets become Villages – higher density, with increased commercial uses
- **Eliminates**: flood-prone Waterfront Village and Waterfront Hamlet Districts – changed to higher-density Villages/Hamlets
- **Eliminates**: Oyster and Willis Wharf Village Vision Plans – increases population density
Comp Plan, Cont’d from p. 1

- **Eliminates**: Existing Subdivision District, mainly single-family with underlying property rights – changed to Residential Districts, adds multi-family, greatly increased density
- **Eliminates**: Town Edge Districts – replaced by Potential Development Areas – no density limits, includes “large-scale commercial/industrial development”
- **Adds**: Planned Unit Development District (PUD) – unmapped areas, no performance criteria, no residential density limits, intended to “be established along major corridors or growth areas”
- **Recommendation**: Revise the current Zoning Ordinance to match the Draft

**Economic Development**

- Narrative based primarily on 6-year-old community input, including repeated references to a phone survey funded by the real estate industry and conducted and analyzed by a firm¹ whose website promotes its “knowledge of the electorate and public attitudes” to “create timely, actionable data by which we can navigate a given crisis”
- State employment graphic appears to show county employment by industry sector to be consistent with other rural counties
- No mention of record-breaking state tourism numbers, expanding aquaculture marketing, or success of entrepreneurial businesses
- Even positive comments about growing industry sectors, entrepreneurial activity, influx of middle- to high-income retirees, are presented with a negative spin
- Narrative makes the case for why the county is the wrong place for business investment
- Of 13 recommendations for action to “Increase and Diversify the County’s Economy,” 9 are labeled “ongoing” under current county policies; 1 suggests hiring yet another Economic Development Director (an action with a 3 for 3 failure rate)
- **Recommendation**: “streamline the Zoning Ordinance” immediately

**Housing**

- Makes the case that the county is not a desirable place for a home investment – lack of infrastructure, declining population, high poverty rate, blight, depressed neighborhoods and empty lots
- Notes the lack of extremely low-to moderate-income housing but includes no State-mandated plan to provide it ⁵
- Promotes affordable housing by zoning change to allow “multi-family by right” in residential districts, with no recommended requirement or incentive to actually create any affordable housing
- **From Draft**: “A GIS analysis in 2014 conducted by County staff identified approximately 5,000 undeveloped building lots in the County and 1,929 within the Towns. There is opportunity to provide a range of housing types for all income levels.”

**Environment, Natural Resources, Open Space**

- Vulnerable resources identified: coastal inundation, ground and surface water, animal and bird habitat, wetlands, dunes, natural areas, and farmland – the 72 resource protection strategies in the current Plan have been reduced to 14
- **Eliminates**: specific zoning recommendations to protect aquifer recharge area, maintain shoreline buffer widths, protect aquatic vegetation, improve development standards, create incentives for dune protection, and enforce waterfront lot dimensions
- **Eliminates**: the Northampton County Sensitive Natural Resources Area Report and Recommendations
- **Recommends**: a 2- to 3-year plan to develop a Groundwater Management Plan and Ordinance

**Community Services and Facilities**

- **Includes**: Public Service Authority sewer maps, Northern and Southern Nodes
- **Creates**: a 1- to 3-year window to identify more areas for expansion of water/sewer lines
- **Includes**: strategies that need substantial funding – basically a wish list with no plan for financing
- **Eliminates**: current Plan’s 97 strategies, many still ongoing, ranging from increasing outreach to county citizens to improving the county website, from adopting a county proffer policy to joint Town/County initiatives, from developing joint school/county recreational facilities to creating mechanisms for protection of historic and cultural assets

**Transportation**

- **Recommends**: conducting a drainage survey with no further action plan
- **From Draft**: “Encourage nodal growth along U.S. Route 13 at existing improved intersections.”

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*¹ Note: The firm in question specializes in promoting its website as a resource for political campaigns.*
Review – or Rewrite?

The Draft appears to be a rewrite of enough of the county’s Plan to justify removing reasonable performance standards for development and resource protection from the Zoning Ordinance, with an overall land use goal of increasing residential density. Virginia Code allows, but does not require, Urban Development Areas for population growth and increased density (up to 12 units per acre). Northampton population is projected to decline 20% over 3 decades. The Draft appears to misread Code requirements.

There are at least 4 major changes in the Draft and its process that appear to indicate some arbitrary rewriting of the current Comprehensive Plan:

1 – It presents the county in an extremely negative light – poor education, poverty, no workforce, no hope.

2 – It demonstrates an apparent suppression of organized community input for the past 6 years. Long-time residents and new property owners, many with substantial home investments, have been completely cut out of the process.

3 – It carefully eliminates much of the decades-long, publicly endorsed zoning policy, and the reasonable performance standards language, that have guided development and protected resources.

4 – The Draft sets the stage for arbitrary, unsupported changes to the Zoning Ordinance – especially massive residential density increases and removal of many resource management policies.

The Planning Commission continues to work on the Draft.

ShoreLine Comment. CBES has long raised our concerns regarding the Northampton County Comprehensive Plan. It is disappointing that this draft continues to be poorly supported by data, research, or significant community participation. The tone is singularly negative, ignoring marked success in tourism and aquaculture. We continue to hope that the Board of Supervisors can still guide the process to result in a more usable document – one that can support our zoning process.
Rich Morrison, Director of Planning and Community Development for Accomack County, presented a draft of the 2018 Annual Poultry Report to the Accomack County Planning Commission at their March 14 meeting. Further refinements will be made at the March 27 Planning Commission Work Session, and the final report will be presented to the Board of Supervisors at their April 18 meeting.

Nailing Down the Numbers

The map on the insert shows the location and approximate size of the existing, permitted, and pending operations. As the report noted, “historically speaking, the majority of the poultry houses in the County were located north of Parksley [blue dots on the map]. Since 2014, a significant number of new poultry houses have been located south of Parksley.” The report provided a further breakdown of the numbers, with a total of 539 poultry houses, or CAFOs (concentrated animal feeding operations), including:

• 284 approved poultry houses prior to 2014 (based on county assessor records and aerial photos)
• 240 approved poultry houses from 2014 to 2017 (77 under the old ordinance, and 163 under the February 2016 ordinance)
• 15 pending poultry houses in 2018

Combining these numbers with those shown on the map yields a density as follows:

• 3.8 houses per site for 74 sites existing/permited prior to 2014
• 7.7 houses per site for 31 sites completed/permited 2014 to 2017
• 5.0 houses per site for 3 sites pending in 2018

A slide included in the draft presentation to the Planning Commission at their February 27 Work Session, but not included in the current draft report, shows a 5-year industry projection (from 2 of the 4 integrators operating in the county) of an additional 38 poultry houses from 2018 to 2023, bringing the total to 577. The county is further refining the number of poultry houses prior to 2014 via on-site inspection (since some of these may be out of operation), in time for the final presentation to the Board of Supervisors.

During the February 21 Accomack Board of Supervisors meeting, Kevin Taylor, Complex Manager for the Temperanceville Tyson facility, told the Board that Tyson is not expanding on the Eastern Shore of Virginia. Morrison clarified at the Planning Commission meeting that this statement referred to all of Delmarva, not just the Eastern Shore of Virginia, as they decommission poultry houses in Delaware and Maryland and build new houses here.

Economic Impact

The Poultry Report provides some information about the economic impact of poultry in the county, including:

• The 2 processing plants for Perdue and Tyson account for more than 3,000 direct jobs, with more than 4,000 direct and indirect jobs.
• Accomack County ranked fourth in the state for poultry production in the 2012 Census of Agriculture, and, given the additional 240 poultry houses, is expected to rise in the ranking in the 2017 Census.
• Poultry processing accounted for $121 million (48%) of the estimated 2014 private-sector, non-farm payroll in Accomack County.
• Property tax revenue is expected to increase substantially on the parcels with the addition of poultry houses; the three examples in the report increased in valuation by $573,600 to over $2 million, with real estate taxes increasing by $3,499 to $13,177.

Groundwater Usage

As reported in the February 2018 issue of ShoreLine (“Eastern Shore Groundwater: Numbers Show Disturbing Trends”), there has been growing concern about the groundwater usage by the CAFOs, and the lack of groundwater withdrawal permits for these operations. As reported at the March 20 meeting of the Eastern Shore Ground Water Committee, the Department of Environmental Quality (DEQ) is reviewing the 30 applications received (for 35 CAFOs) to date; warning letters were sent on February 22 to the remaining 50 operators, with 46 responding to date, many of whom are “pulling together” their water usage data. Drew Hammond, Office of Water Supply, Water Withdrawal Permitting for DEQ, indicated that the first applications may be ready for public comments by May or

See Accomack Poultry, cont’d on page 5
Accomack Poultry, cont’d from p. 4

June; if sufficient comments are received (which is anticipated), local hearings will be held.

Hammond stated that they are still working with the estimate of 3.1 million gallons a day (MGD) for the total usage by all CAFOs in the county, “based on a worst-case scenario,” but he remains “cautiously optimistic” that the number will be reduced once all the modeling has been done as part of the permit process.

The Poultry Report shows low, mid, and high range numbers for total usage (consumption and cooling) of 70,950, 81,625, and 152,875 gallons per month per poultry house, respectively. If this is multiplied out by the total number of houses (with 240 new houses and a 70% factor for the 284 old houses, to account for some smaller houses and some out of use), it equates to 1.0, 1.2, and 2.2 MGD, respectively. Morrison has acknowledged, after discussions with DEQ, that the estimated usage is probably somewhere between the mid and high range numbers. The 2018 Poultry Report also notes that the estimate of 129,000 gallons per month per poultry house from the 2016 Poultry Report “has been confirmed by actual metered use data.” Hammond warned that, in comparing usage numbers, “we can’t treat the aquifer like a bathtub,” so localized modeling is key.

Of course, the concerns about groundwater usage relate to withdrawals from the deep (Yorktown-Eastover) aquifer. During the February 21 Accomack Board of Supervisors meeting, Tyson’s Complex Manager Taylor also told the Board that Tyson will drill into the surficial (Columbia) aquifer for cooling water, where feasible, for CAFOs under construction, and will go back and look at retrofitting new houses already under operation. Estimates for cooling water vary from 20% to 66% of the total usage; cooling is typically needed for 5 months out of the year.

Tyson staff in attendance at the March 20 Ground Water Committee meeting assured this reporter that wells have not been drilled for many of the facilities, and that well drilling is one of the last steps in the construction process. Several members of the Ground Water Committee expressed skepticism about Tyson’s following through, but were encouraged by their statement, and proposed setting up a relationship between Tyson and the Committee through this process. At their March 21 meeting, the Accomack Board of Supervisors agreed to ask Perdue to also use the Columbia aquifer for its use where possible.

Hammond indicated that the aquifer being used will be part of the technical review of the groundwater withdrawal permit applications. The assumption is that all CAFOs to date have been using the Yorktown-Eastover aquifer.

CBES Reaches a Milestone

CBES is 30 years old this year. We often talk about how unusual CBES is. We are an organization dedicated to intensely local issues and are locally funded. We know of no other organizations with a charter as broad as ours that exist anywhere else. I believe that the Eastern Shore’s sense of place and belonging play key roles in our continued relevance and support in the community. People love the Shore in a way that is no longer common. We have so many folks here who truly think of this as their “home.” People here worry about the long-term implications that will span generations.

Usually, the pattern of local groups like CBES is to start with an issue so “hot” that a local group organizes to address it. Normally the group disbands or fades away once the founding issue calms down. CBES founding was similar – we were started by a group of citizens concerned about how the Shore was developing and what that meant for our existing community – a real estate boom that, at the time, looked like it could overwhelm our sense of place. But the early leadership of CBES decided to name the group Citizens for a Better Eastern Shore rather than a more issue-oriented name. They really believed in a broader mission. And the result was that the charter of the group became more inclusive of all of our community, and more flexible to address new issues as they arose. We like to think that our founders’ vision still serves us well as we continue to work through what “better” means for our community. We continue to highlight and address what are the “threats” or risks to our community as well as what successes we highlight and celebrate together.

One of the benefits of our longevity is that we have a proud legacy now that we can point back to. Many groups that now make notable contributions to our community were once either sponsored by CBES or its board members, or, even more frequently, mentored or affiliated in their startup mode with CBES.

For example, one of my favorite annual events is the Community Unity breakfast sponsored now by the NAACP, CBES, and Northampton Schools. In the beginning, this grew out of discussions between CBES board member Jane Cabarrus, Suzanne Wescoat (CBES President), and a few
CBES Milestone, cont’d from p. 5

others. They started the annual event; CBES provided early financial support, received and held donations for the event under our non-profit status, and provided volunteers to man the event.

The Bayview Community was started by Alice Coles (a CBES board member) with help from Norm Nasson (CBES President). CBES helped draft its bylaws, organize its office and accounting systems, staff some early projects with volunteers, and generally provided support for its startup.

The Virginia Eastern Shorekeeper organization was another startup project. Longtime CBES supporters Vic Schmidt, Jack Ordeman, George Savage, as well as several committee members started this organization. CBES collected the donations to fund the early operation, provided staff support for the first meetings, and contributed bookkeeping. In particular, CBES funded the attendance at the Waterkeeper Alliance National Convention and suggested and hired the first Shorekeeper, Richard Ayers.

For other organizations, such as the Friends of the Onancock School, Waste Watchers, the Virginia Eastern Shore Land Trust, and most recently the Eastern Shore Birding Festival, CBES provided funding umbrellas for new or transitioning organizations or just played the role of mentoring new organizations until they were on their feet or had completed their activities. Today, CBES still mentors startup groups. We have always supported citizen activism. Our philosophy is that the more actively involved our community is, the better. Many groups are short-lived, with specific purposes or causes. But some have become contributors to our community for the long term. We are proud to play our role. And we thank you, our members, for supporting CBES and making that possible.

State Water Control Board to Meet on Permits

On Thursday, April 12, the Virginia Department of Environmental Quality (DEQ) will present their recommendations on the three Virginia Pollutant Discharge Elimination System (VPDES) permits to the State Water Control Board for their final determination. Anyone who submitted a written comment or spoke at the January 30 hearing at Nandua High School is entitled to speak at this meeting (which starts at 9:00 AM in Richmond), or may yield their time to another speaker. For more information or to organize a carpool, contact Virginia Eastern Shorekeeper at shorekeeper@gmail.com.

Keeping Track

Can Northampton County Afford More Debt?

Northampton County currently carries a debt repayment bill of about $3.2 million a year. By 2024, this will decrease to about $2.4 million. Most is long-term debt from the county complex and jail and previous school construction – all funded by local tax dollars. There has been much discussion by the Board of Supervisors and the School Board about a new High School/Middle School complex – at a cost of about $35 million; bond repayment would have to be added to the county’s current annual debt.

Scenarios presented to the Board by financial advisers Davenport and Co. showed that in some years, total debt repayment to include new school construction could exceed $4 million a year, and would need a tax increase. Board Chairman Murray stated that he didn’t feel county taxpayers could manage more than the current debt service.

Financial advisers have also presented peer county data showing Northampton’s debt as a percentage of expenditures to be the highest among comparative counties. The percentage of revenue collected locally from real estate and other taxes is in the mid-range; most rural counties depend on local real estate taxes for government funding. The Board is faced with major financial decisions – balancing the county’s need to continue to fund essential services with the community’s desire to have a new school complex.

Citizen Participation

Recent events have highlighted a discouraging trend on the part of our local representatives with regard to input from Eastern Shore citizens. In their February 21 meeting, the Accomack Board of Supervisors passed a rule change limiting public comments (not associated with a specific public hearing) to 1 hour, regardless of how many citizens might want to speak. And, with a start time of 5 PM, the Accomack Board has made it difficult for some citizens to make it to their meetings at all. In contrast, the Northampton Board starts their public meeting at 7:00 PM and provides for public comments both at the beginning and at the end of their meetings. During the last 2 meetings of the Eastern Shore of Virginia Ground Water Committee, the public participation (at the end of the agenda) was severely curtailed, with the Chairman’s insistence that the meeting had to end on time. And, of the 14 Supervisors in both counties, only Ron Wolff in northern Accomack holds regular town hall meetings with constituents. Northampton Supervisors Murray and Duer have held meetings in the past, and newly elected Supervisors Coker and Fauber have been in office less than 3 months. With public outcry about poultry expansion and groundwater usage in Accomack County, and the Comprehensive Plan in Northampton County, we would hope they could do a better job providing opportunities to communicate with their constituents.

See Keeping Track, cont’d on page 7
Keeping Track, cont’d from p. 6

Northampton County Tourism Infrastructure Fund Sitting on Almost $100,000

Unspent funds from previous years’ Transient Occupancy Tax total $99,327, and the Board of Supervisors say it is time to use the funds. Every year, the county solicits applications for tourism-related projects and provides funding for some. But this year’s application process would not wrap-up in time to fund projects set up and ready to go for this summer’s tourist season. The Board asked the County Administrator to provide some pending options that could be funded and ready by summer.

His proposed projects include:

• Kayak launches at Wise Point and Morley’s Wharf: estimated cost, $15,000 for both sites
• Boat launch area improvements: handicapped accessible bathroom facilities at Oyster and Willis Wharf, estimated cost, $6,000 for both sites
• Fresh water facility at Oyster Harbor: estimated cost for well and equipment, $7,000
• Improved signage to boat launch facilities: estimated cost, $3,000
• Bicycle repair stations pre-built for outdoor heavy use, three sites to be determined: estimated cost, $6,000 for three stations

The Board of Supervisors approved these projects so they’ll be in place in time for the summer tourist season.

Ground Water Committee Website Problem

Unfortunately, there is an older version (http://a-npdc.org/groundwater/) of the Eastern Shore of Virginia Ground Water Committee’s website, which was last updated in 2011. To make sure you have the correct website with the latest information (http://www.a-npdc.org/accomack-northampton-planning-district-commission/ground-water-management/eastern-shore-of-virginia-ground-water-committee/), you can access it through the pull-down menus for Accomack-Northampton Planning District Commission’s website (select “Ground Water Committee” three times) or Accomack County’s website (Government – Board Appointed Bodies). If you use a search engine, be sure it shows a copyright of 2018 at the bottom.

CBES Annual Meeting PICNIC

Sunday, June 3, 2018, 4 PM

Spend a relaxing afternoon at Cherry Grove Farm’s century-old barn near Eastville along the peaceful banks of Cherrystone Creek.

Enjoy the company of those who also love protecting our Shore home. Live music, too!

Picnic catered by The Local includes a dinner serving of BBQ Chicken, Pulled Pork, Baked Beans, Potato Salad, Cole Slaw & Corn Bread.

The Suzanne Wescoat Award, named in honor of CBES founding president, will be awarded to Mary Miller for her exemplary volunteer service to the community, including 29 years as a writer/researcher for CBES ShoreLine.

BYOB

Ice Tea/Water & Homemade Desserts Provided

Tickets $25, purchase on www.cbes.org or send check to: CBES, P.O. Box 882, Eastville, VA 23347

This event is not a fundraiser but a laidback, low-cost event open to all to encourage community fellowship. Bring a lawn chair/blanket. Tickets will be limited to 200 in respect to the private landowner.
# SHORELINE

**Community Calendar - April 2018**

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

## CBES and Other Activities

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<th>Date</th>
<th>Event</th>
<th>Location</th>
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<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Apr 17</td>
<td>ES Ground Water Committee</td>
<td>10 AM, Accomac</td>
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<tr>
<td>Apr 17</td>
<td>CBES Board Meeting</td>
<td>7 PM, ES Chamber of Commerce</td>
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<tr>
<td>Apr 19</td>
<td>Shorekeeper Meeting*</td>
<td>3 PM, ES Chamber of Commerce</td>
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* Alternating between the ES Chamber of Commerce in Melfa and the Barrier Islands Center in Machipongo

## Accomack County

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<td>Board of Zoning Appeals</td>
<td>10 AM</td>
<td>Sup. Chambers</td>
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<td>Apr 11</td>
<td>Planning Commission (PC)</td>
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<td>Apr 24</td>
<td>PC Work Session</td>
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<tr>
<td>Apr 26</td>
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## Northampton County

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www.cbes.org