

**SUMMARY OF THE MEETING OF THE
HRPDC REGIONAL ENVIRONMENTAL COMMITTEE
May 2, 2019**

1. Summary of the April 4, 2019 Meeting of the Hampton Roads Regional Environmental Committee.

There were no comments on the April meeting summary.

2. Public Comments

There were no public comments.

3. Ohio Creek Watershed Project Update

Ms. Christine Morris, Norfolk's Chief Resilience Officer, briefed the Committee on the status of the Ohio Creek Watershed Project. After significant community involvement, the final project has been designed and permitted, and the Environmental Impact Statement is complete. Construction will begin in late July/early August, 2019 with an expected project completion date of September 2022. The overall design will allow the communities of Chesterfield Heights and Grandy Village to act as a bathtub, with many water storage features built in. The existing creek beds will also act as stormwater features with tide gates to control water during large storm events. Several amenities will be built in around pump stations, including a solar charging station. For green space, the Norfolk Resilience Park will be the largest amenity to bring the communities together with a play area, chess tables, and open lawn space. A fishing pier was also added.

Ms. Meg Pittenger asked if the berm and flood wall had been modeled to ensure that upstream communities will not be adversely impacted during storm events and Ms. Morris indicated that research had been done to ensure that would not happen.

There was also discussion about what will happen to the watershed after construction to ensure that any environmental justice concerns are addressed and that the park is being taken care of. Ms. Morris noted that while no specific programs have been identified to incorporate the community post-construction, that Norfolk State University, Master Gardeners, and other groups have been engaged to help the community create a "Friends of the Park" organization to ensure that the community is invested in their park. Additionally, there was a question whether or not citizens in those neighborhoods have been identified to be part of the workforce during and after construction. Ms. Morris has engaged the public in a variety of ways, including holding small-business workshops to include them in what they will need to do once jobs go out for bid, and holding workshops to encourage larger businesses to incorporate the smaller, local businesses as sub-contractors.

Ms. Robbie Rhur asked whether or not the City considered what will happen to individual parcels that could get flooded in light of the community acting like a bath tub. Ms. Morris responded that their mantra is that “every parcel has to do its part” and while they haven’t directly planned for this eventuality, there are funds available for residents to incorporate rain gardens and rain barrels on their property. It is becoming more and more clear that at some point residents will have to be able to live with water and not all water will drain quickly.

Mr. Brian Swets asked about possible future gentrification and maintenance costs. Ms. Morris remarked that maintenance costs have been considered and they will be expensive. However, since this time of stormwater management will be unlike other parts of the city, it may be important to educate citizens on the importance of living with tall weeds and grass. It’s unclear how effective some of the green infrastructure practices will be managed and how well they will work so it is a learning curve for the City and the residents. In regards to gentrification, Ms. Morris does not see this as an issue in the short-term since most of the residents are homeowners, but it is likely that taxes and property values will go up in the area in the long-term.

4. Examining the Flood Risk Reduction Benefits of Urban Forests

Ms. Karen Forget, Executive Director of Lynnhaven River NOW, briefed the Committee on a study in Virginia Beach to look at the importance of trees for flood mitigation. In light of increased flooding due to wind tides, as well as other flood events, in the North Landing River, Northwest River, Back Bay, and Lynnhaven River, the City teamed up with several partners including VA Tech’s Department of Forest Resources and Environmental Conservation. The scope of the study, to be completed in July 2019, is to provide a conceptual overview of forest interception, infiltration and evapotranspiration in relation to forest characteristics. They will be looking at forest locations, structure and composition, soil conditions and depth of water table, and position in relation to other land uses. Following the study the group will analyze the extent of flood reduction potential of VA Beach forest cover and identify additional analysis needed to prioritize the most important forest blocks to conserve for flood risk reduction.

Many Committee members asked follow-up questions that will likely be asked following the study and won’t be answered with the initial study. For example, the study won’t be able to determine which areas could be underwater due to sea level rise in the future. Similarly, the study will only be looking at existing land use using LiDAR and won’t be able to tell how water storage could be disrupted in actively logged sites that aren’t logged during the study.

Ms. Barbara Brumbaugh asked about the political will to encourage conservation of forests in lieu of development and Ms. Forget acknowledged that that was an issue. Another attendee asked about the VA Beach Open Space fund and whether or not this study would help to garner more funds and opportunities for conservation. Ms. Forget recognized that currently the funds are going to Parks and Recreation for maintenance of existing open space and hopes that in the future funds can be directed towards acquisition of forestland based on the results of this and future studies. Mr. Tanner Council acknowledged that VA Beach's most recent Urban Forest Management Plan did not incorporate the importance of trees and forest for flood mitigation and hopes that this study can help guide the next plan. Ms. Forget agreed and stated that the city's arborist is part of this study and it will likely be included in the next plan update.

5. 2018 VA Outdoors Plan

Ms. Robbie Rhur, Virginia Outdoors Project Planner with the Virginia Department of Conservation and Recreation (DCR), presented highlights from the 2018 Virginia Outdoors Plan. The 2018 Virginia Outdoors Plan (VOP) is the 11th statewide comprehensive outdoor recreation plan. The primary objectives of the plan are to provide guidance to both government and the private sector in achieving the state's conservation, outdoor recreation, and open space goals and to provide guidance for land protection through the Virginia Land Conservation Foundation (VLCF).

The VOP planning process begins with the Virginia Outdoors Demand Survey (VODS). The 2017 VODS had a 23% response rate and included questions about outdoor recreational preferences. The most popular activities for both the state and Hampton Roads included visiting natural areas, walking for pleasure, and driving for pleasure. The top recreational needs identified by respondents across the state and within Hampton Roads included parks, natural areas, water access, and trails. The survey also indicated strong support for public funding of outdoor recreation, with 74% of respondents in support of state funding.

Ms. Rhur also highlighted VOP featured projects for the Hampton Roads region. These include implementing the Stony Run Greenway and the Green Sea Blueway and Greenway and Water Trail plans, connecting regional multi-use trails, developing the Southeast coast Saltwater Paddling Trail, creating recreation opportunities at Fort Monroe, and implementing the Elizabeth River Easter Branch Restoration Plan. The 2018 Virginia Outdoors Plan is available online through the following link: www.dcr.virginia.gov/recreational_planning/vop.shtml. Ms. Rhur also stated that the Land and Water Conservation Fund (LWCF) state grants program will likely be opening for applications next month. LWCF project areas must be maintained as open space public outdoor recreation areas in perpetuity.

Mr. Greg Grootendorst asked if other trail recreational activities apart from walking are being considered for public parks. Ms. Rhur responded that biking trails are particularly popular at Pocahontas State Park; however, the use of ATVs on state-owned parks seems unlikely because of habitat protection concerns. Dr. KC Filippino asked how the featured projects for the Hampton Roads region were determined. Ms. Rhur stated that individual regional meetings were held where local stakeholders discussed priority projects.

6. Update on HRPDC Projects and Activities

Mr. Ben McFarlane provided an update on the HRPDC's regional public access to waterways site, fishswimplay.com. HRPDC staff is currently reviewing the existing inventory and populating additional attributes, including parking and restroom availability, fees, and ADA accessibility, as well as attaching images of the site where available. The updated inventory will be shared with local government staff for review.

Dr. Filippino updated the Committee on the results of the 2019 Stormwater Local Assistance Fund (SLAF) project awards. Of the 56 proposals submitted statewide, 24 received funding, including 23 stream restoration projects. Of the nine projects submitted for Hampton Roads, one project in Newport News was awarded funding. HRPDC staff is working with DEQ to better understand how projects were prioritized for funding awards.

Mr. Matt Smith stated there is an upcoming Town Hall meeting regarding offshore wind on May 28, 2019 at Old Dominion University. Mr. Smith also updated the Committee on the progress of the Hampton Roads Chesapeake Bay Preservation Act (CBPA) Workgroup. The CBPA Workgroup met on April 29, 2019, and discussed ideas for outreach activities to promote awareness of the CBPA and inform property owners of Resource Protection Area buffers.

7. Other Matters

A. **DEQ TRO** - Mr. Matt Fanghella stated that the City of Williamsburg and Thomas Nelson Community College have upcoming MS4 audits.

The next meeting of the Regional Environmental Committee will be held in Chesapeake on June 6, 2019.