

## MEETING NOTES

### York 2040 Committee

Wednesday, March 4, 2020 – 5:00 p.m.

Public Works Multi-Purpose Room

105 Service Drive, Yorktown, Virginia

Members Present: Chad Green, Leigh Houghland, Montgoussaint “Montee” E. Jons, Vivian McGettigan, R. Anderson Moberg, Sheila L. Myers, Jacob Rizzio, Eugene Seiter, Cowles “Buddy” Spencer

Staff Present: Susan Kassel, Director of Planning and Development Services; Timothy Cross, AICP, Deputy Director of Planning and Development Services; Earl Anderson, AICP Senior Planner; Amy Parker, Senior Planner; Daria Linsinbigler, Planning Assistant; Gail Whittaker, Public Information Officer

Member Absent: Mark Bellamy, Gregory “Skip” Brooks, Michael S. King, Richard Myer

### Call to Order

Vice Chairman Jons called the meeting to order at approximately 5:00 p.m. and welcomed the Committee members and guest speakers.

### Approval of February 5, 2020 Meeting Notes

The February 5, 2020 meeting notes were approved unanimously.

### Presentation: Sea Level Rise in York County and Hampton Roads

Claiborn Phillips, GIS (Geographic Information System) Manager in the York County Department of Information Technology, and Kent Henkel, Engineering Specialist II in the York County Department of Public Works, gave a joint presentation on sea level rise in York County. Mr. Phillips explained that relative sea level rise is caused by three factors: global sea level rise, which is the increase in the quantity or volume of water; land subsidence from sediment compaction and extraction of sub-surface liquids such as oil and water; and changes in ocean circulation, specifically the slowing of the Gulf Stream, allowing more ocean water to remain in the Mid-Atlantic. He stated that the regional planning agency, the Hampton Roads Planning District Commission (HRPDC), has adopted a policy recommending that localities plan for a 1.5’ increase in sea level between 2020 and 2050, and additional 1.5’ between 2050 and 2080, and another 1.5’ by the year 2100. Mr. Phillips displayed maps showing the effects of these increases in York County, noting that the areas most affected are in Districts 3 and 4 – specifically Seaford, Dandy, and Dare – but he added that other less vulnerable areas will also be affected because stormwater systems will back up as the shoreline moves farther inland. He noted the impact on vulnerable homes and roads, adding that even though in some the properties might not be inundated, the roads to access them would be.

Ms. Myers asked what is causing the volume of water to increase. Mr. Phillips responded that it is attributable mainly to the melting of the glaciers.

Mr. Henkel spoke about state and local initiatives to address sea level rise. He stated that at the state level, the Governor signed Executive Orders designating a Chief Resilience Officer for the state, requiring research into the vulnerability of state-owned buildings, and creating standards for development of state-owned properties in flood-prone areas. Regarding development standards, he stated that the three-foot freeboard requirement is the same standard followed by York County for construction in flood-prone areas. Mr. Henkel explained that the freeboard requirement is the minimum distance between the bottom of the horizontal structural member of the lowest floor and the base flood elevation, which is the water surface level that would be reached in the event of a 1% annual chance (or so-called “hundred

year”) storm. Another state initiative, he noted, is the General Assembly’s recent action to allow localities to offer partial exemption from real estate taxes for flood mitigation efforts.

With regard to local initiatives, Mr. Henkel spoke about the City of Hampton’s “Living with Water” study and the Hampton Roads Sanitation District (HRSD) SWIFT (Sustainable Water Initiative For Tomorrow) program, which will take highly treated wastewater that would otherwise be discharged into local rivers and put it through additional rounds of advanced water treatment to meet or exceed drinking water quality standards. He explained that the water will then be added to the Potomac Aquifer, the primary source of groundwater throughout eastern Virginia which would enhance the sustainability of the region’s long-term groundwater supply and help slow the rate of land subsidence.

Ms. Myers asked who is taking water out of the aquifer. Mr. Ben McFarlane, Senior Regional Planner for the HRPDC, responded that it is mainly large industrial water users but also other users as well. He explained that HRSD is trying to re-pressurize the aquifer with treated wastewater. Mr. Seiter asked how much difference this process will make, to which Mr. McFarlane responded that ultimately it should make up for everything that is taken out of the aquifer but will not replenish the aquifer.

Mr. Henkel spoke about Old Dominion University’s “Blue Line Project”, which was a public awareness event that enlisted students, faculty, and citizen volunteers to use paint, flags, and chalk to mark projected high tides in the City of Norfolk. He also spoke about the National Flood Insurance Program (NFIP) and the Community Rating System (CRS), in which York County participates. He explained that the CRS enables property owners to reduce their flood insurance premiums in recognition of various flood mitigation efforts on the part of the locality, and he stated that York County is currently a Class 7 locality, which provides for a 15% discount. Lastly, Mr. Henkel noted the Comprehensive Plan update that is currently underway and will, by state mandate, include strategies to address sea level rise and recurrent flooding.

Amy Parker, Senior Planner, introduced Ben McFarlane of the HRPDC to speak about sea level rise from a regional perspective. Mr. McFarlane explained that the HRPDC is the regional planning agency for Hampton Roads and that it serves as a resource of technical expertise to its member local governments, including York County. He stated that the HRPDC has done a lot of work in recent years in the area of sea level rise. Mr. McFarlane stated that there are three basic approaches to addressing sea level rise: protection, such as sea walls, levees, and floodgates; accommodation, such as elevating structures and flood-proofing ground floors; and retreat, such as moving out of or not allowing new construction in flood-prone areas. He stated that there is no single answer to the problem and that all three strategies are needed. He stated that large mega-projects to keep water out are very expensive and do not address chronic flooding, whereas adaptive shorelines, with local, site-appropriate mixes of natural and structural defenses are a more effective and practical strategy.

Mr. McFarlane spoke about the HRPDC’s Coastal Resiliency Program, stating that the HRPDC has inventoried more than 400 local projects aimed at addressing sea level rise and he referred the members to the website ([www.hrgeo.org](http://www.hrgeo.org)) where information about these projects can be found. He stated that 133 of these 400 projects have been completed, at a total cost of \$123 million, with another 154 projects underway and 120 that are either programmed or proposed. He spoke about the regional policy recommending that localities plan for certain levels of sea level rise over future decades, and he displayed various projections of the extent of sea level rise. Lastly, Mr. McFarlane provided some case studies highlighting flood mitigation strategies in the City of Hampton and Miami-Dade County, Florida.

Amy Parker introduced Dr. Derek Loftis, Assistant Research Scientist for the Virginia Institute of Marine Science (VIMS). Dr. Loftis spoke about VIMS’ work in the area of sea level rise and his work in particular, which is focused on the study and analysis of flooding from a shorter term perspective, including flooding that results from storm surge, rain, and tides. He spoke about “Catch the King,” which is the world’s largest environmental survey. He explained that this survey leverages citizen science to aid in flood data collection throughout coastal Virginia.

Vice Chairman Jons asked that any members who have additional questions either write them down and give them to the staff or speak to the presenters after the meeting.

#### Committee Discussion

Mr. Seiter commented that sea level rise will have a greater impact than any of the other trends that have been discussed by the Committee so far. Mr. Spencer agreed, but he added that there needs to be a balance between environmental concerns and individual property rights. He said that over-regulation can reduce property values, and he expressed concern about the Chesapeake Bay Act and its RPA (Resource Protection Area) buffer requirements, which curtail property owners' ability to build in certain areas.

Mr. Seiter noted that based on the mapping, the areas most affected by sea level rise seem pretty well-defined, and he asked what percentage of the population lives in these areas. Mr. Phillips responded that there are roughly 1,100 homes in the areas deemed to be vulnerable based on the regional policy. Based on this number, Mr. Cross estimated that the number of people directly affected is approximately 3,300, which represents a little less than 5% of the population. Ms. McGettigan added that the County has also studies the total value of the properties affected as well as impacts on County infrastructure.

Mr. Green noted that the 2050 benchmark for the projected 1.5' increase in sea levels is ten years beyond the horizon of the Comprehensive Plan, and he suggested that the Plan should recognize the potential risks associated with sea level rise but not overreact. He echoed Mr. Spencer's concern about the Chesapeake Bay regulations, which he felt should not be allowed to prevent people in vulnerable areas from protecting their property. Mr. Seiter agreed that we should not overreact to the threat of sea level rise, but he noted that 2050 is only ten years beyond the horizon of the Plan, so it is important to plan ahead. Mr. Rizzio added that it is important to recognize that, as was stated earlier, many more people will be indirectly affected even though they do not live in areas susceptible to sea level rise. Mr. Moberg commented that at some point, people are simply going to have to move out of their homes to escape the effects of sea level rise.

#### Other Business

Mr. Spencer asked for an update on Chairman King's condition. Mr. Cross reported that he had spoken to Chairman King at a meeting that very morning and that he is recovering well from surgery and is now working a full schedule but still trying to take things slowly. He stated that he expects Chairman King to be at the next meeting.

#### Citizen Comment Period

There were no citizen comments.

#### Adjournment

The meeting was adjourned at 7:07 p.m.