

**SUMMARY OF THE  
HAMPTON ROADS REGIONAL ENVIRONMENTAL COMMITTEE  
DECEMBER 4, 2025 at 10:00 A.M.  
IN-PERSON, REGIONAL BOARDROOM**

**1. Summary of the October 2, 2025, Meeting of the Hampton Roads Regional Environmental Committee (REC)**

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

**2. Virginia Municipal League (VML) and Virginia Association of Counties (VACo) Legislative Update**

Mitchell Smiley, Policy Manager for Transportation and Natural Resources (VML) kicked off the presentation with an overview of what can be expected with budget bills during the 2026 General Assembly. It's unclear what the final budget will be entering the session, but he noted that this will be a difficult budget year. It's likely that there won't be additional appropriations for the WQIF, VACs, and SLAF programs. Many other budget requests likely won't be carried through since federal funding cuts and loss of staff positions will have to be considered.

VML and VACo have several priority issues with land use and affordable housing as top concerns. There are some bills that will be looking to allow by-right, multi-use housing on church properties. These Faith in Housing bills are not popular by local governments because there are many exemptions on taxes and fees. Solar siting, agrivoltaics and data centers are other top issues. Any bills that were vetoed last year will likely come back in some form or another. Similarly, PFAS and water withdrawal bills will be large issues. There will be a push for more testing of PFAS in biosolids and another closer look at interbasin water transfers. VACo and VML are both in support of bills that add funds to the Community Flood Preparedness Fund (CFPF) and flexibility in the use of funds for large scale flood mitigation projects and support local government enabling legislation for tree canopy goals. While VML and VACo align on all the above issues, Jay Hutzler (VACo) noted that VML is also supportive of the Forestland Sustainability Fund and Purchase of Development Rights Programs.

Regarding tree canopy bills, there was a question about their likelihood of passing. While the language may look different than in past years, there is a good chance we will see some of them move forward. On housing, data centers, and local land use authority, positions may be more nuanced during this session, and it is still unclear what this administration's housing policies will look like. Committee membership changes, including the loss of several housing developers, may also shift how these bills are approached. A statewide utility fee was also mentioned, which would likely be unpopular for localities and enterprise funds. Finally, the budget outlook was discussed again. Reductions tied to federal funding for programs such as Medicaid and SNAP could significantly impact remaining revenues, leaving limited funding for other programs and initiatives.

**3. Chesapeake Bay Foundation (CBF) Legislative Agenda Update**

Jay Ford, VA Policy Manager for CBF, coordinates with VACo and VML on their agendas and noted that the budget concerns are mostly focused on the loss of state staff funded by federal money. This could impact state staff working on floodplain issues and in the Soil and Water Conservation Districts. CBF's legislative agenda is aligned with the updated Chesapeake Bay Watershed priorities. Several initiatives are proposed for fisheries, including a fisheries adaptation plan, funds for a freshwater mussel hatchery, and tackling menhaden concerns. Wetlands are another priority topic. CBF is requesting that migration corridors be added to the Conserve VA mapping tool, ensuring that

beneficial use of dredge materials can be allowed for wetland enhancements and creation, and to codify the Habitat Committee within the VA Marine Resource Commission (VMRC). There will also be a bill looking to marry tidal wetland mitigation requirements to those of non-tidal wetland mitigation requirements.

While budget appropriations will be difficult, CBF is also advocating for more funds for WQIF, the agriculture cost-share program, and SLAF. The interim report on the WQIF program will be available soon, highlighting where the law and the budget language don't agree to provide appropriate technical assistance. They would also like to codify the Pay for Outcomes program to incentivize BMP implementation that monitors outputs, although no funds will likely be added this year. PFAS and microplastics are likely to be hot topics, looking at identifying their concentrations in biosolids, identifying thresholds, and identifying disposal mechanisms. However, a question was asked about how to remove microplastics from biosolids, and it's still unclear how that can be accomplished.

In terms of resilience, the Commonwealth will likely re-enter RGGI, and CBF would also like to align the RVERF with CFPF so that nature-based solutions are prioritized. There is a request to add more funding to RAFT and expand the tool statewide. There is also a need to protect pre-disaster funds so that they don't get appropriated for post-disaster needs. A question was asked about who would be in charge of ensuring that the VA Disaster Assistance Fund is maintained appropriately, and it was noted that a framework needs to be developed.

Trees will also be the subject of bills supported by CBF, along with solar siting, supporting environmental education, composting, and protecting turtles. VA is the lowest-ranked state in the Bay watershed in terms of environmental education, and CBF is looking for funds to support better education initiatives.

A question was asked about what part of enforcement for tree removal would be more stringent. Jay noted that the goal was to make it cost-prohibitive to remove trees during development, so they are proposing raising the fees. Another question was asked about regional solar planning and how that could impact PDCs. Jay commented that there has been a large group meeting with a mediator to tackle these issues from all sectors, but it has not been successful. A likely approach would be to have an opt-in program that PDCs could participate in to get technical assistance to tackle these issues related to planning for solar, data centers, and energy supply and demand. There was also a question about what legislation would look like regarding environmental justice, and the goal is to revive any vetoed legislation and start having conversations around cumulative impacts for communities.

#### **4. Regional Trail Network**

Mr. Bob Crum, Executive Director of the HRPDC/HRTPO, shared the efforts towards creating a regional trail network. Support for expansion of the trail network is part of the region's legislative agenda. A study was conducted to better understand what would bring more young people to the region and 15 issues were ranked. The top three were jobs, housing, and the availability of biking and walking trails. This has been a major motivator of trail creation in the Region, and the goal is to make the Region a center of biking and walking in the mid-Atlantic.

There are several existing trails on the Southside and the Peninsula that need to be connected. The VA Capital Trail starting in Richmond now connects to James City County but needs to be connected to Fort Monroe on the Peninsula, and ultimately to Virginia Beach via the Jamestown Ferry. The previously named Birthplace of America Trail (BOAT) has been renamed Trail 757 and will serve as this connector. It will be 80 miles long on the Peninsula and 50 miles on the Southside when completed. There is also an expansion of the VA Capital Trail planned around Colonial Williamsburg

and is just awaiting funding. Overall, on the peninsula, Trail757 has 15 miles completed, 13 funded, and 54 unfunded.

On the Southside, the goal is to connect to the Elizabeth River Trail, which is already 10.5 miles along the urban waterside in Norfolk. The South Hampton Roads Trail is a planned 41-mile multi-city trail from Suffolk to the Oceanfront. There are also plans to finish the Dismal Swamp trail and connect it to the NC border.

These trails remain a key priority to the localities and are being advocated for in the regional legislative agenda. HRPDC is actively looking for all funding opportunities to connect and create these trails.

There were questions about the types of funding and costs. Most of the funds come from a mix of state and federal dollars. There are currently 10 successful grants funded now and 3 more pending. Costs are about \$3M/mile in rural settings and \$7M/mile in urban settings. Maintenance is conducted by the VA Capital Trail Foundation for those that they support then handed over to the localities or VDOT depending on the trail. Otherwise, most trails are maintained by the localities. Another question was asked about allowing bikes on the James River Bridge, which haven't been allowed since the 1970s. While this has been discussed, no effort has been made to make this a reality again.

## **5. Information Sharing Session**

For those present, a Menti poll was shared to identify what programs most localities participate in. There weren't many localities present, but there are four participating in Bee City USA, five in Tree City USA, and while none present say they were members of Sol Smart, Norfolk has a designation. Many are members of Storm Ready (NOAA) and Keep America Beautiful, but none are Bicycle Friendly Communities. This information will be compiled and developed in a more comprehensive way so localities can be made aware of what programs are out there and see what other localities are participating in. Finally, a word cloud was created to share what emerging topics will shape 2026.

## **6. Other Matters**

The HRPDC parking lot retrofit project has received an award from the American Council of Engineering Companies of Virginia for AMT's designs. The next HRPDC REC meeting will be held virtually on January 8<sup>th</sup>, 2026.