Getting Serious About Workforce Housing…
...Where’s the Plan?

By Mary Miller

Accessible and affordable housing for the Shore’s workforce is a problem identified over and over. The need is there. The problem needs to be solved, the workforce needs accessible housing – or economic development will suffer, county revenues will suffer, community integrity will suffer. The solutions may be out there already, or not. They need to be identified or created, analyzed, found compliant with local Codes and Comprehensive Plans, and an action plan established. That’s what planners and community development professionals are trained to do. Then comes an even greater challenge – local governments need to make commitments, create incentives, and establish funding mechanisms.

Sound Like a Plan?

Northampton County had that plan on the books before it was removed during the 2021 Comprehensive Plan update. For decades, county planning included an overlay district called a Planned Rural Village. It was originally created to enable the development of the Bayview community near Cheriton. Then, when rampant development threatened the county, the designation was changed to Existing Planned Rural Village, and after Bayview, no more such projects were contemplated.

The entire 4,000-plus word chapter for a Planned Rural Village overlay can be found in previous Zoning Ordinances. It incorporates many of the current Comprehensive Plan’s descriptions of existing county Villages. It also includes many of the concepts of the “Livable Communities” initiative adopted by the county in 2011. The overlay’s major differences from the traditional county Villages are that there would be greater residential density, enabled by water/sewer infrastructure, and they are usually established in districts reserved for agriculture.

Besides the Bayview community, there are other planned “villages” in the county. New Roads, even though part of Exmore, is planned like a small, walkable village. Bay Creek, even though part of Cape Charles, is planned as a series of separate “villages.” The county does have successful models for planned villages – incorporating varied housing types and increased residential density with water/sewer services. But unlike rural subdivisions surrounded by agricultural districts, planned villages also often have sidewalks and streetlights, limited neighborhood commercial and community service uses, home businesses, professional offices, and designated open spaces.

Would county residents support a stand-alone, small-lot, modest home/rental unit development with its own infrastructure, in a rural location, to provide workforce-housing opportunities?

Workforce Housing Villages?

Is it possible to revisit the Planned Rural Village overlay concept and make sure it provides for workforce housing? The same issue that led to removal of the overlay district still exists – how to prevent this development tool from resulting in only high-end, high-density residential enclaves. Local governments cannot control house prices or apartment rents in privately funded development projects.

But if the projects were public-private partnerships, with public infrastructure and private residential construction, there would be more flexibility. See Housing, Cont’d on p. 5
Karen Parker, the general manager of Waterford Printing in Exmore, moved to the Eastern Shore of Virginia in her 20s. She had been working in printing since completing coursework in the subject at her high school.

At the time the business opened, there was only 1 printer on the Shore, in Onancock, so Parker, with owners Hilary and Amy Little, thought there might be a need for their services. Over 33 years later, the business is still flourishing.

It started out in a modest space on the southern end of Main Street, past the Tru Blu gas station, in a small building shaped like a barn. In a couple of years, the business outgrew the space and was relocated to Bank Street in downtown Exmore.

As the years went by, with dramatic advancements in printing technology, Waterford enlarged its product line, offering more and more promotional items. In addition, the business migrated away from the off-set printing presses that had been the workhorses for most of its output.

As the availability and affordability of high-speed full-color digital equipment became more attractive, Waterford was able to produce high-quality color printing in a more environmentally sensitive way. Thanks to equipment that doesn’t require solvents or special handling of waste, and that doesn’t require specialty labor, such as a press operator, the company is able to compete successfully with off-Shore businesses.

According to Parker, they are “constantly keeping an eye on technology, which changes in the industry very quickly and is necessary to compete in today’s market.” One valuable service that is offered today is the printing of addresses on the mailed copies of ShoreLine – no labels necessary!

As for promoting the business, the company employs a salesperson who covers the area from the Chesapeake Bay Bridge-Tunnel through Pocomoke. But Parker says that in the Eastern Shore community, good service and quality products make for the best marketing. She adds that word of mouth and personal recommendations are important to the growth of the customer base.

The biggest challenges they have faced in the past 3 decades were the ripple effects of the COVID-19 pandemic, when supply-chain issues made it difficult to meet their customers’ needs. They overcame this by offering alternatives to paper stocks and promotional products, but are still dealing with some of the same issues today, although the situation is quite a bit better now than it was a year ago.

Parker offers this advice to those who are considering starting a business on the Shore: “Best advice I can give is to provide quality products, good service, and a friendly, easy-to-work-with attitude. Support the Eastern Shore by doing all you can to enhance our community, and this support will inevitably help your business grow.”

Waterford Printing can be reached by calling 757-442-5616. Look for it on Facebook, or find out more online: www.waterfordprinting.com.
The General Assembly met this year from January 11 to February 25, with a one-day reconvened session on April 12 to respond to the Governor’s amendments and vetoes. Governor Youngkin signed 738 bills into law, vetoed 3, and made suggested amendments to 78. The 3 vetoes were sustained; these would have allowed public utility/broadband service vehicles to be left on private property; required changes in state employee grievance procedures; and studied the issue of vehicle noise. Key bills passed are summarized below.

**Environment**

- A bill introduced by Sen. Lewis to study the Chesapeake Bay population of menhaden (including the ecology, impacts to other fisheries, and economic impacts) was scaled back to require VIMS to provide details of a potential study by September 1, 2023, including the scope, methodology, stakeholders, cost, and timeline.
- A bill introduced by Del. Bloxom directs the Virginia Marine Resources Commission to update its guidelines for tidal wetlands mitigation banks, including the formation of a stakeholder group.
- A bill introduced by Sen. Lewis mandates the addition of resilience strategies to localities’ comprehensive plans; resilience is defined as “the capability to anticipate, prepare for, respond to, and recover from significant multi-hazard threats with minimum damage to social well-being, health, the economy, and the environment.”
- An Oyster Replenishment Fund has been established, to provide tax credits to restaurants and other businesses for recycling oyster shells, of $4 per bushel up to a maximum of $1,500 per year.
- A bill expands the range of universities to be consulted in crafting coastal resilience policy, including the Virginia Institute of Marine Science, Virginia Sea Grant, the Virginia Cooperative Extension, and the newly formed Institute for Coastal Adaptation and Resilience at Old Dominion University. The bill was partly in response to the closure of William & Mary’s highly respected Virginia Coastal Policy Center, with a new Virginia Coastal Resilience Collaborative being developed in its stead.

**Education**

- The Virginia Literacy Act, which requires school boards to provide reading intervention services to students with substantial deficiencies, has been expanded from its current status in kindergarten through 3rd grade, to 4th through 8th grades starting in 2024-2025.
- A Teacher Reengagement Program will be established to address teaching shortages, as well as pandemic-related student learning loss.
- All school boards will be required to develop a plan for placing automatic external defibrillators (AEDs) in every public school.

**Other**

- A bill introduced jointly by Sen. Lewis and Del. Bloxom makes the Chincoteague pony the official state pony for the Commonwealth of Virginia.
- A bill introduced jointly by Sen. Lewis and Del. Bloxom adds community development projects, including housing for low- and moderate-income families, to projects financed by the Virginia Resources Authority.
- Recreational sales of hemp-derived products containing intoxicants such as delta-8 THC (at a cannabinoid [CBD]:THC concentration above 25:1) are banned, although certain therapeutic CBD products will remain available. Although recreational marijuana is legal in Virginia, selling it remains illegal.
- The Firearm Safety Device Tax Credit provides a tax credit of up to $300 for each eligible transaction through January 1, 2028.
- The Food Crop Donation Tax Credit, which allows farmers to donate food to nonprofit food banks, was renewed through January 1, 2028, with an increase to 50% of the fair-market value for qualifying donations, and an expansion to include wholesome foods.
- A bill introduced by Del. Bloxom removes the witness requirement for absentee ballots, requiring the last 4 digits of the social security number and date of birth instead.

Attempts to repeal Virginia’s participation in the Regional Greenhouse Gas Initiative and Virginia’s Clean Car Standards were defeated.

It is not clear if the House of Delegates and the State Senate will be able to agree to changes to the budget, which is in the 2nd year of a 2-year budget, before it goes into effect on July 1.
The Eastern Shore Chapter of Virginia Organizing is one of VO’s 16 chapters across the Commonwealth. VO is a non-partisan statewide grassroots organization dedicated to challenging injustice by empowering people in local communities to address issues that affect the quality of their lives. Virginia Organizing especially encourages the participation of those who have traditionally had little or no voice in our society. The Eastern Shore chapter carries out the mission of VO by building relationships with individuals and groups to get them to work together to bring about positive community change.

The local chapter recently celebrated its 5th year on the Shore. During this time, the chapter has focused on critical community issues including, but not limited to, achieving enforceable health regulations to protect essential workers during the COVID crisis; supporting Medicaid expansion affecting many Shore residents; conducting a Shore-wide memorial service for COVID victims; supporting Fund Our Schools; working for the equitable expansion of affordable, accessible, and reliable broadband; initiating the campaign “ANEC and You” to emphasize member ownership, democratic principles, and the need for diversity on the cooperative board; working for environmental justice; supporting and publicizing community mental health services and staffing; supporting legislation affecting Shore residents with an emphasis on low-income and marginalized communities by working with and holding accountable our elected members of the General Assembly; addressing the school-to-prison pipeline and promoting restorative justice; joining a coalition to advocate for temporary agricultural workers on the Shore; and sharing and supporting efforts to address the lack of affordable housing. The chapter partnered with CBES on broadband expansion and the ANEC program.

The Eastern Shore Chapter will continue to focus on these and other community issues under the leadership of the Rev. Justin Nick, who was appointed the Eastern Shore Organizer in December 2022. Justin grew up in Southeast Maryland. His undergraduate degree is from Albright College in Reading, PA, and his Master of Divinity is from Wesley Theological Seminary in Washington, DC, where he specialized in African-American Church Studies.

Justin is the Pastor of Gaskins Chapel AME Church in Onancock and believes his new position as Organizer complements his pastoral role. Justin wanted his church to do more in the community about the issues people face on the Shore. A member of his church connected him with Virginia Organizing. Justin said, “Churches can become insulated from the community. That’s why it is so important to get involved with what’s going on.” Justin embraces the core mission and values of VO – “I really like the question of ‘What do people want to see changed.’ That’s the central core of Virginia Organizing. It isn’t what the leaders want. It’s what the people want.”

Justin is committed to carrying on the good work of the Chapter and has implemented several new approaches to reach out to individual communities, to enhance the presence of VO on the Shore, and to recruit new members. In a series of “listening sessions,” the chapter is reaching out to hear the concerns and issues facing local communities, in order to determine how VO can become engaged in grassroots efforts to address these issues, and to create awareness of the organization. In partnership with the local affiliate of the NAACP, the sessions are held the Thursday after the monthly chapter meeting in various venues including Horntown, Bayside (Onancock), Whitesville (Parksley, on May 15th at 6 pm), Little Boston (Pungoteague), and other locations around the Shore.

Another initiative is to hold “tabling” events in venues around the Shore (such as the Food Lion in Onley). Chapter members staff tables outside businesses and public agencies to meet people and provide information about VO, identify issues to be addressed, and solicit support for chapter efforts.

The Eastern Shore Chapter has its regular monthly meetings the 3rd Monday of each month at 6:00 PM. Since the COVID pandemic, these meetings have been held virtually on Zoom. However, the meeting on May 15 will be an in-person meeting at 6:00 PM at the Mary N. Smith Cultural Center, 24497 Mary N. Smith Road, Accomac, VA. The meeting is open to the public, and refreshments will be served. In addition to the regular meeting agenda, participants can get to know the Rev. Justin Nick personally.

For more information, you can contact the Rev. Justin Nick at easternshore@virginia-organizing.org.
Marsh Love
Submitted by
Patty McLaughlin

As a kid, all I knew of the coast were traffic jams, bad boardwalk boys, and the flat groomed sand of New Jersey. But what was this? A mere three hours south and green as far as I could see. No roads, and the silver snake of a creek coiling in and out of view. The green fingers of the marsh grabbed my stunted suburban self and pulled me close. Pay attention to me, the grass whispered. Come closer.

With sun-tightened skin and salt-crunched hair, I accepted the invitation, stumbling drunk on the low tide smell of earth and food and life and danger. I lost my balance, surprised at the yielding soft mud. I lost a shoe, a Cinderella moment, and fell in love.

Shimmering with limerence, I grew hungry for more - more mud, more magic, more meaning. I devoured all the information I could find, and delighted in my new vocabulary - Spartina alterniflora and patens, intertidal and anaerobic, omnivores and decomposers. I grew strong with the knowledge of salt-secreting grass blades, secret shark nurseries, and new moon floods.

Buoyed by the marsh promises to nurture, to sustain, to protect, even me. I had so little to offer in return. I am here. I am humbled. Always your witness, in sickness and in health.

* * * * *

Now, settling into our fifth decade together, we enjoy a comfort and a quiet. The mystery remains, but is a bit bittersweet. Now more tender and tempered with a deeper awareness of fragility, vulnerability, and what might be lost if we don’t pay attention to the mud, the mystery, and the magic of the marsh.

Housing, Cont’d from p. 1

A new overlay district called Planned Rural Workforce Village could be mapped on the Plan’s Future Land Use Map (FLUM) for only census tracts, near employment centers, that reflect household employment income as low to moderate, as per HUD standards for Virginia localities. It could establish maximum lot size and dwelling-unit square footage – and it could create a small portfolio of modestly sized, pre-approved, single- and multi-family units, providing a greatly streamlined regulatory process for builders. The combination of designated overlay locations, a public-private partnership financed by public dollars, plus independent building contractors and developers’ investment, increased density, and the limitations of lot and building sizes, would help create non-subsidized housing opportunities for the county’s workforce.

Community Buy-In

Like any other major land-use change consideration, a Planned Rural Village overlay district would need an amendment to the county’s Comprehensive Plan. Currently, development areas are mapped on the FLUM around towns that have, or may have in future, the water/sewer infrastructure to support increased housing density. Would county residents support a stand-alone, small-lot, modest home/rental unit development with its own infrastructure, in a rural location, to provide workforce housing opportunities? Would county government be willing to invest in the infrastructure needed to support this housing? Can the county use Federal Housing credits? Is there any state money for localities in the Governor’s new “Make Virginia Home” plan? Would county planning and community development professionals be willing and able to create the streamlined regulatory structure and the fast-track housing portfolio for such an initiative? Would county government work to establish an incentive-based partnership with private developers?

A few communities across the state, especially in areas that depend on a tourism or retirement economy, are testing this partnership concept. An across-the-board positive response to all of the above questions would be needed to get such a project off the ground on the Shore. And that would indeed be getting serious about workforce housing.

RECYCLING CORNER

Plastics in the Air

As was discussed in the August 2019 Recycling Corner, we now know that plastics are not only in our waterways, but also in our soil. Now, a new report (https://www.ciel.org/reports/airborne-microplastics-briefing/) shows that micro- and nanoplastics are in the air as well, and that we’re breathing these in.

There is now evidence that microplastics “exist in every environmental compartment – from freshwater to soil and air – and in thousands of species, including humans,” the report notes. And, in the atmosphere, these particles can travel even faster than in oceanic currents. With this long-range transport, populations can be affected far from the sources of plastic pollution, making this “a grave public health issue.”

Currently, humans are breathing in up to 22 million particles annually; these can pass through the airways and reach deep into the bottom of the lungs. Microplastics also represent “a dangerously potent vector for toxics and pathogens,” since the particles can carry bacteria, viruses, or toxic chemicals into the body.

Studies on the health impacts of microplastics are just beginning, but the effects can range from minor irritation, to cancer with chronic exposure. Some of the potential impacts include:

- Respiratory diseases
- Neurodevelopmental disorders
- Hormonal diseases
- Cardiovascular disease
- Reproductive impacts
- Metabolic disorders
- Adverse pregnancy outcomes

The report notes that plastic production is expected to continue to increase, which will only increase the potential for exposure. It includes 3 recommendations:

- Since exposure to microplastics doesn’t happen in a vacuum, but occurs along with other toxic substances in the environment, regulators need to address the risks of combined exposure, and include all plastic products, not just food-grade plastics, in assessing risk to human health.
- Since voluntary approaches have failed to reduce microplastic pollution, legally binding measures, including banning intentionally added microplastics, must be adopted “without further delay.”
- Since airborne microplastics are part of the bigger story, regulators must “address the full life cycle of plastics, beginning with the extraction of fossil fuels and associated chemicals used in plastic production.”

Keeping Track

Menhaden Memorandum Signed

As we have reported recently (see September 2022 and October 2022 ShoreLine), menhaden harvesting in the Bay continues to present problems; although the Bay harvest for Omega Proteins is capped by Atlantic States Marine Fisheries Commission (ASMFC) at 51,000 metric tons, many argue that this is still too high. They point to impacts on striped bass, other fish, and osprey, which depend on the menhaden for survival, as well as recent fish spills on the Shore that have impacted tourism and quality of life.

At their December 2022 meeting, the Virginia Marine Resources Commission (VMRC) voted to accept a memorandum of understanding, in lieu of any regulations to address the issue, between VMRC and Omega Protein; the memorandum was announced on April 19.

In order to reduce the risk of spills, as well as avoiding conflicts with recreational boat traffic, the agreement states that Omega will keep its boats at least 1 nautical mile from shore in specified areas, including:

- The Eastern Shore, from Powell’s Bluff on Occohannock Creek to the Chesapeake Bay Bridge Tunnel (CBBT)
- The Hampton Roads shore, from James T. Wilson Fishing Pier along the Hampton Roads Bay Bridge Tunnel to the Sandbridge Fishing Pier
- At least ½ nautical mile on either side of the CBBT

Omega also agreed to suspend fishing on weekends between Memorial Day and Labor Day; on July 4th; and on the federally observed holidays for Memorial Day, Independence Day, and Labor Day.

The agreement also stipulates that Omega will work collaboratively with VMRC staff to develop a protocol for spill reports and evaluate previous spills, and develop effective spill-prevention tactics, including a spill simulation exercise.

Speaking for the angler and conservation community, the Theodore Roosevelt Conservation Partnership called the agreement “toothless,” and noted that it does not establish any buffer for the northern part of the Bay, prevent spills outside the most populous areas, or create enforceable regulations.

2023 Clean the Bay Day

This year’s Clean the Bay Day will be held on Saturday, June 3, from 9 AM until noon. CBES will join friends from The Nature Conservancy at Oyster Harbor. Use the following link to find locations for Clean the Bay Day, and to register: https://www.cbf.org/events/clean-the-bay-day/clean-the-bay-day-locations.html

Can’t make it on June 3? Join Clean the Bay Your Way – the DIY portion of this annual event. From June 4 – 10, you can conduct your own cleanup effort on smaller sites like your private property or anywhere else you have permission. Access the Clean the Bay Your Way page from the above website for more information.
Asparagus With Sesame Pork Noodles

Asparagus cutting went for about 6 weeks – and was careful, precise work for a 10-year-old farm girl. The little guys couldn’t keep anything in their minds but baseball in the spring – and who would trust them with the shears anyway? The best time to cut was early evening, after the heat of the day. Stalks clipped just above ground level quickly filled the basket – and every evening there’d be more to cut. This spicy pork ramen noodle dish, with just enough heat and complexity, is perfect with asparagus. Dutch-oven braising, a few pantry staples, plus a quick finishing sauce, make it a great meal for a weekend supper. Recipe serves 4-6, but can be easily adjusted.

- (2) 1-inch-thick boneless pork chops
- 2 tbsp orange marmalade
- Red pepper flakes to taste
- 1 can chicken broth
- 3 pkg ramen noodles, any flavor – use only 1 flavor pkt
- 3 tbsp tahini or creamy peanut butter
- 1 ½ tbsp toasted sesame oil
- 2 tbsp soy sauce
- 2 tbsp brown sugar
- 2 tsp apple cider vinegar
- 1 tbsp minced ginger
- Toasted sesame seeds and chopped cilantro, for topping
- 1 bunch roasted asparagus

Heat a bit of oil in Dutch oven. Season chops with salt and pepper and sear well. Add broth, marmalade, red pepper, and seasoning packet from one ramen package. Cover tightly and simmer on very low for about 3 hours. About ½ hour before serving, assemble sauce fixings, except noodles, asparagus, and toppings. Remove pork from pot, add fixings, and simmer to reduce a bit. Shred pork. Toss asparagus with olive oil, salt, and pepper, then roast at 450˚ for 2 to 3 minutes. Cook 3 packages of ramen noodles only, in 3 ½ cups water until done. Using tongs, add noodles to sauce in Dutch oven, add pork, and toss well. Add ramen cooking water if needed. Pass toppings.

Mary Miller • The Kitchen Hive
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CBES to Present Suzanne Wescoat Award to Senator Lewis

June 11
PICNIC@theBARN

For 2 decades, first as a Delegate, then as a Senator, now-retiring Senator Lynwood Lewis has represented the Eastern Shore, Mathews County, and parts of Norfolk and Virginia Beach. Throughout his tenure, he dedicated himself to issues near and dear to Shore citizens. He did so with decorum and a practice of working across the aisle for the good of his constituents, an anomaly in today’s divisive politics.

For his commitment, Citizens for a Better Eastern Shore is pleased to present Lynwood with the Suzanne Wescoat Award during its PICNIC@theBARN event, which also doubles as the CBES Annual Meeting.

In 2015, CBES Board of Directors established the award for exemplary service by an elected or appointed public official. (It has since been broadened to include others outside of public office.) The award is a memorial tribute to CBES founding president. As a Supervisor, then Chairman of the Board of Supervisors, Suzanne worked diligently to benefit the community and well-being of the people of Northampton County. She would herself have been a most deserving recipient of this award.

The award was instituted with the understanding that it would not always be given out yearly; instead, CBES would wait to honor a citizen who has portrayed a rarified and long-standing commitment to the betterment of the Eastern Shore. Like Suzanne, Lynwood has lived up to the mantra “Service is the price you pay for the space you occupy.”

CBES invites the public to attend the PICNIC@theBARN and help celebrate someone who has served the Shore well. Purchase tickets for the Sunday, June 11, 4 - 7 PM PICNIC@theBARN at www.cbes.org

Contact us at info@cbes.org or 757-678-7157.
CBES PICNIC@theBARN
Sunday, June 11, 4 - 7 PM
Celebrate Shore Livin’ & CBES 36th year!

Enjoy a fun - fun - fun afternoon at Cherry Grove Farm’s century-old barn along the beautiful banks of Cherrystone Creek, near Eastville.

Featuring never-fresher
SMALL’S SMOKEHOUSE BARBECUE & Fixings!
- Pulled Pork
- BBQ Chicken
- Coleslaw
- Baked Beans
- Broccoli Salad
- Iced Tea & Water
- Dessert Bar

BYOB - Feel free to bring your own adult-or-not libation.
Bring your chair/blanket.

You’ll Be Dancing With Heather & Nathan and the Band
The Suzanne Wescoat Award will be presented to the Shore’s own Senator Lynwood Lewis, retiring after 2 decades of public service.

TICKETS only $31.59 with all fees included. [This is NOT a fundraiser, but a community gathering. CBES charges only to cover costs.]

Open to ALL
Bring your friends! Make new ones!

HURRY- Limited Tickets
Available until June 1 [unless SOLD OUT]
Purchase online: www.cbes.org
Contact us: info@cbes.org or 757-678-7157