



Wachapreague Town Council: 2014-2015 Year in Review

This document is the 3rd in a series of annual recaps of the Town's achievements. It has been Council's intent for this yearend review to be distributed every year with your town tax statement. It is Council's hope that this will assist in keeping our town residents informed as to the activities of your Council, our town's residents and our town business owners in our mutual endeavor to maintain Wachapreague as an economically viable incorporated township as well as a place where we can all appreciate the benefits of living in "Our little city by the sea".

- Town Financials: Fiscal Years Begin July 1st and end June 30th.
 1. The financial condition of our incorporated town remains strong. As of the end of Fiscal Year 2015, current assets amounting to \$127,000 were on the Town's balance sheet and \$101,000 for the Port of Wachapreague. Combined net income for the Town and Marina for fiscal year 2015 (ended June 30th) was a positive \$13,000. Town and marina expenses remained roughly within our budgeted projections with the exception of an unbudgeted property purchase of the town's dredge spoil site.
 2. Cash assets for the town at the end of FY 2015 were down \$31,000 due to purchase of 22 acres that included the town permitted dredge spoil site. This property became available on the market and the purchase became necessary to ensure continued ability for the town waterfront marinas to dredge and maintain sufficient water depths for our commercial and recreational boating users. This property purchase increased the Town's real property asset value by \$50,000.
 3. For fiscal year 2016 (commenced July 1st) Accomack County tax assessments remained at the same level as FY 2015, thus town property valuations/assessments remain the same for FY 2016. Council decided to maintain the current real estate tax rate of \$.13/\$100 (reduced from \$.16/\$100 in FY 2013). The 2015 real estate tax revenues were approximately \$12,800 or 24% less than the average of the annual revenues from 2011, 2012 & 2013. This result was due to Council reducing the town real estate tax rate in FY 2014 and continued to maintain the current tax rate of \$.13/\$100 in FY 2015 in the face of county & town real estate tax assessments declining by approximately 6.5%.
 4. Each member of the Town Council firmly believes that public service is a civic responsibility. Council continues to manage town affairs by receiving no compensation for Town Council and Mayor. This civic responsibility continues to save the town annual administrative costs to our taxpayers in the amount of \$5,600 which was charged to town residents by previous Councils. Each town resident should be aware that some Council members devote 20-30 hours a month to town business. Since compensation was discontinued in FY 2012, at the end of FY 2016, over this 4 year period, no Council compensation will have reduced town administrative costs to our town residents by over \$22,000.
 5. For FY 2015 the meal tax brought in revenues of approximately \$28,000. In compliance with the town ordinance concerning use of meal tax revenues, 25% (\$7,000) was dedicated for tourism related activities and 75% (\$21,000) went into general revenues to cover town administrative costs. The combination of prudently managing town expenditures coupled with the meal tax revenues are the primary reasons Council has been able to continue to reduce and maintain the low level of real estate property taxes for our residents.
 6. Despite significant efforts to collect delinquent vehicle & golf cart tag and real estate taxes, we still have delinquent balances. At the end of FY 2013, delinquencies amounted to \$6,000. The end of FY 2014 had delinquent fees and taxes amounting to \$1,850 with about \$2,660 remaining delinquent at the end of FY 2015, however, at the end of this September, this amount was further reduced to \$955. Continued tax and fee delinquencies remain a concern to Council.
- Our Business & Tourism Advisory Board (B&TAB) continues to be very proactive in increasing visitor & tourism revenues for our businesses and the town. The B&TAB consists of volunteer town residents and business owners who attempt to meet monthly and provide guidance to Council on actions to improve the marketability of our town. The B&TAB also provides recommendations on projects requiring expenditure of the budgeted monies for tourism which are made available by a portion of transient & meal taxes. Tourism revenues for Accomack County in 2010 were \$140 million and resulted in 1,800 tourism related jobs. In 2014, tourism revenues for Accomack County were \$181 million resulting in 2,040 tourism related jobs. This is an increase of \$41 million or +29% and an increase of 240 jobs or +13% in 4 years. The responsibility of the Wachapreague B&TAB is to ensure Wachapreague obtains its share of this increasing Eastern Shore tourism revenue stream in order to enhance the marketing exposure of our town in our attempt to increase our town's visitor traffic and thus assist all of our town businesses in increasing their revenues. **Increases in our town's business revenues will result in increased tax revenues to the town (transient tax, meal tax and sales tax) providing increasing funds to continue to improve the town and avoid increases in our resident's real estate property taxes.**
- Some of the B&TAB activities have been:
 - Winning a \$10,000 grant award from the Virginia Tourism Corporation Marketing Leverage Program
 - Re-design and development of a new town website which will link to our town's businesses
 - Participation in the development of Virginia's Eastern Shore Artisan's Trail which just had its kickoff event. Come to Town Hall and pick up an Artisan Trail map and see how Wachapreague is prominently featured.
- The volunteer efforts of our town residents continue to provide community activities; a 4th of July celebration/parade at the Seaside Park; Crab Cake & Apple Pie Cook Off; and a Christmas festival with town carolers. Wachapreague volunteers also worked on a town St. Patrick's Day float for Onancock's St. Patrick's Day parade which again won "Best in Parade" honors for a second year.

- Town Council continues to provide funding to improve & maintain Seaside Park, an Artisan Trail site. With the extraordinary volunteer efforts of some of our town residents, Seaside Park continues to improve from the efforts of those town volunteers. Town Council will continue to provide funding, and with the assistance of our town residents, will continue to enhance and maintain Seaside Park as a social focal point for our community.
- Council remains very concerned regarding the substantial continued deterioration/erosion of Cedar Island which provides significant coastal flooding/erosion protection to the salt marsh and our town mainland properties from Nor'easters and hurricanes. Activities continue with the Army Corps of Engineers on completion of the Federal Interest Determination (FID) project as well as participation with the Nature Conservancy in working closely with a number of partners to implement coastal resiliency projects, including the Accomack-Northampton Planning District Commission and the University of Virginia and coastal geologists at the University of North Carolina. Other concerns continue to be the shoaling of the waterway from day marker 122 out to the inlet. This is a non-federally designated waterway thus not within the Corps of Engineer jurisdiction to maintain the navigable depth. Maintenance of the aids to navigation in this stretch of waterway as well as Bradford's Bay, by the USCG is also a cause of continuing concern and efforts continue to maintain these navigational aids as USCG continues with the removal of the 135 aids to navigation over the 100 miles of the North-South Virginia Inside Passage.
- A representative of Council was chosen as a member on the Ad Hoc Regional Navigable Waterways Committee, formed to determine the feasibility of implementing an Eastern Shore Regional Navigable Waterways Committee to coordinate and develop waterway projects in a combined unified bi-county approach. The objective of this regional approach would be to enhance the opportunity of the Eastern Shore to work closely with the Army Corps of Engineers, the US Coast Guard and other federal & state agencies on waterway issues as it may relate to Aids to Navigation, dredging, working waterfronts, etc.
- Concern was raised regarding the ownership and use of Dawson's Shoals. Nature Conservancy is addressing the ownership concern with the State and it is our understanding that ownership will revert back to the State, with the shoals being managed by VMRC. Users of Dawson Shoals will need to be cognizant of potential use restrictions that may be imposed by VMRC.
- Using Virginia Port Authority grant funds, the town marina's shore power, lighting, electrical wiring and water piping were significantly overhauled, with additional work on the Marina office including a new roof.
- Wachapreague's Planning Commission, consisting of volunteer town residents, initiated a significant project in updating the town's Comprehensive Strategic Plan. The last approved plan is dated 1983, 32 years ago. The Comprehensive Plan is required by State law to be reviewed and if appropriate, revised every 5 years. The Planning Commission completed their hard work on a draft plan and submitted it to Council for review. Council's objective is to make this draft plan available to all town residents for their opportunity to provide comment in the November/December 2015 time frame, a Public Hearing on the plan will be scheduled. Council's goal is to finalize the plan in the January/February 2016 period. Whereas, other towns have hired consultants or the Accomack-Northampton Planning District Commission to develop their plans, Wachapreague has completed this professional quality plan with only town resources at no additional cost to our residents.
- After a decade or more of attempting to reconcile addresses in Wachapreague with Accomack County's 911 maps, Council is very close to completing this undertaking. Council passed a 911 address ordinance, agreement was reached with county to change the 911 map to reflect Wachapreague addresses versus addresses changing to reflect the map. Council members have visited residences to verify and get resident agreements on addresses to ensure correct addresses will be provided to the county 911 map. Completion of this project will establish and maintain a formal, legally based town system of assigning addresses to facilitate the identification of buildings and properties in order to protect the public health and safety by enabling more rapid response times for emergency services.
- Some additional projects that have been addressed this year by Council:
 - Completion of a new Flood Plain Management Ordinance to comply with new FEMA requirements
 - The Community Rating System (CRS) of the town was upgraded resulting in an increase in our Flood Insurance premium deductions for town residences and businesses, lowering flood insurance payments that are projected to continue rising.
 - Considerable effort was made by Council working with VDOT to achieve a significant amount of sidewalk and curb repairs on Main Street which was the first time in many decades this work had been accomplished.
 - Participation in the two year Accomack-Northampton Planning District Commission update of the Eastern Shore Hazard Mitigation Plan continues. Participation will increase our CRS numerical level achieving additional flood insurance deductions.
 - An internal Council review of the town's garbage collection was completed. Included in this evaluation were costs to purchase a reconditioned replacement garbage truck. This study showed that to change from a town provided garbage service to a contractor service provider would require an increase of 51% in real estate taxes; a cost increase to town residents of \$50,000-\$65,000 each year. Thus, Council will continue with a town provided garbage collection service and purchase of a reconditioned garbage truck when necessary.
 - The Eastern Shore Broadband Authority (BA) is running the broadband fiber optic cable into town from Rt. 13. This is being accomplished at no cost to the Town, a projected cost of approximately \$100,000 to the ES BA. Council is working with various town stakeholders and telecommunications providers to provide the "last mile" of broadband service to the various users in town. The BA projects completion of their cable work by January 1st. The "last mile" service providers will solicit for customers for the use of this new broadband service. Council is also hopeful that a cell phone service provider may also take advantage of this opportunity with the fiber optic availability to eventually provide wireless cell phone service to the town.

These are just some of the activities of your Town Council, residents and our business owners that we believed warranted documenting in this 3rd yearend recap. Mayor Fred Janci; Vice Mayor Bonnie Munn; Council members, John Joeckel, Aileen Joeckel, Susie Atkinson; Stuart Bell & Sandie Wood.