

Wastewater Summit, September 9, 2009 Shore Bank Headquarters, Onley, Virginia

Sponsored by Delegate Lynwood Lewis and the Accomack-Northampton Planning District Commission

The purpose of the meeting was to inform as many citizens as possible about the impact of wastewater issues on the Eastern Shore of Virginia.

To achieve this purpose, the Virginia Departments of Health and Environmental Quality and the Virginia Water Environment Association gave status reports on the current issues and impacts of wastewater on the ES. Several organizations that have collection and treatment systems reported on their experience, costs, and challenges. An engineering company provided information on wastewater technologies, costs, options, and benefits, and a private wastewater management company provided information on economies of scale, management of municipal wastewater collection and treatment systems, and how they can be self-sustaining. Several funding agencies including the Virginia Resources Authority, USDA Rural Development, and the Department of Housing and Community Development, also attended to inform the public of grant or loan programs they manage.

Seventy-nine (79) attendees included members of town and county governments and planning commissions, private citizens, engineering firms, and businesses. Several attendees from each funding agency also attended.

The public was invited to give feedback on what they had learned by answering four questions. Those questions and unedited responses follow.

1. What is the most significant thing you've learned today?

- That costs and risks associated with wastewater issues could be potentially crippling to a locality over the longer term; thus we need to be careful and move forward cautiously in small increments, taking baby steps, and putting our money into areas that could result in the creation of meaningful, well-paying jobs.
- ?? Hospital
- Funding opportunities
- What I hoped for was a discussion/thoughts on how a county best organizes to plan/provide infrastructure outside of incorporated towns and how the county and towns can best work to leverage efficiencies and outside assistance from USDA, VRA, etc?
- Grant money and process along with potential economy of scale and pooling of resources

- That out of the reports from those that have wastewater treatment systems, Exmore and Parksley seem to be the ones that need help. The remaining systems appear to be doing well. Also, it appears that there is money available to help Exmore and Parksley.
- Various funding mechanisms availability
- Status of the various municipalities with regard to wastewater systems on the Eastern Shore
- GMB's collection planning steps
- Challenges related to disposal option(s).
- The availability of funding for upgrades.
- The not so subtle inference that density is needed to pay for wastewater systems. It doesn't have to be this way.
- There is no "canned solution."
- There is a significant amount of government funding and resources to assist with water and wastewater projects; however, it is predicated upon the communities investing initially in the development of project (ensuring they have a stake in the game). This is not new but needs to be repeated with greater frequency!
- Learned more about each individual entity's current situation with their sewage systems and needs/plans.
- The lack of communication and cooperation amongst localities makes larger centralized systems very difficult to attain.
- No one mentioned the connection between the potable water aquifer and failing wastewater treatment systems, especially septic systems.
- Moving into the 21st century, there will be a decrease in municipal water/sewer systems and an increase in alternative and decentralized systems, especially in rural areas; multiple permittees managed by a central system – Service Districts.
- Wastewater plan costs vary; little cooperation among counties and towns.
- That Rural Development (USDA) has money to purchase capacity.
- Significant. Networking was wonderful; re-use of water.
- USDA and DHCD loans and grants and engineer consultant input.

2. What issue do you think is of the greatest importance to the Eastern Shore?

- Feasibility and funding coupled with the best environmental option.
- Fostering economic growth and development that results in businesses providing meaningful, well-paying, long-term employment opportunities. Growth simply for the sake of growth, regardless of quality, will only quickly eat up our limited desirable space.
- Affordability
- Implementing water and wastewater service areas.
- Infrastructure must be jointly planned to maximize limited resources and to protect against unintended consequences. The issues are:

- Structure
- Process
- People
- Comprehensive planning for wastewater systems.
- Protection of the groundwater; sludge management
- Political motivation to take steps to provide either local wastewater systems or regional systems, and funding projects, environmental stewardship
- Public sewer to un-served areas
- While providing clean water is important, the preservation of environmental resources through smart handling of waste is most important.
- Political cooperation and support for central “management” with decentralized operations.
- Economical way to implement effluent reuse.
- Getting beyond the tipping point of infrastructure development/construction and full expansion of economic development and residential growth to offset the cost of the infrastructure.
- Greatest importance is tough to decide:
 - Changing paradigm to view water/wastewater as a resource whose maximum value should be extracted rather than waste product to be disposed of.
 - Best protection of fragile ecosystem and limited fresh water supply
- Protection and preservation of the Shore’s natural resources.
- Protection of potable water source by wastewater treatment.
- How do we provide services, water, sewer, solid waste, etc. to all the already permitted building lots in both counties?
- Affordable water and sewer for those who need it and to focus on quality development and good economic development.
- Deciding if a regional or centralized system is really needed. If so, what pathway is the best one to follow in order to develop a system.
- Learning to work together to address issues regionally.
- Need to regionally work on affordable utility solutions.

3. What do you see as the greatest difficulty in resolving the wastewater issues identified today?

- Must develop wastewater options that will be community supported, financially doable and will fit into future operating budgets.
- Recognizing that not one size or solution will fit all areas and determining the best solution for each individual area with its own individual characteristics of which there are many on the ES or VA.
- Teamwork
- Political issues and public fear of change/growth.
- Local control/politics

- Developing good communication between the community leaders that need money to address their systems and the people who have the money.
- Funding; political agreements
- Money
- Funding issues
- Lack of trust among political leaders
- Distances between population densities in multiple jurisdictions
- Crossing the political bounds and agendas to achieve greater collaboration
- Greatest difficulty again, tough to choose:
 - No engineering solutions to political problems (probably don't need attribution on this one)
 - Affordability
 - Creativity – even with all the ideas present, there are many more opportunities that weren't mentioned.
- Economical and demographic differences between localities on the Shore.
- Lack of recognition of the severity of the problem and lack of political will power.
- Eastern Shore has had a difficult time making a decision regarding regional or wastewater treatment. The population needs to decide what they want to do and move ahead – it may be just an issue of leadership.
- Collective planning and decision-making by the community.
- Money – perhaps we can not afford to provide wastewater treatment to all the residential already approved.
- Lack of local experts to make good decisions and explain a reasonable approach that will work. Too much focus on silver bullet and PSA, not on what is practical.
- Politics
- Hard to narrow down to one:
 - Financial constraints
 - Technical capacity of part-time or unpaid community leadership to develop and manage complex utility projects
 - Income disparity on Shore

4. What are your suggestions for addressing these difficulties?

- Communities need to have good feasibility studies done for the various options in order to help narrow the choices to options that have real merit and are doable. This will take some dedication of funds up front. Must be dedication to sticking with the issues and seeing it through to the best choice for the community needs and the environment.
- That to the extent possible, that growth of wastewater facilities and services grow outward from population centers much as towns to the

surrounding areas. Also, we should go out and recruit the type of businesses that we would like to see locate here. For instance, I am sure that we would rather have a small college, rather than 20 hamburger stands locate here.

- PSA
- Accept the need for infrastructure and set timeframes for implementing services.
- Comprehensive body given authority and resources
- I believe meetings like this one could help but need to be able to talk about specific problems and solutions on a one on one.
- Continue to push for decisions by Eastern Shore entities and get feasibility studies started.
- Planning input from all communities with state participation.
- People will need to be educated on these matters before they are willing to pay for them.
- Distributed wastewater systems and maximum use of I.T. and SCADA(?).
- A governmental structure spanning jurisdictions needs to be created to analyze the needs and options.
- Targeted regional/neighborhood meetings with political leaders, residents and funding partners to reach consensus of direction.
- Perhaps some facilitated collaboration brainstorming (some experience with some carrot and stick “facilitated collaboration” as well with superseding state/federal entities). Need to better articulate the eventual “cost” of doing nothing to better compare to cost of doing something.
- Continued communication and cooperation amongst localities.
- Communicate, educate, cooperate
- Acknowledge that perhaps we can NOT support a density of population that would create the massive wastewater volume that will destroy the soil and surface and groundwater.
- Get Accomack and Onancock together and work at how to jointly provide service to Central Accomack. Get something going and build on it over time.
- Make a decision. Develop a plan on how to carry out that decision. Provide the leadership to sell the plan.
- Access to persons who can facilitate complex federal and state applications and regulatory compliance – facilitator for regional capacity building.

WASTEWATER SUMMIT AGENDA

- 10:00 – 10:15 Registration (name tags)
10:15 – 10:30 Lynwood Lewis, Welcome and Purpose of Meeting

The Current Wastewater Situation

- 10:30 – 10:45 James Davis, Virginia Department of Health
10:45 – 11:00 Robert Aaron, Virginia DEQ
11:00 – 12:00 Reports from those that have wastewater treatment system
Cape Charles – Bob Panek
Exmore – Artie Miles
Riverside Shore Memorial Hospital – Joe Zager
NASA – Caroline Massey
Onancock – Sandy Manter
Parksley – Rick Chase
- 12:00 – 12:15 Jim Christian, Virginia Water Environment Association
12:15 – 12:30 Q&A
- 12:30 – 1:00 Lunch (provided)

Technology and Business

- 1:00 – 1:40 Chris Derbyshire, GMB, Wastewater collection and treatment systems – choices, options, costs
1:40 – 2:15 George Phillips, Artesian Water Company, Delaware

Funding Agencies

- 2:15 – 2:40 Carrie, Schmidt, USDA Rural Development, Richmond
2:40 – 3:00 Jean Bass, Virginia Resources Authority
3:00 – 3:20 Keith Sherrill, Virginia Department of Housing and Community Development
- 3:20 – 3:30 Break
- 3:30 – 4:00 Q&A and comments from attendees
4:00 – 4:15 Collection of answers to four questions.
4:15 – 4:30 Wrap-up