

## **Chapter 4**

### **Issues and Concerns**

## The Local Economy

### *Strategic Plan for Economic Development on the Eastern Shore*

*The Challenge:* A strategic plan for economic development on Virginia's Eastern Shore was developed by a local economic development advisory council in 1994. That plan defined the challenge to successful economic development on the Shore as holding on to the area's history, heritage, and fragile unique natural assets, while attempting to capture new concepts and opportunities for economic growth. According to the plan, the keys to economic growth are; revitalizing and diversifying the economic base, promoting homegrown entrepreneurship, investing in the work force and, investing in infrastructure.

*Revitalizing and Diversifying the Economic Base:* In revitalizing and diversifying our economic base, we must overcome a significant apprehensiveness toward economic development that arises from the misguided belief that economic development and environmental protection are mutually exclusive. This can be accomplished by conducting comprehensive regional strategic planning which seeks broad based input; employs a consensus building process; develops a vision for the region; and produces an action plan for implementation which targets economic development that is consistent with, and capitalizes on, the existence and preservation of our fragile ecological environment and unique Eastern Shore culture.

*Promoting Home Grown Entrepreneurship:* By promoting home grown entrepreneurship, we can create new opportunities for businesses and jobs for people who already have a strong commitment to the region; who are already knowledgeable of the area's strengths and weaknesses; and who will not require special inducements to locate here. This approach has the added benefit of retaining a greater percentage of business profits locally – enhancing capital formation for further regional growth. Emphasizing this approach does not preclude attempting to attract suitable businesses to locate in the region. In fact, it will enhance the attractiveness of the region to prospective firms.

*Investing in the work force and infrastructure:* Success in accomplishing economic development is highly dependent on the public sector's long-term commitment of resources for work force and infrastructure development. We must have the political will and leadership necessary to acquire the capital to improve the quality of our public school system; provide relevant training opportunities that will improve the quality of our labor pool; optimize those facets of our transportation system which support the economic activity envisioned by our strategic planning; develop regional solutions to water, waste water, and solid waste issues; and increase the supply and quality of housing for our citizens. Since the region is one of the poorest in the Commonwealth, financial assistance from the State is essential. We must, however, also examine our regional sources and uses of revenues to assure they are consistent with the priorities which emerge from our strategic planning.

*Recommendations:* The following discussion includes information and recommendations from the *Strategic Plan for Economic Development on the Eastern Shore*, the Countryside Stewardship Exchange Report, and the Eastern Shore Economic Development Commission's Plan of Action.

*Business and Industrial Development:* Exciting opportunities exist for the Eastern Shore to

attract and develop new businesses and industries, retain existing companies, and encourage expansion. Business and industry development can provide well paying jobs, a diversified tax base, improved quality of life, retention of our young people as they enter the work force, and a stable economy. To be successful in recruiting, developing and sustaining new industry, the Eastern Shore must pursue an economic development strategy that balances the needs of growth against those of protection of our ecological resources and rural character.

*Industrial Park:* The Shore's industrial parks and properties marketed by the Eastern Shore of Virginia Economic Development Commission are superb development assets. The Accomack County Airport Industrial Park is served by water, sewer, and paved streets and is strategically located adjacent to the County's airport, the Eastern Shore Community College, and U.S. Route 13.

*Foreign Trade Zone Designation:* NASA's Wallops Flight Facility, the Cape Charles Port area in Northampton County, and the Accomack County Airport Industrial Park have great potential as a Foreign Trade Zone (FTZ). A FTZ designation by the U.S. Department of Commerce would serve existing and future companies as an economic development incentive through the elimination or deferral of import duties. A Foreign Trade Zone application is currently being prepared by the Eastern Shore of Virginia Economic Development Commission.

*Small Business Development:* The development of micro-business enterprises would provide opportunities for the establishment of resident owned and operated or employee owned businesses. An Incubator/Business Center would provide the facilities, services, equipment, and expertise required by new and expanding local enterprises at a single location and at a cost that would increase the chances of those businesses succeeding. Such a center could be a partnership of local business service providers such as banks, chambers of commerce, local enterprise agencies, and local governments. The benefit of such a center lies in both the combined expertise gained from the partnership which would benefit regional economic development and individual gains for service providers through referrals.

Artisans and small production companies are a growing sector of the county's economy. Many producers of local arts, crafts, and food products would benefit from a marketplace which would sell and promote their products. A marketplace, located on Route 13, could provide this central outlet and encourage highway travelers to stop and shop in Accomack County. This concept has been developed successfully in North Carolina and West Virginia.

*Federal and Local Enterprise Zone Incentives:* In 1994, parts of Accomack County were designated as a Federal Enterprise Community and State Enterprise Zone. The state provides an incentive package for business in the Enterprise Zone but the federal government provides no incentives. The addition of a federal incentive package would be beneficial to promoting growth in the zone and Accomack County should support any efforts to have such incentives developed. In addition to the tax incentives provided by the state to businesses that locate in the Enterprise Zone, localities are encouraged to adopt local incentives. Although these incentives will not be of the same monetary impact as those provided by the state, they advertise the county's pro-business attitude. Examples of local incentives initiated by other localities include accelerated permit processing, crime prevention programs and education, waiver or reduction of certain permitting fees, real property rehabilitation tax abatement (i.e.

five year, tax credit on the increased assessed real property value resulting from rehabilitation work completed on commercial or industrial property), and machinery and tools tax credit (i.e. five year exemption from machinery and tools tax to qualified businesses). Some localities that give tax rebates base those rebates on the number of jobs that a business creates.

### **Local Economic Assets and Issues**

**Commercial Space Activity:** Virginia is uniquely positioned to capture a portion of the emerging market for commercial space activity. The existing infrastructure at NASA's Wallops Flight Facility provides maximum leverage for any new capital investment which targets this market.

Advantages include:

- (1) Satellite orbits, which provide coverage of the majority of the earth's populated land mass, can be launched from Wallops Flight Facility with less energy (i.e. less cost) than from any existing launch site in the U.S.
- (2) The Eastern Shore is a "radio frequency quiet" area making it an ideal location for ground stations supporting satellite operations
- (3) Wallops Flight Facility's mission and tempo of operations provide the launch schedule flexibility needed to profitably conduct commercial activity
- (4) Wallops Flight Facility has earned the reputation as a low cost/quick response utility – attributes compatible with commercial activity. Development of the Mid-Atlantic Regional Space Port (MARS) at Wallops Island is currently underway. The MARS handles commercial rocket and satellite launches. MARS has a significant impact on Accomack County's economy. In addition to revenue generated by Space Port activities, it is expected that additional support industries will locate in the vicinity of the facility. Development of the Wallops Research Park will help the county to capture a major sector of the emerging market for commercial space activity by supporting development of the MARS.

**Tourism:** Virginia's Eastern Shore is a peaceful peninsula nestled between the Atlantic Ocean and the Chesapeake Bay. There is an abundance of natural scenic, recreational, and multi-cultural assets which offer saltwater fishing, beaches, bird watching, hunting, boating, antique shops, a unique style of architecture, and historic old homes. Tourism development must be carefully planned to create a diversity of attractions, have a low impact on the environment and link the interests and assets of existing businesses, communities, and individuals with the county's environmental and cultural assets for the benefit of the county as a whole.

The county's unique heritage and natural resources present opportunities for increased tourism activity. Tourism could be encouraged through extension of the heritage trail into Accomack County and development of museums and information points which would interpret Eastern Shore history and direct visitors to local points of interest. Signs on Route 13 could be used to entice travelers to venture off the highway and direct them towards towns, harbors, beaches, and points of interest. The Eastern Shore should have representation at the Virginia visitor center on



Route 13 to encourage travelers entering the state to explore the area. Special events such as the Seafood Festival, Harvest Festival, Garden Tour, and Eastern Shore Birding and Wildlife Festival and attractions such as beaches and parks should be actively promoted.

**Infrastructure:** Businesses investigate the quality of infrastructure, such as available facilities, utilities and the transportation network, when selecting locations for operation. These items must be given attention in order to be competitive with other areas also trying to attract new industry. **Facilities:** The availability of quality business facilities is important to recruitment efforts. There is a lack of existing modern industrial and office buildings in Accomack County for new business to move into. A prospective location is more attractive to a business if that business knows that either a building is ready for them to move into or that they will face few obstacles in obtaining the land and necessary permits to build. In order to stay competitive, some localities construct shell buildings to attract new business. Construction of these buildings can be funded through a revolving building fund. With a revolving fund, the Industrial Development Authority constructs industrial buildings, and when the first buildings are sold or leased, the proceeds are used to build more buildings. Another, less desirable, option is to establish a “ready-to-build” program which provides cleared and pre-permitted sites with building plans drawn, building costs estimated and sources of financing identified. With this option, prospective businesses can be assured that an approved building site is available. The county should research, and possibly establish a revolving fund for, the construction of speculative industrial buildings and consider the establishment of a “ready-to-build” program for new businesses.

**Sewage Disposal:** One town in Accomack County, Onancock, has central sewage collection and tertiary treatment facilities. The Accomack County Industrial Park has its own water supply and water tower and is connected to Onancock’s sewage treatment plant. All other areas, including the incorporated towns, use various septic systems. Properly designed septic systems provide an effective and efficient method of waste disposal. Placement of septic systems, however, are dependent on the availability of suitable soils. Approximately 35% of Accomack County has soils that are suitable for septic system installation. Traditionally, the distribution of suitable soil has directed the distribution of residential and commercial development. As Accomack County continues to grow, it may be desirable to investigate alternatives to individual septic systems. Any central sewage treatment systems proposed should be designed to minimize impact on the environment and should serve compact development areas around villages and towns.

**Transportation:** The Eastern Shore has several major components of an effective and complete transportation system to support business activity and development. Accomack County Airport, with a 7,000 foot runway (5,000 feet lighted), is strategically located on the coastal North-South air routes and offers a low-activity destination, interim rest and refuel, and a possible training location for various sized commercial aircraft. Its location, adjacent to the Accomack Airport Industrial Park, gives added advantages for businesses requiring on or near airport locations and operations. U.S. Route 13, a major four-lane highway, connects Virginia to Maryland, and the Eastern Shore to the Virginia mainland via the Chesapeake Bay Bridge-Tunnel, an 18 mile long structure of multiple bridges and tunnels. U.S. Route 13 is the major transportation link for all commercial, industrial, and tourism activities on the Eastern Shore. Eleven interstate commercial carriers, primarily engaged in furnishing “over-the-road” trucking and common carrier services to the Eastern United States, are in operation on the Eastern Shore. The Eastern Shore Railroad (ESRR) provides rail service from Norfolk through the Port of Cape Charles to Pocomoke, Maryland and offers interline

transport of products and material that is critical to many local businesses. Onancock and Chincoteague harbors and waterways also offer additional locations for barge transport operations.

*Education:* Job training is closely linked to the creation of jobs. Residents must have the opportunity to pursue training for available jobs and new industry needs assurance that a trained work force will be available to fill necessary positions. The county is served by a public school system and the Eastern Shore Community College. Both offer significant services to business and industry. Enrollments suggest stable high school graduation numbers with college enrollment at 1,200. Of that number, 730 are at the Community College and 470 at other institutions. Literacy/GED classes enroll 375 adults. The public school test scores and the percent of adults with high school diplomas are below state averages. High schools offer varied vocational programs and work closely with the college. In order to develop a work force that is well trained to fill the needs of local industry, business, education and community representatives should work together to identify local training needs and facilitate solutions. The public schools should also work to improve student performance and graduation rates, and pursue techprep, school-to-work transition, dual enrollment, technology utilization, and other options to increase student preparedness for the work force. In order to provide better opportunities for local residents, the County should encourage development of a 4-year college.

*Regional Cooperation:* The success of regional economic development efforts on the Eastern Shore requires an effective working relationship between various public and private organizations and individuals. The broad range of programs and projects being pursued by these interests represents a major commitment of valuable Eastern Shore resources. Since the success of these separate efforts depends upon a sustained commitment of resources over a long period of time, a high degree of cooperation is needed to jointly agree on regional priorities. An essential feature of this cooperation is the process for determining and assuring an equitable and adequate allocation of these limited resources to projects and programs that have the greatest potential to benefit the most people in our region. Accomack and Northampton County and town governments must play a leadership role in encouraging inter-county cooperation. Bi-county organizations such as the Eastern Shore of Virginia Economic Development Commission, Accomack-Northampton Planning District Commission, and the Accomack-Northampton Transportation District Commission can provide an effective framework for accomplishing projects which impact the whole Eastern Shore. Significant economies can be realized by combining resources and finding shore-wide solutions to critical infrastructure needs.

**Growth Trends:** Current trends show significant growth in service industries while the manufacturing and agriculture/seafood sectors are declining. Aquaculture and shellfish farming, however, are showing new growth potential and offer new business opportunities with intensive management and farming techniques. Tourism offers many opportunities to support development efforts. Eastern Shore tourism is primarily based on the area's natural, ecological, cultural and historical assets. Two new festivals have emerged on the Shore; one focused on the harvest season and its bounty and the other on nature and bird watching.

**Labor Pool:** The county's labor pool includes a large, under-utilized, low wage and unskilled labor force. Many workers are caught in a low skills/low wage economic trap. The most visible trends affecting the labor pool today are (1) college educated and skilled labor is relocating elsewhere for better paying, quality jobs off the Shore and (2) employment opportunities are declining. It is believed that those workers "out-migrating" would stay on the Shore if a broader

range of employment were available. The Eastern Shore Community College provides vocational training programs which serve many of the community's needs but continues to produce graduates that must leave the Shore to find work in their field.

**The Distributed Workforce, Telecommunications and the Quality of Life:** In 2005, roughly 12% of the workforce in the United States had become what economists call the “distributed workforce”. This refers to people whose place of work need not be located near their place of residence due to their use of telecommunications technology. Many occupations are now able to use the internet and world wide web for day-to-day tasks, allowing them to live many miles from the center of their business. Examples include writers, sales people and consultants. Jobs in the distributed workforce tend to be high paying professional jobs, either independent entrepreneurs, or senior people in larger companies. This trend puts increasing value on a community's quality of life as a basis for economic development, since these types of employees have a wide range of choice as to where they reside. Accomack County has many quality of life factors that are attractive to segments of the distributed workforce, such as small towns, and high quality environmental resources for hunting, fishing and outdoor recreation. The County should strive to retain and enhance these factors as an underpinning of future economic development.

## **The Seafood Industry**

Seafood production is an industry that holds important ties to Accomack County's past and future. For years, watermen have made their living harvesting fish, crabs, oyster, and clams and many others were employed by seafood processing plants. Today, crab, oysters and clam quantities have declined and most of the seafood processing plants have gone out of business. Aquaculture, the farming of fish and shellfish, has become the seafood industry of the future. Clam aquaculture is now a \$30 to \$40 million dollar business on the Eastern Shore.

**Seafood Harvest:** Seafood catches continue to steadily decline. To compensate for decreased catch, watermen have tried extending their season and switching to species that are more abundant.

**Seafood Processing:** Many of the Shore's seafood processing plants have closed. Closure was brought on by both declining seafood harvests and the state's adoption of more stringent water quality standards. Some of the plants, faced with decreased profits were unable to afford to upgrade their plants to meet the new standards. The DEQ is now working on general permits for seafood processing plants which save the applicant money and streamline the application process. For these general permits, DEQ develops requirements for category-specific permits with EPA and adopts the permits through the regulatory process. Individual facilities in Virginia are then able to apply for and be covered by the umbrella of a general permit. This should relieve some of the burden placed on processors that are required to obtain a permit.

**Water Access:** Currently, watermen have little trouble gaining access to the Bay and Ocean to make their living. However, as waterfront development continues to increase and areas traditionally used by the public change hands, access could become more scarce. In recognition of the seafood industry's importance to Accomack County, effort should be made to ensure that adequate waterfront access is maintained for boat access and water dependent uses such as crab shedding.

**Aquaculture:** Fin and shellfish populations are declining while the demand for seafood continues to grow. Virginia's Eastern Shore has the reputation for good seafood, there is a large labor force, and markets are established. The area is bordered on the east by the Atlantic Ocean with a coast of pristine bays and creeks, and on the west by the nutrient rich Chesapeake Bay. The traditional seafood industry is in serious decline, but Virginia's Eastern Shore remains an ideal location for major shellfish and finfish aquaculture. Taking advantage of the location, reputation, work force and markets, aquaculture could continue to revitalize the local seafood industry. The county should work to identify the level of water quality necessary for viable aquaculture operations and establish standards to be maintained in waters supporting aquaculture. The County should work closely with the Virginia Department of Agriculture to protect water quality for aquaculture.

**Water Quality:** In the shellfish aquaculture industry, water quality is important because seawater from tidal creeks is used in raising young shellfish that are very sensitive to water conditions. In recent years, several aquaculture operations have suffered clam larvae mortalities attributed to water quality problems. At times these problems have been related to large-scale runoff in the greater Chesapeake Bay basin which Reduced salinities and at others to blooms of toxic dinoflagellates. In 1996, controversy arose between aquaculture operators and farmers accused of creating a pollution problem. The water quality problems were occurring in creeks downstream from agricultural fields in plasticulture production. Plasticulture is a method of farming that uses plastic ground covers to control soil moisture, reduce pesticide requirements and increase yields. Problems observed in shellfish hatcheries included chronic feeding inhibition and shell deformation in larvae and acute toxicity to larvae and juveniles. These occurrences are consistent with both heavy metal and organic toxicant contamination.

A study conducted by the Virginia Institute of Marine Science evaluated water quality in Seaside creeks in relation to the presence or absence of vegetable cultivation using plastic ground cover within the watershed. Eleven sites in six watersheds were tested. Sites were selected to represent a variety of surrounding land use. Since problems witnessed at the hatcheries indicated heavy metal toxicity, water at each site was tested for the presence of heavy metals. Each site was also tested for toxicity from insecticides. Insecticide toxicity was tested using grass shrimp, a common inhabitant of tidal marshes and creeks that is sensitive to insecticides.

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### Growing Clams



*Growing clams is the basis of a million dollar aquaculture industry on the Shore. Hard clam operations hatch and feed clams in holding tanks until they are large enough (about 4 millimeters) to move outdoors. The small clams are placed in long sloughs of fresh, unprocessed seawater, to prepare them for planting in the shallows of coastal bays. The "grow-out" stage of the process is often handled by independents who work on a cooperative basis with the hatcheries. The entire process, from spawning tank to market, takes two and a half years. Producing high enough spawn rates from broodstock is essential to success. The Shore's aquaculture industry has experienced lower than usual spawn rates over the last several years.*

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## Water Quality Test Sites

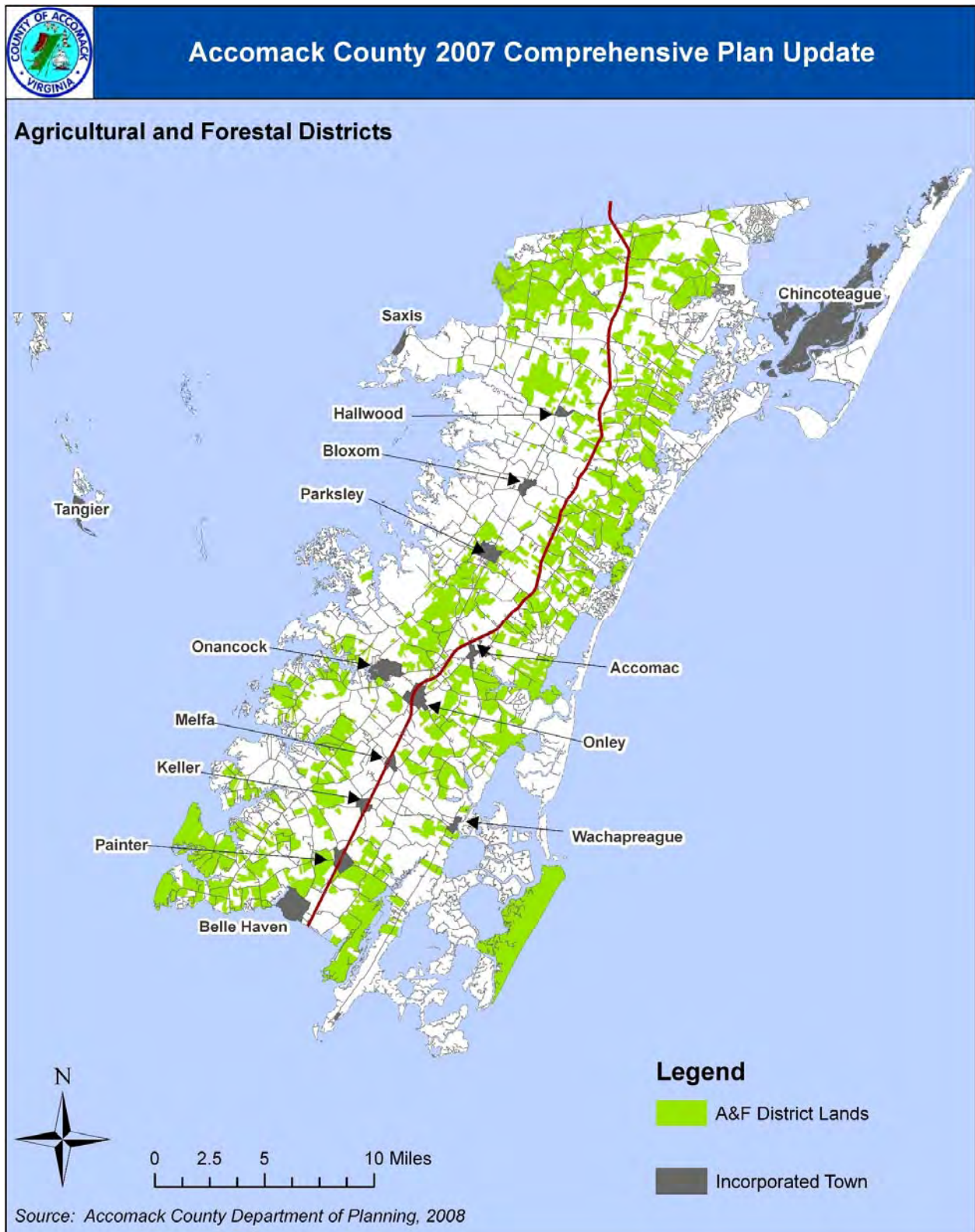
Site	marsh & open water	woodland	urban/res.	cropland	plasticulture
Phillips .....	11% .....	32% .....	4% .....	53% .....	0%
Nickawampus ...	5% .....	38% .....	5% .....	51% .....	<1%
Indiantown .....	1% .....	35% .....	4% .....	47% .....	13%
Gargathy.....	7%.....	33%.....	4%.....	51%.....	5%
Finney .....	2% .....	40% .....	3% .....	46% .....	9%
Folly.....	6% .....	32%.....	7% .....	48% .....	7%

Evidence of metals toxicity was observed in filtered water samples collected from the upstream site at Gargathy Creek. Less toxicity was observed in the midstream site at Gargathy Creek. Metals toxicity was also observed in filtered samples from Finney and Nickawampus Creeks. A trace of toxicity was observed in unfiltered water samples from Wachapreague Channel and Indiantown Creek. At the upstream location on Gargathy Creek, complete mortality of the shrimp was observed after virtually every rainfall event. Available data indicates that this mortality was not associated with low salinity or dissolved oxygen levels. Coupled with observations of direct runoff from an adjacent tomato field, the implication of this finding is that agricultural practices in the immediate watershed are impacting living resources at this site.

A similar, but less severe, pattern of mortality in relation to rainfall was observed at the downstream site at Gargathy Creek. Mortality of shrimp was also observed at Indiantown Creek, but generally only after rainfall events in excess of 50 mm / 48 hr. The Finney Creek site experienced approximately 70% mortality after a large rainfall, but over 30% mortality was observed in Nickawampus Creek, which has almost no vegetable cultivation, following the same rainfall. Upstream stations at Folly Creek and Phillips Creek, along with downstream stations at Folly Creek and Wachapreague, experienced only minimal mortalities.

**Information Needs:** Additional information is needed on the role water quality and surrounding land use has on the seafood industry in order to effectively manage impacts. The recent controversy between the agriculture and aquaculture industries has lead to a good deal of research and study. The county should carefully monitor the results of these studies and take action to correct problems that are defined.

Map 4-D



Map 4-E



## Agriculture

**Viability:** Conditions which affect the viability of commercial farming include soils, farm size, land ownership, surrounding development patterns, taxes, and market conditions.

**Soils:** Soil factors such as permeability, depth, natural fertility, and drainage are important when considering the agricultural potential of a piece of land. In general, loamy soils are best suited for crop production, being of medium porosity they can hold enough water and air to support good crop growth. In Accomack County, bojac and munden are the soils best suited to crop production. Bojac soils are also the prime soils for residential and commercial development because they are the soils most suitable for septic systems. This creates competition between farmers and developers for the best soils.

**Farm size:** The geography of the Eastern Shore does not allow for large, contiguous farm tracts. The peninsula is narrow and land is bisected frequently by creeks. Efficient, large scale farming often requires the use of large high-speed equipment which requires large areas in which to maneuver. The USDA conducted a study in 1981 which determined that the most efficient corn-producing farms in the Midwest were about 640 acres. The study also found that efficiencies of 90% could be achieved on farms as small as 300 acres. The average farm size in Accomack County in 1992 was 328 acres. It increased to 345 acres by 1997, but fell to only 286 acres in 2002. It is important that viable farmland be protected from fragmentation by residential and commercial development.

**Land ownership:** Population increases and the resultant competition for land leads to higher land values. As land values increase, it becomes difficult for a farmer to purchase land for a new operation or expansion. Instead, farmers are forced to lease land. Non-farmer land owners are often reluctant to tie up the potential development value of their property with long term agricultural leases. When the land owner decides to sell or develop the land for another use, the farmer must find other land to farm. A side effect of non-farmer ownership of agricultural land is that, without a commitment to a long-term lease from the property owner, the farmer leasing the land may not be willing to invest in long-term soil improvement measures and soil quality can be adversely impacted over the long term.

**Taxes:** Real Estate taxes are usually based on fair market value which is derived from the “highest and best use” of that piece of property. As development pressures increase in a rural area, increasing property taxes can have a real impact on agricultural land owners. If farm land is in an area with development potential, that property may be taxed based on its potential as residential or commercial property rather than its current agricultural use. Agricultural use of the land may not produce enough income to offset increased taxes and may force property owners to pursue other uses for their land.

**Farm Ownership**

The following table lists Accomack County farm acreage by ownership for 1987, 1992, 1997 and 2002.

	<b>Acreage</b>			
	<b>1987</b>	<b>1992</b>	<b>1997</b>	<b>2002</b>
<b>Full owners ....</b>	10,740 .....	10,425	10,436	21,775
<b>Part owners ...</b>	66,621 .....	63,758	66,011	65,341
<b>Tenants .....</b>	12,414 .....	17,385	16,917	3,940

Source: Census of Agriculture, 1992, 1997, 2002.

Accomack County currently offers land use taxation for property in agriculture or forestry use. Under land use taxation, property is assessed at its agricultural or current use value instead of fair market value. The savings to owners of agricultural property can be significant. The land use taxation option affords relieve from pressures to remove land from agriculture and develop it to it's "highest and best use." When land that has been in land use taxation is developed for more intensive use, roll back taxes must be paid by the property owner. One option the County may wish to consider to enhance the efficiency of the Use Value Taxation Program would be to limit eligibility to land that is within an adopted Agricultural and Forestal District (AFD).

**Surrounding land use:** Farming and residential development seldom successfully mix. As rural development increases and residential developments spring up in formerly agricultural areas, conflicts between the newcomers and surrounding farmers often occur. Agricultural practices which occur in once wide-open areas now pose nuisance problems for homeowners who have moved to the country. People who move to the country with bucolic visions of rural life are soon confronted with the realities of manure spreading, pesticide spraying and noisy farm equipment operating at all hours of the day. The result is an increase in complaints and nuisance lawsuits against farmers. When a farm is creating a nuisance that threatens neighboring property owners, the farmer is usually forced to modify or cease the offensive agricultural practices, regardless of whether the farm was there first. Accomack County currently requires that a statement be recorded on the plat of any subdivision created in an Agricultural zoning district, stating that, "These residential building lots are located in an area and zoning district specifically designated for agricultural activities, including horticulture and the raising of animals. Residents may expect the use of herbicides, pesticides, and fertilizers on adjacent agricultural fields, as well as other general agricultural activities, including plowing, spraying, pruning, and harvesting, which may occasionally generate dust, smoke, noise, and odor, and may also include changes from one specific agricultural activity to another."

In spite of this notice, conflicts still arise and it is best to keep these uses segregated. The conflict that arises from uses incompatible with agricultural operations illustrates the need for agricultural zoning that minimizes those conflicts. Currently, Accomack County's zoning ordinance allows uses such as single family housing, schools, churches, and post offices by right in an Agricultural district. In addition to those uses, all other uses are allowed by special use permit; specifically: camping facilities, light industry, retail stores, restaurants, office buildings, health care facilities, mobile home parks, duplexes, apartment buildings, banks, hotels, and motels. Many of the uses specified are not compatible with the use of land for agricultural production and should be excluded from a district that takes the goal of agricultural production

seriously. However, any such amendments should consider potential pressures for “spot” zoning for such intensive uses, due to the extensive coverage of the A District in Accomack County.

**Agricultural and Forestal Districts:**

In 1983, the Accomack County Board of Supervisors created 22 Agricultural and Forestal Districts with a total of 82,560 acres of land. In 2007, the total acreage is estimated to be 80,215 acres. Property owners made application for inclusion of their land in an Agricultural and Forestal District and those applications were considered by an Agricultural and Forestal District Advisory Committee, the Planning Commission, and the Board of Supervisors. In considering land for inclusion, the County reviewed the agricultural and forestal significance of land within the district (significance is evaluated based on soils, extent and nature of farm improvements, present status of farming and forestry, anticipated trends in economic conditions and technology, etc.), the nature and extent of land uses other than active farming or forestry, and local development trends and needs. The ordinances creating these districts state that land in the districts is “land which requires conservation and protection for the production of food and other agricultural and forestal products and as such is a valuable natural and ecological resource, providing open spaces for clean air and adequate and safe water supplies and other aesthetic purposes and is therefore valuable to the public interest.” Land in these districts qualified for land use taxation, under which land is taxed based its current, rather than “highest and best” use.

In 1994, the Board of Supervisors approved an amendment to each of the Agricultural and Forestal Districts to include a paragraph stating that, “In order to further the intent and purpose of this Ordinance, in accordance with provisions in § 15.2-4309, Code of Virginia, (1) any lands currently included, or subsequently added to, this District shall not be developed to any more intensive uses, other than for more intensive agricultural and/or forestal production, (2) nor shall any rezoning request for more intensive uses, nor any subdivision of lands be permitted within a District for other than agricultural and/or forestal uses, unless such lands are first approved for removal from the District, in accordance with § 15.2-4311 Code of Virginia. The state enabling legislation which allows for the creation of Agricultural and Forestal Districts has a stated purpose of providing “a means for a mutual undertaking by landowners and local governments to protect and enhance agricultural and forestal land as a viable segment of the Commonwealth’s economy and an economic and environmental resource of major importance.” The enabling legislation provides insurance that agricultural uses may continue unimpeded by local regulation by stating that, “No government shall exercise any of its powers to enact local laws or ordinances within a district in a manner which would unreasonably restrict or regulate farm structures or farming and forestry practices in contravention of the purposes of this chapter unless such restriction or regulation bear a direct relationship to public health and safety.” The legislation goes on to state that, “Local ordinances, comprehensive plans, land use planning decisions, administrative decision and procedures affecting parcels of land adjacent to any district shall take into account the existence of such district and the purposes of this chapter,” ensuring that local plans and regulations are consistent with the purpose of the Agricultural and Forestal Districts created. In 2006 the Agricultural and Forestal District Advisory Committee began reviewing the 22 A&F Districts and updating each A&F District ordinance. Review of the A&F Districts will be completed in 2008.