

**SUMMARY OF THE  
HAMPTON ROADS REGIONAL ENVIRONMENTAL COMMITTEE  
JUNE 5, 2025 at 10:00 A.M.  
CHESAPEAKE, VA**

**1. Summary of the May 1, 2025, Meeting of the Hampton Roads Regional Environmental Committee (REC)**

The summary and attendance of the May 2025 meeting were included in the agenda. There were no edits.

**2. Mains Creek FEMA Parcels**

Ms. Ana Elezovic of the City of Chesapeake's Parks, Recreation, and Tourism Department provided an overview of the City's plans to use FEMA funds to buy flood-prone parcels. The City will purchase five parcels in the Mains Creek neighborhood at market value and convert them to public park spaces.

Ms. Elezovic emphasized the importance of partnerships in projects like this. They have tapped students at the University of Virginia and Virginia Tech to provide landscape design ideas that include native plants, wetlands, gathering spaces, a boardwalk, and signage. The City is working with Wetlands Watch and a local architecture firm to coordinate community engagement and develop the design specifications. Chesapeake has secured \$275,000 for the first phase of work and another \$100,000 for the second phase.

The City has explained that while these projects will help to mitigate flooding, they are a small part of the restoration effort that would be needed to eliminate flooding in the area. Ms. Elezovic also noted that some property owners are committed to staying in the area and are skeptical of climate change in general.

The Committee discussed some of the challenges of implementing FEMA's buyout program, including restrictions on future uses of the property and the piecemeal approach required. A locality would need to acquire adjacent properties to implement a more traditional park space. Having isolated parcels revegetated does not look like a typical neighborhood landscape, which can lead to push back from some residents. In Hampton Roads, many localities are using FEMA funds to elevate houses instead of purchasing them.

**3. Virginia Marine Debris Reduction Plan**

Ms. Christina Trapani, Clean Virginia Waterways (CVW), began her presentation with a review of the focus areas for CVW, including: 1) updating the Virginia Marine Debris Reduction Plan, 2) monitoring marine debris in the coastal zone, 3) analyzing the economic impact of plastic pollution, 4) convening a workshop to remove abandoned derelict vessels, and 5) tracking balloon litter.

Ms. Trapani shared highlights from last year's Virginia Waterways Cleanup event, which resulted in over 84,000 pounds of trash collected. The top ten most collected items were a familiar list, however, for the first time in years, the most common item collected was food wrappers while cigarette butts were second.

The first Virginia Marine Debris Reduction Plan was published in 2014 and in 2021, the plan was updated to align with NOAA's Mid-Atlantic Marine Debris Reduction Plan. The 2021-2025 plan, which was a collaborative effort among 75 partners, lists actions that are most feasible to implement. The goals of the plan are to address: 1) consumer debris/ single-use plastics, 2) abandoned and derelict vessels, 3) derelict fishing gear, and 4) microplastics. The updated plan for 2026-2030 is underway.

Solutions include removal of pollution sources, public education campaigns, legislative changes, and research. Implementing successful solutions requires extensive collaboration among partners. For example, Lynnhaven River NOW secured a grant to remove derelict vessels and will be working with ODU SeaGrant. Some actions will require legislative change, such as the ban on polystyrene food containers, which will be phased in over the next couple of years.

Ms. Trapani acknowledged the success of their recent Marine Debris Summit, which was held in March at the Norfolk Botanical Garden. The next event will be the 8<sup>th</sup> Annual Stormwater and Plastic Pollution Workshop, which will be held on September 9, 2025 at Pocahontas State Park.

When asked if there are new legislative initiatives on the horizon, Ms. Trapani replied that they are evaluating various bottle bills to identify best practices and pursuing additional plastic bag bans. Rather than have bans by individual localities, they will continue to advocate for a statewide ban or a five-cent fee per bag. If a fee program is implemented, one Committee member suggested marketing ways to reuse the bags, such as for trash can liners and pet waste pickup. Ms. Trapani also noted a successful program in New York state that prohibits automatically including plastic silverware with take-out orders.

CVW and askHRgreen.org will continue to collaborate with their polystyrene phase-out educational campaigns.

#### **4. Virginia Beach Stormwater Extension Program**

Mr. Kyle Coolbaugh, City of Virginia Beach, delivered an overview of the City's new Stormwater Extension Program, which is designed to empower homeowners and business owners with tools and knowledge to mitigate flooding on their property outside of the right-of-way. The mission of the program is to help residents better understand how stormwater management impacts their property, by focusing on one-on-one communication, advocacy, engagement, and technology resources.

Mr. Coolbaugh has developed a Flood Mitigation Toolbox that provides information on 17 mitigation strategies that could be implemented on their property. The recommendations prioritize green strategies such as tree planting and living shorelines, but they also include more structural practices such as french drains and sluice gates. In addition to providing stormwater management information, staff will also assist property owners with navigating city processes and putting property owners in touch with the appropriate staff.

The Extension program began in January 2024 and staff have been developing the scope of the program, creating a tracking system, and working test cases as they arise. Mr. Coolbaugh noted that the city intends to officially launch the program by publicizing contact information, mitigation materials, and social media outreach next month.

When asked whether the city has adequate capacity to take on and prioritize cases, Mr. Coolbaugh indicated that they really do not know how many property owners will take advantage of the program and will have to wait to see.

The Extension program includes making sense of tide gauge data and putting it into a context that property owners can use for decision-making. While it primarily features the City's data that measures the water level from the high point on a roadway, they also included a few Chesapeake roads that connect the two cities.

The Committee discussed how the program could be replicated in other localities or even on a larger scale if state funding were provided.

## **5. Recycling Rate Report**

Mr. Eric Walberg, HRPDC, first shared a review of the recycling rate report that the southside localities are required to submit to DEQ annually. The SPSA Solid Waste Planning Unit must maintain a minimum 25 percent recycling rate. This percentage considers household, commercial, and institutional waste. Collecting this data is challenging due to personnel changes, estimated reporting, and changing recycling market. Between 2010 and 2022, the recycling rate averaged 35%, but it has decreased the last couple of years due to reductions in commingled and metal materials. Mr. Walberg suspected that the decreases are due to changes in business practices or perhaps vendors outside of the region getting a larger share of the materials.

A major amendment to the Regional Solid Waste Management Plan occurred in 2024, when the waste-to-energy facility in Portsmouth, often referred to as the Wheelabrator facility, closed. The closure of the facility resulted in a significant increase in the volume of waste transferred to the regional landfill.

SPSA is currently working on permitting a new transfer station and material handling facility to be built in Portsmouth. At this facility, material recovery equipment will segregate recyclables, organics, and non-processible residuals from the waste stream. Recycling in the region will be in flux over the next few years. HRPDC staff are working to facilitate communication across the region as this new facility drives change, and askHRgreen.org is ramping up their "Start Smart, Recycle Right" program with nearly \$2M in EPA grant funds. Their goals include waste reduction as a first step and building public trust in the recycling process.

The Committee discussed how to better collaborate with businesses to improve the commercial recycling data. Regional education initiatives have traditionally focused on residential recycling, so there could be opportunities to expand messaging.

When asked what the capacity of SPSA's new transfer station will be, Mr. Walberg indicated that the plan is to manage all residential waste from the southside and potentially expand to handle some from the peninsula. It is challenging to create a feasible business model for waste-to-energy facilities. For example, Wheelabrator was forced to close when the Navy stopped sending material to the facility.

## 6. Other Business

- A. The Green Infrastructure Center is hosting a workshop titled "[Readiness, Response, and Recovery: Managing Urban Forests for Disaster Resiliency](#)" on Tuesday, June 10, 2025 from 9:45 am to 3:00 pm at the Sandy Bottom Nature Center in Hampton.
- B. The next Coastal Resiliency Committee meeting will be held at the Regional Building on Friday, June 27, 2025 at 10:00 am.
- C. The HRPDC recently installed a customized "757" bike rack that was created by welding students at the College and Career Academy at Pruden in Suffolk.
- D. The USGS is installing an extensometer near HRSD's James River Treatment Plant. It is a dual installation, one goes to the bedrock and the other stops at the Potomac Aquifer, so they will be able to measure what is happening at different levels in response to HRSD's SWIFT project.
- E. The HRPDC will soon release a public survey in support of the Regional Strategic Plan, and Mr. Walberg encouraged the Committee members to provide their input.