

**SUMMARY OF THE MEETING OF THE
HRPDC REGIONAL ENVIRONMENTAL COMMITTEE
February 6, 2020**

1. Summary of the December 5, 2019 Meeting of the Hampton Roads Regional Environmental Committee.

There were no comments on the November meeting summary.

2. Public Comments

There were no public comments.

3. Featured Stormwater Management Technique – New MOST Course: Landscaping for Resilience in a Changing Climate

Ms. Jill Sunderland, HRPDC Water Resources Planner, discussed the newest training courses available on the Municipal Online Stormwater Training (MOST) Center’s website. There are currently 10 free online courses that cover financing, construction site management, integrating green infrastructure into capital improvement planning, and designing for a changing climate. Ms. Sunderland highlighted the most recent course added, “Landscaping for Resilience in a Changing Climate”. It is a two-hour course developed in conjunction with the Chesapeake Bay Landscaping Professional (CBLP) certification program and the University of Maryland Extension. The featured speakers are Dave Hirschman and Tim Stromberg. The course covers climate change impacts with respect to the Chesapeake Bay watershed, sustainable landscape practices, native plants, stormwater, and impacts at the water’s edge. Two hours of DEQ Continuing Education Credits are offered to inspectors and administrators after taking this course. All courses offered provide 1-3 hours of credits to just administrators or administrators and inspectors.

Norfolk and Chesapeake use these courses for continuing education. Ms. Shereen Hughes, Wetlands Watch, informed the Committee that these courses will only be free until the end of March 2020. After that they will begin to ask for a subscription to take the courses but it is unclear what the costs will be.

4. Norfolk Thrive and Harbor Park Redevelopment

Mr. Tim Stromberg, Stromberg/Garrigan & Associates (SGA), briefed the Committee on plans to revitalize the Harbor Park area in Norfolk. The goal is to create green space and protect the waterfront in order to attract development. Many concepts and ideas were presented to the City through collaborative work with multiple departments including the Office of Resilience and staff working on Brownfields projects. Work was primarily funded through a variety of Brownfields grants. SGA explored implementing a buried wall, similar to designs on the west coast, to protect the area from sea level rise and still allow for green space and development. The intent is to have hydrologic basins inform the designs by creating lagoon landscapes and will connect the ballpark with downtown,

Norfolk State University, and surrounding neighborhoods. Since much of the work is large in scale, it was important that the City start small, so they are creating a water street and open space west of Harbor Park this summer. This plaza will allow for recreation activities like skateboarding and has stormwater features built in for control of flooding and runoff.

Ms. Barbara Brumbaugh asked if the goal is to attract development how will the green space be protected if people become used to it. Mr. Stromberg noted that if the green space is already there, it will provide incentive to protect and preserve what's already there for the community. Ms. Brumbaugh asked about the possibility of the buried wall and if it had been done on the east coast anywhere but no one has replicated this work here yet. It would be a good model for Norfolk and it is tied to how the Dutch design and incorporate hard and soft engineering.

HRPDC staff asked about the challenges incorporating different departments into the process. Mr. Stromberg noted that in the early stages of project development, SGA comes to localities with a list of stakeholders that need to be involved from the beginning in order to have successful dialogue.

5. Virginia Beach Participation in the Community Rating System

Ms. Whitney McNamara, Environmental Planner for the City of Virginia Beach, presented on the steps taken to become part of the National Flood Insurance Program's Community Rating System (CRS). The process took approximately five years, however once conversations began with the CRS staff, the turnaround of documents was quick. The City entered the program as a 7. Most Hampton Roads localities enter as a 7 or 8 and some are trying to obtain more points to become a 5 or 6. Ms. McNamara discussed her approach, which involved talking with multiple departments to obtain all of the necessary paperwork, mapping, and documentation to be sent to the CRS program. She also suggested that good preparation, working knowledge of documents being submitted, and organization were key.

The City did not initially score high for outreach and stormwater management. However, obtaining the appropriate information in the future will allow the City to increase points in those areas. The City is also working on their Sea Level Rise plan, and while there are no specific categories identified for this effort, it is likely they will get more points in the future for this as well. This program is allowing residents to save 15% on their flood insurance premiums.

There were questions regarding obtaining points for drainage system maintenance, open space, and urban forests. Discounted points can be provided depending on the frequency of maintenance. Open space can also receive points as long as the intent of the area is to remain open, it does not have to be deed restricted. And urban forests don't get specific points but are tied into open space.

6. Legislative Update

HRPDC staff provided an update on legislative items related to resilience, stormwater, and energy. Many bills made it out of committees and subcommittees the day before and crossover will occur February 11. There was a question regarding HB 794 (Askew), which was continued to 2021, and whether or not the region was in support of this bill which would have directed the Virginia Resources Authority to establish a program to subsidize the purchase of flood insurance by low-income Virginians. There may be interest in the future to support this bill if it comes back in 2021. There was also a question about how much money could be in the Shoreline Resiliency Fund. HB22 (Lindsey) requests that this fund be changed from a lending to a grant program. Budget requests call for up to \$10M to be put into this Fund, which currently has no funding.

7. Regional Environmental Committee Meeting – Assessment and Planning

Ms. Sunderland shared the results of the survey taken by REC attendees to identify their priorities and help HRPDC staff plan future meetings. 27 people responded, with the majority identifying stormwater management as their primary topic of interest followed by Chesapeake Bay matters, policy and legislation, and planning. Respondents were somewhat interested in coastal resiliency, regional examples, environmental education, solid waste and recycling, and state initiatives. Respondents also ranked the aspects of REC that they find most valuable. ‘More information about your practice area’ ranked 1, followed by ‘exposure to work of peers in the region’, ‘exposure to other initiatives outside of your practice area’, ‘interaction with your peers’, and ‘communication with state agencies and representatives’.

Those in attendance also requested that REC begin to dive into the regions contribution to climate change. They would like to see the region be more proactive rather than reactive.

8. Other Matters

Ms. Shereen Hughes, Wetlands Watch, mentioned the recent CBLP maintenance training she held thanks to RISE funding. There were 28 in attendance, half were public works staff and half were from the private sector. The cost is \$180 per person and she is reviewing comments to help improve 1-d training for maintenance crews in the future. CBLP is also developing native plant safari cards for training purposes that will be featured at the next Level 1 CBLP training in Norfolk, Feb. 25-26 (\$300/person).

The James River Association is hosting a living shoreline seminar in Carrolton in March and a living shoreline summit in Hampton (Fort Monroe) on Feb. 20.

Ms. Liz Scheessele announced VWEA’s spring stormwater seminar, April 23, 2020. The theme is BMPs: New Trends in Maintenance, Design, and Flood Mitigation.

Ms. Sunderland announced the Hampton Roads Contractor Workshops for Stormwater and ESC. One will be held at HRPDC Feb. 7 and one on the peninsula Feb. 20.

The City of Portsmouth has two job openings in the Planning Department. Check their website for more details.

The next meeting of the Regional Environmental Committee will be held at the HRPDC on March 5.