

What is Important to YOU? ENVIRONMENT!



What are the hot topics and what do we do with them?

For the past six months, in preparation for the Comprehensive Plan update, the Community Participation Team has been collecting your thoughts and ideas on the issues facing James City County. We have read all the input received, which is available for you to examine at www.jccplans.org, and have developed a list of hot topics that are on your minds. Hot topics were strongly related and many comments crossed categories, but generally included the impacts of growth, community character/quality of life, transportation, economic climate, environment, housing, population needs, and water. To help everyone have a better understanding of these hot topics, what they include, and the next steps of the process, we are going to highlight a new topic each week. **Environment will be discussed at the Community Conversation on Tuesday, August 19 from 6-9 p.m. at Jamestown High School, 3751 John Tyler Highway.**

What do we mean by “environment”?

The final hot topic highlighted in this series of essays is the environment. Respecting and preserving the environment has been a rising hot topic in both the County and the world as a whole. The most typical comments focused on keeping trees and avoiding clear-cutting, preserving meaningful and connected areas of open space, and conserving the wealth of natural resources within the County. Coupled with these were concerns about the need to mitigate increasing amounts of flooding within new and existing neighborhoods. Input into the Comprehensive Plan also highlighted a growing desire to incorporate green/environmentally-friendly building practices into new construction projects and redevelopment of existing buildings and housing units. There has also been a strong interest in exploring renewable energy sources, such as wind and solar power, and stepping up recycling efforts. Finally, comments showed an interest in retaining high water quality of rivers and streams adjacent to and within the County and in taking action to improve those streams that are already damaged. The underlying theme in all these comments seems to be sustainability, or protection of the environment and resources for generations to come to enjoy.

How does the environment affect my daily routine?

The County's natural environment is one of its most valuable and vulnerable assets and is perhaps one of the major reasons why you moved to the County in the first place or choose to stay here. Depending on layout and design features, development projects can either complement and respect this asset, or spoil it. Destruction of trees and open space impacts scenic vistas in the area and alters or destroys wildlife habitats. Insensitive development can also impact the quality of the air you breathe, the water you fish in and drink, and the amount of food that can be produced in local farms. On the other hand, projects that account for these impacts and other important natural features up front in their design can effectively position buildings in clusters so that large tracts of connected open space are preserved. In these scenarios, wildlife habitats can be kept relatively intact and agriculturally viable areas can be preserved.



Both positive and negative actions taken towards our natural resources within the County have cumulative impacts on a regional and global level also. For example, streams that have their source in our backyards continue into adjacent cities and counties, feed larger river systems, and flow into the ocean. So does the sediment and pollution that ends up in some of these streams. Air quality is another example of how actions, whether positive or negative, taken in one area can have large scale impacts. The health of our ecosystems affects our health and our community's overall quality of life, both now and in the future.

How did we get here and how would the Comprehensive Plan address the issue?

A major component of this plan update is the theme of sustainability. According to the 1987 Brundtland Commission report, sustainable development is development that "meets the needs of the present without compromising the ability of future generations to meet their own needs." Intertwined with this is a community's ability to make development choices which respect the relationship between its economic, social, and ecological pieces. The ecological component of this definition, which dictates that "humans are part of nature, nature has limits, and communities are responsible for protecting and building natural assets," particularly pertains to this environmental hot topic (*Mountain Association for Community Economic Development (MACED): Hart Environmental Data*). Communities and individuals are called on to be stewards of the environment and take an active role in its preservation.

The County totals approximately 144 square miles and contains about 152 miles of shoreline along the James River, York River, and Chickahominy River. Past Comprehensive Plans have had a strong



focus on protection of these natural resources and habitats. State Chesapeake Bay Preservation Act requirements were incorporated into the 2003 plan, and will be carried through in the 2008 update as well. Many of these regulations directly relate to citizen concerns of tree preservation, disturbance of steep slopes, water quality impacts, stormwater runoff, and more. Additionally, previous Comprehensive Plans have addressed the need for land preservation tools and government funding to protect open space and rural areas. Have these programs been effective and should they be continued?

LEED (Leadership in Energy and Environmental Design) principles and Earthcraft construction will also be an area looked at closely in this update. Both programs encourage builders to use "green building" techniques to develop energy and water efficient buildings and landscapes that also serve to protect the environment they are built in. We want to hear whether you think policies related to these certifications for both public and private developments is something that should be examined by the County.

Finally, at the end of 2007, James City County continued to lead the way in environmental protection with two other counties in Virginia by signing the Cool Counties Resolution. This means that local leaders have committed to implementing local strategies to reduce climate change and maintain air quality by using smart energy, building, and growth solutions. The 2008 Comprehensive Plan update will examine what local citizens can do to decrease our "carbon footprint." Generally speaking the County's carbon footprint measures the "impact our activities have on the environment, and in particular climate change. It relates to the amount of greenhouse gases produced in our day-to-day lives through burning fossil fuels for electricity, heating, transportation, etc" (www.carbonfootprint.com). Three of the many ways to reduce our carbon footprint are: first to design developments to decrease vehicle trips between residential areas, employment centers, and shopping opportunities; second to reduce greenhouse gasses released into the atmosphere by using alternative

fuels; and third to explore renewable energy resources like solar and wind. Related to this is looking at how the County can plan for the effects of regional and global climate change, including rising sea levels and increased storm occurrences.

Where can I go for more information?

- 2003 Comprehensive Plan: <http://www.jccegov.com/government/administration/comp-plan.html>
- JCC Environmental Division: <http://www.jccegov.com/environmental/index.html>
- Cool Counties Initiative:
 - JCC Resolution: http://www.jccegov.com/pdf/bospdfs/bospdfs2007/092507Bos/H1_res.pdf
 - Sierra Club: <http://virginia.sierraclub.org/coolcities.html>
 - Carbon Footprint: <http://www.carbonfootprint.com>
- Brundtland Commission report- *Our Common Future*: <http://www.un-documents.net/wced-ocf.htm>
- James River Association: <http://jamesriverassociation.org/>
- Chesapeake Bay Foundation: <http://www.cbf.org/site/PageServer?pagename=homev3>
- Virginia Department of Conservation and Recreation: <http://www.dcr.virginia.gov/>
- Virginia Department of Environmental Quality: <http://www.deq.state.va.us/>
- Environmental Protection Agency: <http://www.epa.gov/>
- U.S. Green Building Council and LEED information: <http://www.usgbc.org/>
- Earthcraft House: <http://www.earthcrafthouse.com/>
- Chesapeake Bay Preservation Act:
http://www.dcr.virginia.gov/chesapeake_bay_local_assistance/theact.shtml