



Northumberland County RAFT Alumni Follow-Up Meeting Summary

Tuesday, May 21st 2024

Overview

On May 21, 2024, Wetlands Watch staff met with key Northumberland County officials, including Drew Bates, Stewart McKenzie, and Phillip Marston, for a RAFT (Resilience Adaptation Feasibility Tool) Alumni meeting. Discussion topics centered on the county's RAFT Resilience Action Checklist, comprehensive planning processes, resilience projects, and funding opportunities to support Northumberland's resilience goals.

Phillip, serving in multiple roles, has dedicated years to Northumberland, which faces distinct resilience challenges. Drew, with his recent focus on economic development, emphasized collaboration with county officials to promote economic and community resilience. In Northumberland County, while resilience is recognized, it remains a challenging topic to build consensus on, a critical component to moving forward action to pursue risk adaptation measures.

General Feedback on the RAFT Process

Stewart expressed initial concerns regarding the RAFT process, noting discomfort in presenting resilience analysis to the Board of Supervisors due to their unfamiliarity with resilience planning concepts. Some Board and Planning Commission members remain unconvinced about increased risk and necessary adaptation, contributing to Northumberland's slower progress in resilience planning compared to other counties. To address this, Drew suggested introducing RAFT concepts to the Economic Development Committee (EDC) and Planning Commission before discussing with the Board. Both Stewart and Drew agree that preliminary buy-in from key committees is crucial to drive further resilience initiatives.

Resilient Action Checklist Item Updates

1. Comprehensive Planning Integration

The County has yet to incorporate resilience into its comprehensive planning processes fully. Stewart highlighted that work on resilience stalled with the pandemic and ongoing efforts around solar ordinance development. Currently, staff are drafting Chapters 1 and 2 of the comprehensive plan. Stewart emphasized the need for support in aligning the Hazard Mitigation Plan with the comprehensive plan, particularly in addressing flooding hotspots in areas like Bluff Point Way and Summer Highlands.

2. Economic Resilience

Drew discussed the Economic Development Committee's revitalization, with plans underway for



This project, Task 91.03, was funded by the Virginia Coastal Program at the Department of Environmental Quality through FY23 Grant # NA23NOS4190255 of the U.S. Department of Commerce, National Oceanic and Atmospheric Administration, under the Coastal Zone Management Act of 1972, as amended.



a 5-6 year strategy. He emphasized that resilience would strengthen Northumberland's economic foundation, particularly as the area increasingly serves as a retirement destination. Stewart added that support for businesses is growing, especially those focused on tourism and water access, but there is room for improvement in addressing resilience for local industries impacted by flooding and coastal erosion.

3. Emergency Preparedness for Vulnerable Populations

While Northumberland County has a history of storm-related impacts, including tornados and coastal erosion, no formal alert or notification communication strategy has been established that is targeted to vulnerable populations, including ESL residents. Staff agreed that communication and emergency preparedness could benefit from coordinated efforts, leveraging the county's connections with the Northern Neck Planning District Commission (NNPDC) for strategy and outreach to vulnerable groups. Additionally, Stewart mentioned the need for improved radar infrastructure in the region to reduce emergency response times for tornados and other extreme weather events.

Current and Planned Resilience Projects

The County has faced barriers in implementing specific resilience projects from the RAFT Checklist. Phillip shared that while community flooding hotspots are documented, capacity constraints have delayed tangible projects. Current efforts have focused on small-scale public access improvements, such as kayak launches supported through tourism funding. Stewart noted ongoing challenges in balancing resources between GIS needs, floodplain management, and administrative duties, which limits capacity for resilience project planning.

Notable Flooding Hotspots and Critical Infrastructure

Identified flood-prone areas include Lewis Avenue, Bluff Point Way, and Louisa Road, with frequent closures during extreme tides and storm events. Stewart highlighted that flood-related access issues remain a significant concern, impacting evacuation routes and isolating certain areas during severe weather.

Funding and Opportunities

Wetlands Watch staff presented several potential funding avenues, including the VA Department of Conservation and Recreation's Community Flood Preparedness Fund (CFPF), FEMA grants, and the Coastal Resilience and Trees Fund (CRTF). Staff acknowledged the CFPF as a valuable resource that is more accessible given current capacity for application requirements and reporting than the complex requirements associated with federal funding which is less feasible for Northumberland's staff. To strengthen resilience initiatives, Drew advocated for private and non-governmental funding sources, underscoring the potential for grants tailored to local needs without restrictive eligibility criteria. Wetlands Watch staff offered to explore additional partnerships, including potential collaborations with the NNPDC for regional resilience strategies and shared resources for GIS and floodplain management.



This project, Task 91.03, was funded by the Virginia Coastal Program at the Department of Environmental Quality through FY23 Grant # NA23NOS4190255 of the U.S. Department of Commerce, National Oceanic and Atmospheric Administration, under the Coastal Zone Management Act of 1972, as amended.





Lancaster County RAFT Alumni Follow-Up Meeting Summary

Friday, June 7th 2024

Overview

On June 7, 2024, Wetlands Watch staff met with Lancaster County representatives, including Economic Development Director and Assistant County Administrator John Bateman and Planning Director Olivia Hall, to review the county's progress on the RAFT (Resilience Adaptation Feasibility Tool) Resilience Action Checklist. The meeting included discussions on resilience planning, public outreach, funding, and strategies to incorporate resilience more deeply within the county's planning framework. Given Lancaster's rural context, with a population of predominantly elderly and retired residents, challenges persist in rallying community-wide resilience efforts, but promising projects are underway.

General Feedback on the RAFT Process

Lancaster County staff reflected on the importance of RAFT's Resilience Checklist in framing resilience as a component across various county committees and initiatives. While there has been progress in integrating resilience into economic development and public access, capacity constraints and community resistance to extensive regulatory changes pose challenges. Olivia noted that while resilience is increasingly prioritized, the checklist has highlighted gaps in current strategies that would benefit from expanded funding and technical assistance.

Resilient Action Checklist Item Updates

1. Establish Community-Resilience Planning Committee

Lancaster has made strides in involving stakeholders across different community sectors, especially in its Economic Strategy Lancaster 2035 initiative. This framework includes resilience considerations in public access and development. However, there is a gap in public engagement around septic and well vulnerability, particularly in low-income communities. The county has engaged with the EPA's Water TA program to address community wastewater needs, focusing on septic issues affecting a predominantly Black neighborhood. Staff expressed interest in enhancing data on septic systems in partnership with local agencies and nonprofits.

2. Develop Resilience Communication Strategy and Tools

Olivia outlined plans to improve resilience communication through targeted public outreach. The county intends to utilize CRS (Community Rating System) credit-related activities to enhance resilience messaging. Interns are working on floodplain materials to support public education, and resources such as RPA buffer brochures for real estate agents are under development. Additionally, a new radio system is being explored to provide a communication network during emergencies, particularly for the elderly population.



This project, Task 91.03, was funded by the Virginia Coastal Program at the Department of Environmental Quality through FY23 Grant # NA23NOS4190255 of the U.S. Department of Commerce, National Oceanic and Atmospheric Administration, under the Coastal Zone Management Act of 1972, as amended.



3. Restore Public Beaches and Ensure Community Access

Lancaster County has made notable progress in this area, with efforts underway to restore Windmill Point Beach. Restoration includes breakwater installation and improved access points, aimed at mitigating shoreline erosion and improving public access. The project has seen significant traction with one official submission on the CRMP Data Portal to date, indicating more room for growth in leveraging digital tools for planning. The county is also exploring grants from the National Fish and Wildlife Federation and the VA Department of Conservation and Recreation's Stormwater Local Assistance Fund to continue restoration work.

4. Conduct Tree Canopy Assessment and Increase Canopy Coverage

Despite initial efforts to increase the county's tree canopy, challenges persist due to competing needs to protect rural property rights and conserve vital natural and cultural resources while navigating competing land-use interests, particularly in relation to solar farm siting. With ongoing partnerships with Friends of the Rappahannock and the Northern Neck Soil and Water Conservation District, Lancaster has completed tree planting projects in key areas like Morattico, Kilmarnock, and Belle Isle State Park, reinforcing the county's commitment to ecological resilience.

5. Review Comprehensive Plan for Resilience Opportunities

The county has recently updated its comprehensive plan, with ongoing efforts to compile resilience-focused elements. Staff indicated interest in conducting a vulnerability analysis to better serve populations at risk during extreme events, such as the elderly and those requiring electricity-dependent medical equipment. This analysis is expected to inform further updates to align with the Hazard Mitigation Plan, focusing on minimizing transportation disconnects and enhancing access during emergencies.

Current and Planned Resilience Projects

Lancaster County has successfully incorporated resilience into multiple community initiatives outside the RAFT Checklist. Notable projects include the development of demonstration sites for vegetative plantings on public shoreline properties, intended to serve as educational models for residents. Although the county attempted to secure CFPF (Community Flood Preparedness Fund) support for a marina stabilization project, this application was ultimately declined. John and Olivia expressed interest in identifying alternative funding sources for other resilience projects, particularly those focused on public and private shoreline enhancements.

Other Ongoing Projects and Community Needs

Additional projects suggested by community members include a hot meal program called "Helping Neighbors" for vulnerable residents, expansion of bike and walking trails to enhance tourism and resilience, and incentives for stormwater management improvements on private properties. These ideas reflect community aspirations to balance resilience with public amenities that support both local economic growth and environmental stewardship.

Funding and Opportunities

Wetlands Watch staff presented several grant opportunities, including the Community Flood Preparedness Fund and the Coastal Resilience and Trees Fund (CRTF), which Lancaster could



This project, Task 91.03, was funded by the Virginia Coastal Program at the Department of Environmental Quality through FY23 Grant # NA23NOS4190255 of the U.S. Department of Commerce, National Oceanic and Atmospheric Administration, under the Coastal Zone Management Act of 1972, as amended.



leverage for future resilience projects. Staff acknowledged the underutilization of Department of Forestry resources and proposed that more coordinated efforts with SWCD (Soil and Water Conservation District) could aid in deploying funds for tree planting and shoreline conservation. In addition to these grant opportunities, Wetlands Watch discussed potential support through federal funding avenues provided by IRA and BRIC, with particular emphasis on FEMA grants for both pre- and post-disaster resilience measures. However, Olivia noted capacity constraints in navigating these funding processes and highlighted a need for further support in grant writing and technical guidance. The county's resilience efforts will continue to build upon existing collaborations with agencies such as Friends of the Rappahannock, Virginia Department of Forestry, and Northern Neck PDC, strengthening Lancaster's resilience framework while addressing capacity challenges and community engagement needs.

Wetlands Watch Outreach for VA DCR's Coastal Resilience Master Plan Phase II

Thursday, September 12, 2024 (Tappahannock)

Wednesday, September 18, 2024 (South Richmond)

Monday, September 23, 2024 (Rappahannock/Northern Neck)

Wednesday, September 25, 2024 (Chesapeake)

Wetlands Watch originally planned to conduct five RAFT alumni interviews, but due to low capacity and turnover, the remaining three localities were not able to meet. In place of this planned engagement with the RAFT alumni, Wetlands Watch provided resources via email to all Northern Neck RAFT alumni communities about the Community Flood Preparedness Fund (CFPF), the important resources completed under the Virginia Coastal Resilience Master Plan (VCRMP) development process (funding database; online map tool), and the CZM-funded



This project, Task 91.03, was funded by the Virginia Coastal Program at the Department of Environmental Quality through FY23 Grant # NA23NOS4190255 of the U.S. Department of Commerce, National Oceanic and Atmospheric Administration, under the Coastal Zone Management Act of 1972, as amended.





resilience project database hosted on the Coastal Resilience Master Plan web-portal. Additionally, Wetlands Watch engaged with the Department of Conservation and Recreation (DCR) Public Outreach Meetings for the VCRMP Phase II in Tappahannock, Warsaw, Richmond and Chesapeake to provide attendees, localities, and partners with resources on the CFPF, coastal resilience, and flood insurance and CRS/NFIP technical assistance. Wetlands Watch staff engaged 63 members of the public during these meetings.

In support of the Virginia Department of Conservation and Recreation's (DCR) Coastal Resilience Master Plan Phase II, Wetlands Watch participated in four community outreach events focused on increasing public awareness and engagement in coastal flood resilience efforts. These events gathered a diverse group, including local government officials, regional planning commissions, non-profits, Soil and Water Conservation Districts (SWCDs), property and business owners, and residents, to discuss local flood risk and explore resilience initiatives.

The events featured a presentation by Matt Dalon, showcasing newly developed flood maps that incorporate pluvial flood risk, rainfall data, and enhanced modeling techniques to accurately represent flood exposure across Virginia's coastal zone. These maps provide an essential tool for localities, enabling them to adopt community-specific flood zones that reflect actual risk levels and can be regulated similarly to FEMA-designated flood zones. Such resources empower local governments to implement risk mitigation measures and establish higher regulatory standards aimed at reducing property damage from flooding.

At each event, Wetlands Watch provided a range of resources on funding opportunities, training for the Community Rating System (CRS), and guidance on the National Flood Insurance Program (NFIP). Wetlands Watch staff engaged directly with over 60 attendees, answering questions on flood insurance policies and resilience strategies, while promoting educational newsletters like the Commonwealth Resilience Brief and Catch the King. In collaboration with Catch the King staff at two of the events, Wetlands Watch helped recruit volunteers and distributed materials on king tides, emphasizing the importance of community participation in flood monitoring and water quality protection.

These outreach efforts exemplify a collaborative approach to resilience, offering communities essential tools and knowledge to better manage and reduce flood risk in Virginia's coastal areas.



This project, Task 91.03, was funded by the Virginia Coastal Program at the Department of Environmental Quality through FY23 Grant # NA23NOS4190255 of the U.S. Department of Commerce, National Oceanic and Atmospheric Administration, under the Coastal Zone Management Act of 1972, as amended.

