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Providing local politically supported water access opportunities to the waterways of Virginia's Middle Peninsula

Objectives:

Discuss how a special purpose entity (Middle Peninsula Chesapeake Bay Public Access Authority) continues to elevate the provision of public access to a priority status with government administrators and local elected officials.

Description:

In 2003, the Virginia General Assembly approved House Bill 619 creating the institutional framework for Middle Peninsula local governments to address public access on a regional basis and enabling the creation of the Middle Peninsula Chesapeake Bay Public Access Authority. This session will discuss the utility of a single purpose government entity, who's only function is to provide focused attention to public access issues

Abstract:

The Middle Peninsula Chesapeake Bay Public Access Authority gives Middle Peninsula local governments the ability to address public access issues utilizing a single purpose entity.

Enabled by the Virginia General Assembly, the Authority, comprised of elected officials and local government administrators, was established to identify, acquire and manage public water access opportunities in the region that can be used by the general public for passive and active activities. The structure of the Authority and its partnerships with the public, non-governmental organizations, and private citizens enables it to respond quickly when opportunities are present.

Since its inception in 2003, the Authority has leveraged over 2.5 million dollars for access acquisitions and improvements. The Authority has incorporated such innovative solutions as the utilization of local inmates for construction and maintenance of public access projects; leveraging the local disability services board to enhance disabled accessible features in Authority-managed areas; production of educational brochures on the Authority and its sites; rebuilding of public infrastructure after catastrophic hurricane events; and coordinating with other local entities to maximize conservation efforts in sensitive areas.

The Public Access Authority Board of Directors, as well as rural Middle Peninsula, localities, recognize that shorelines are high priority natural areas. And the Middle Peninsula region becomes more densely populated, it is critical that localities set aside access sites for all types of recreational activities, such as fishing, birding, hunting, boating, picnicking, and sight seeing. These recreational activities associated with Chesapeake Bay rivers, bays, tidal creeks, and marshes are important to the economy and to the citizens of the Commonwealth. Current estimates from three Middle Peninsula localities show \$44,000,000 in direct, indirect, and induced impacts generated by recreational fishing, \$12,000,000 generated in seafood landings and \$120,000,000 in tourist traveler spending, totaling a conservative \$176,000,000 in annual economic impacts across the Middle Peninsula region. The economic engine of the region is tied to adequate water access.

The majority of public water access sites within the Middle Peninsula are acquired, developed, and managed by – or with assistance from – the Virginia Department of Game and Inland Fisheries. However, Middle Peninsula local governments do manage a limited number of county docking facilities and public access sites, and some sites are privately owned with controlled access.

Sustainability and expansion of access sites across the region is critical due to the scarcity of good sites, the high level of development around the waterfront, and the time required to develop new access sites.

The Public Access Authority is working under the concept to “preserve and manage access to the water.” The Authority will accomplish this by acquiring and/or managing fee simple or public access rights on small, medium and large parcels of land , thus creating or enhancing access points to rivers, bays, tidal creeks, marshes as well as lakes and ponds. Lands for access could support a facility for trailered boats and/or small craft (canoes, kayaks) and provide bank fishing (shoreline angling and wading), clamming, birding, or other opportunities. Access is primarily intended for general public use and for commercial purposes, provided that such commercial use does not exclude other uses by the general public.

Public Access Policy Management Tools

Access Standards

Public access standards vary greatly across the coastal U.S. In the development of standards, the following questions should be discussed before the development of comprehensive access standards.

1. Who are we providing access for: residents, commercial applications, or transients?
2. Should different types of access be provided for different users groups?
3. Should the user groups intermingle at all access sites?
4. What are the types of access that should be provided?

a. Geographical Based

- i. Regional usage sites
 - ii. Local usage sites
 - iii. Community usage sites
- b. Use Based**
 - i. Boating with trailer
 - ii. Paddling-car top limited parking
 - iii. Paddling-car top no parking
 - iv. Walking and birding limited parking
 - v. Walking and birding no parking
- c. Natural Feature Based**
 - i. All tide facilities
 - ii. Part tide facilities
 - iii. Foot access
 - iv. No tide
- d. Density and Infrastructure Based**
 - i. Access site every "X" miles of road
 - ii. Access site every "X" miles of shoreline
 - iii. Access site based on diversity of opportunities

Access Standards Across Coastal U. S.

Demand criteria for providing public access can be based on a number of factors. The following standards have been used to assist other coastal communities with policy development.

1. One access site for every 16 miles of shoreline
2. One access site for every 1.3 miles of coastline
3. All tide areas designated for trailerable and hand carried boats
4. Part tide area designated for use, dependent on tide range
5. Foot access for fishing, clamming, nature study
6. View shed usage for peace of mind
7. Access sites based on relation to population centers
8. Access sites based on the relations to existing sites
9. Local access sites, portals 10ft. in width serving foot traffic
10. Neighborhood access sites with 5-25 parking spaces within an access site 40-50 feet wide
11. Regional access site with 25-80 parking spaces with ½ acre site
12. Multi regional 80-200 cars multi acre site
13. Local access with one access portal per block
14. Regional access with one site per four miles of either road or shoreline
15. Neighborhood with one access site per 50 dwelling units

Institutional Considerations

Many Coastal communities have instituted a management structure or management services to assist with the administrative activities associated with the provision of access. These include:

1. Fee based access system
2. Fee for non regional users
3. Pass system for use of sites
4. Signage
5. Parking requirements
6. Non-regional residents charged a parking fee
7. Provision for public services

Policy Action Needed

As any entity strives to address and utilize Public Access Policy Management Tools, consensus needs to be developed to determine the appropriate access standards for use in the development of a Comprehensive Access Plan.

Conclusion

Given the unique utility of the Authority, the development of a Comprehensive Access Plan continues to evolve. The Authority is often pulled in different directions to address “the access opportunity of the day”. The ability to be think strategically, be nimble, yet stay focused is of great benefit to participating jurisdictions and, as a result, keeps the provision of public access at a high priority.

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Biography:

Background: Born and raised in Gloucester County, Virginia. Spent seven years working for the Virginia Institute of Marine Science on the Research Vessels *Langley* and *Bay Eagle*. Presently serve as the Director of Regional Planning for the Middle Peninsula Planning District Commission

Professional Work Interest- Coastal Development Management

Recent Projects:

2006

- Established a program to utilize inmates at the regional security center for public access improvement projects, such as: rebuilding a pedestrian walking bridge, installation of hunting stands, trail clearing and parking lot improvements.
- Coordinated the gifting process of a 14 acre \$265,000 parcel to the Middle Peninsula Chesapeake Bay Public Access Authority for future public use.
- Oversaw a study of the regulatory barriers to public access via VDOT roads ends

2005

- Coordinated the participation of the Middle Peninsula Chesapeake Bay Public Access Authority in a \$1,000,000 Federal Earmark for land acquisition and preservation within the Dragon Run Watershed.
- Completed a regional inventory of Engineered OSDS system within the Middle Peninsula

Education

Master's in City and Regional Planning, University of Memphis

Bachelors in Business Administration-Real Estate, Christopher Newport College

Professional Activities and Appointments

- 2005- open Virginia Coastal Zone Management Program, Coastal Policy Team
- 2003- open Chesapeake Bay Restoration Fund Advisory Committee
- 2003-2004 President of the Mid Atlantic Marine Education Association

Awards-2003 Virginia Environmental Stewardship Award for outstanding contributions to the protection and enhancement of Virginia's Natural resources.