



The Queen Anne's Chronicle

CELEBRATING QUEEN ANNE'S COUNTY

INFORMING THE CITIZENS

CENTREVILLE – COUNTY SEAT AND RIVER TOWN

By **MARY CAMPBELL**

Centreville's role as the County seat is evident to Queen Anne's citizens and visitors alike. Circuit court, commissioners building, finance office, health department, sheriff's office, "Lawyers Row" – all these structures and others announce that this town is where the County's government is headquartered.

Less obvious -- until recently -- is the fact that Centreville is also a river town. For many years, Centreville had a bustling waterfront with active maritime commerce for passengers and goods, captains' houses, stores, visits by popular floating theatres

(See Highlights from Wharf's Past, Page 3). Then, over time, what we still call "the wharf area" gradually declined, becoming just a rather barren place with a few rented boat slips and a boat launch into the Corsica.

Now the exciting news is that at last Centreville's waterfront is on its way to becoming vibrant again!

For years, it seemed that the focus of

every Town Council candidates debate was: "What to do with the wharf area?" It has such potential! Should we let developers develop it? Get them to sell it to the County? Have the Town buy it?



New Centreville Wharf fishing pier, finger piers, and boardwalk

Opportunity Presented – and Seized

According to Town Council President Tim McCluskey, the deteriorating economy discouraged the developers' interest in development, and in 2007 the town was able to buy the wharf area. The Town paid \$2 million dollars for 2.4 waterfront acres – not exactly sure what they would do with it, but

wanting to have control of this very special attribute that so many towns would love to have.

A Wharf Committee was established. They decided to begin by addressing the perimeter of the area, repairing the bulkhead and putting in amenities that everyone could agree on: boardwalks, fishing pier, finger piers for 10 visiting boats, a playground, a living shoreline. Two pocket parks were created with ADA accessible pavilions.

Where has the money come from for the improvements? The Town stepped up to some of the costs, and some came from grants. For the playground, the Town saved a lot of money by moving and reusing the play equipment from Mill Stream Park when a grant funded new equipment at that location.

Hundreds of people enjoyed the grand opening of the new Wharf area on July 2 of this year. Between the ribbon-cutting and the fireworks later in town, children and adults fished, folks canoed and picnicked, children played, and everyone just enjoyed being beside the beautiful Corsica River.

Next Steps for the Wharf

What is already in place, around the perimeter, is a great resource for the Town

continued on Page 3

THE ROAD TO HIGHER TAXES – AND WHAT'S AHEAD

Our property taxes are up sharply – why? Will they continue to rise?

AKRF, the New York-based consulting firm, had answers to these questions in its January 2011 economic study of Queen Anne's County. Here are the key points.

The Fiscal Squeeze

The fiscal "squeeze" (AKRF's term) on Queen Anne's County that led to the tax hike occurred because, simply stated, revenues went down while expenditures were going up. The Great Recession has impacted County revenues because it resulted in (1) falling incomes, (2) lower property assessments, and (3) reduced State funding for the County. At the same time, as AKRF puts it, County expenditures were rising "to meet the needs of current and future residents".

According to AKRF, there is nothing unique about the squeeze that the County now finds itself in:

"Counties and municipalities around the state and country are grappling with fundamentals of providing expected services, absorbing state and federal cuts in aid, and the

continued on Page 2

Non-Profit Org
US Postage
PAID
Baltimore, MD
Permit #1

QUEEN ANNE'S COUNTY: PROPERTY TAX RATES

(PER \$100 OF ASSESSED VALUE)

FY 2003: \$.976	FY 2006: \$.870	FY 2009: \$.770	FY 2012: \$.847
FY 2004: \$.976	FY 2007: \$.800	FY 2010: \$.770	
FY 2005: \$.926	FY 2008: \$.770	FY 2011: \$.767	

QUEEN ANNE'S COUNTY: TOTAL ASSESSED VALUE OF REAL PROPERTY

(APPROX. 80% RESIDENTIAL, 20% COMMERCIAL)

FY 2003: \$3.6 BILLION	FY 2006: \$5.0 BILLION	FY 2009: \$7.0 BILLION	FY 2012: \$7.5 BILLION
FY 2004: \$4.0 BILLION	FY 2007: \$5.6 BILLION	FY 2010: \$7.5 BILLION	
FY 2005: \$4.5 BILLION	FY 2008: \$6.3 BILLION	FY 2011: \$7.7 BILLION	

Sources: Queen Anne's County, Maryland, Comprehensive Annual Financial Report for the Fiscal Year ended June 30, 2010, p. 197; Queen Anne's County Commissioners, Resolutions 10-11 (June 8, 2010) and 11-18 (June 29, 2011); Fiscal Year 2012 QAC Property Tax Bill.

The Road To Higher Taxes, *continued from Page 1*
pressure to keep tax rates low.”

AKRF could carefully say last January that by trimming personnel costs, QAC had “so far” avoided any tax increases – but within six months, as we now know and as AKRF clearly anticipated, the current County Commissioners found it necessary to raise everyone’s property taxes by a painful 10% in a single year. And they are saying that more hikes and/or service cuts are still to come.

Obviously, the County didn’t foresee that it would be in the squeeze it is now, that it would be faced with “a highly challenging combination of a sudden drop in stable revenue sources and a need to meet latent demand for increased public expenditure associated with prior residential development.”

But why didn’t County officials and citizens see the “perfect storm” (again, AKRF’s term) that was coming?

The Mask That Hid the Ugly Truth

We didn’t see the storm coming because, in AKRF’s words, the “growth in assessed value along with additional residential development masked the underlying growth in expenditure demand.” The mask was showing us just the good news, hiding from us the accompanying – and greater -- bad news.

Until the Great Recession hit, times in QAC appeared to be very good. The past decade in the County was an era of sharply rising property values: the total assessed value of real property shot up some 250%. And it was also a decade of vigorous residential development: there was 19 percent growth in the number of housing units from 2000 to 2009.

But there were signs of the deeper trouble, if we had looked for them. It was not just that overall County spending was rising by a remarkable 89% over the ten-year period: we knew that. What was more ominous was buried in the budgetary fine print: the specific categories of County spending that were growing by much more than the 89% overall average. As AKRF shows, these were the categories “typically associated” with a jurisdiction’s “increasingly residential character”:

General Government (which includes functions such as planning/zoning, IT, executive staff, etc.) -- up 144 percent.

Public Safety (which included a major expansion in emergency services) -- up 180 percent.

Debt Service (which has primarily been associated with school construction projects) -- up 146 percent.

Now the mask is off, revealing what we didn’t see, or want to see, before: the mounting “pressure to provide more residential-oriented public services. It is a typical phenomenon”, AKRF observes, “in a suburbanizing area that ultimately gets expressed in terms of higher costs to residents and businesses in the County.”

Land Uses and Taxes

So here we are, living in the reality that we tried to ignore but that the economic relationship between land uses and taxes makes inevitable. AKRF offers a single paragraph that says it all:

“By any number of planning and financial metrics, it is well established that over a long term perspective, residential uses generally create more financial burden than they generate in overall revenues. This is the basic nature of municipal governance and why a balanced assessment base tries to capture and retain a non-residential assessable base even when the municipality is a predominantly residential community.”

The AKRF Report directs our attention to the right ways – the balanced, fiscally sound ways -- to manage the three principal land uses in the County: residential, commercial, and agricultural:

• **Residential:** “While it is clearly the case that Queen Anne’s County will experience new residential development (and actively works to plan for and accommodate new growth), it is also clear that ramping up residential development is not a long term financial benefit or solution to the County.”

• **Commercial:** “It is also the case that an open-ended approach to encouraging commercial development would not solve the County’s budget dilemma. The potential to grow the County’s economy through absorption of, and maximizing the value of, existing commercial properties would be the most effective way to plan for and attract more businesses to the County. Economic development efforts should focus on finding potential new commercial users to fill existing capacities, including vacant built space and vacant or underutilized parcels in already zoned lands.”

• **Agricultural:** “[T]he combination of working agricultural lands, other open spaces, and its Chesapeake Bay waterfront has an intrinsic value that enhances the quality of life for its residents and serves to enhance residential property values. . . . Working open spaces not only pay taxes but incur the least amount of public expenditures with minimal requirements in terms of road miles, water and sewer infrastructure, community facilities, and police protection.”

The Way Forward from Here

The AKRF Report provides a road map that shows how the County can get off the path that has led it (and still leads it) to ever higher taxation and ever more painful cuts in services. On the AKRF map, there are two main roads, both clearly marked:

• **The Road That Should Be Taken -- Smart Growth:** “[W]ithin the context of pursuing sound fiscal planning over the long term, it is an economic imperative that Queen Anne’s County embrace a smart growth agenda Smart growth concentrates new development in areas that have existing or planned infrastructure, and in doing so improves the economic and fiscal health of a region as compared to more dispersed land use patterns.”

• **The Road That Should Be Avoided -- More Non-Smart Growth:** “Queen Anne’s County has not had a great track record in directing new development within its Priority Funding Areas (Growth Areas). Given that a majority of Queen Anne’s ready-to-build lots are located in the county’s agricultural and rural areas, without additional regulations or incentives for smart growth, the trend of building outside of planned growth areas and the escalation of municipal costs associated with sprawling residential development will persist once overall market conditions rebound.”

Right now, AKRF tells us, we’re on the wrong road. As a result, the current fiscal squeeze, with its pressure to raise taxes and cut services, will persist, even when the economic climate finally improves.

The AKRF report, “Impacts of Land Use on County Finances: A Fiscal Study of Queen Anne’s County, MD” (January 2011), can be read in full at www.qaca.org and on the Maryland Department of Planning website.

CORSICA RIVER WATERSHED AWARENESS DAY

Saturday, September 17, Noon to 4 p.m., Bloomfield Farm, Route 213, just north of Centreville.

Admission free – much to do and see!

- Tasty food offerings, hayrides, tours of the early 1800’s farmhouse, pony rides, petting zoo, pond fishing, face painting, pumpkin painting, creative craft activities for children.
- Exhibits on wild life, rain gardens, oyster restoration, storm water management, river testing results, living shorelines, land preservation, cover crop programs, septic system upgrades.

Sponsors: Corsica River Conservancy (CRC), Queen Anne’s County Parks and Recreation, and the Town of Centreville, with exhibition support from State and local agencies and organizations.

For more information, visit www.corsicariverconservancy.org



CENTREVILLE, *continued from Page 1*

-- and imagine the further possibilities: seasonal ice cream stands, kayak and canoe rentals (a floating dock for kayaks is on the way), and bike rentals, too, with the beautiful country roads to explore nearby, not to mention historic Centreville itself.

Tim McCluskey says he doesn't want the Wharf area to compete with the rest of Centreville, but rather to attract visitors to it. Downtown Centreville, after all, is an easy bike ride or walk from the Wharf along Chesterfield Avenue with its charming houses or via the trail near Creamery Lane.

What about the interior of the Wharf property? What to do here is still up in the air.

A substantial area of the interior is impervious surface, and that hasn't been touched so far, since once it is removed, it can't be put back. So, the thinking is, better to leave it alone as long as no decision has been reached about what's coming. Right now the impervious area is being used as a parking lot for people coming to the playground, the pavilions, and the fishing pier.

A Town with a Future

Centreville is a town with many attractions and blessings: it has historic buildings and houses, its role as a County seat guarantees a future for it, it is situated on navigable water (with a reviving waterfront!), it is the largest municipality close to the Bay Bridge -- and it has a vision and citizens who care about its future.

We may ultimately look back on the Wharf restoration project as a major milestone in the 21st century rise of Centreville.

Centreville has an informative website: www.townofcentreville.org – it's well worth visiting for news, meeting schedules and agendas, staff info, and much more.



A FEW HIGHLIGHTS FROM THE WHARF'S PAST

1804 – Two schooners, the Centreville and the Farmer, operated by the partnership of Nicholson & Atwood, commence twice weekly service between Centreville and Baltimore, carrying passengers, grain and mail. “The cabins have been . . . put into the best order for the accommodation of passengers, and the utmost attention will be paid to keep them clean and comfortable.” (Announcement, Star, July 24, 1804)

1880 – Captain John Ozmon builds his two-story brick general store (listed on the National Register of Historic Places) at “Centreville Landing”. Captain Ozmon transported grain, lumber, and other merchandise between Baltimore, Norfolk, and Eastern Shore points. The four small “Captains’ Houses” were built by him for the captains and crew members of his schooners.

APPROACHING AUTUMN

As the days get shorter on the Eastern Shore, lots of creatures make big changes in their lives. The marvelous migrating Monarchs are featured elsewhere in this issue; here are two more creatures on the move in autumn.

Good-bye, Ospreys –

Departing ospreys, or fish hawks, vacate our fish-filled waters in the autumn, heading south and leaving behind nests built atop poles and trees -- and even boats. Common to every continent except Antarctica, some of our ospreys winter in the Caribbean, but most fly 3,000 + miles on to South America, with a few going down as far as Argentina.



-Photo Credit – David Godfrey

Although they are usually solitary creatures, migrating and wintering alone, the osprey most often mates for life and returns to the same mate and nesting place every spring. (Some say the reason they stay with one mate for life is because they vacation alone!) The pair works together raising their chicks. In fact, both male and female ospreys have a “brood patch” – a bare place on their stomachs they place over their eggs for warmth. The chicks, born here during the summer, migrate on their own without a parent, and stay in their wintering area for two winters before returning to the area where they were hatched.

It has been reported that, historically, the Chesapeake Bay has supported the largest concentration of breeding ospreys in the world.

1886 – “Four schooners and 2 steamboats trade regularly between Centreville and Baltimore, with several other steamers during the peach season, and various other vessels with lime, shingles, lumber, coal, &c.

“At Centreville Landing there are granaries with storage capacity for over 200,000 bushels of grain, in addition to storage capacity for fertilizers, salt, provisions, &c. A phosphate factory, a cannery, and a fruit drier are also located at that point. The landing has a wharf front of over 500 yards in length. In addition to the wharves at Centreville Landing there are on Corsica River 8 others.” (Report of the Chief of Engineers, U.S. Army, 1886)

Here on the Eastern Shore, the male ospreys will return around mid-March, after the ice has melted on our tidal and non-tidal waters. They will be followed shortly by the females. Ospreys have a typical life-span of 7-10 years, though individuals can live to be much older (25 years or more.)

Hello, Woolly Bears –

No, not the kind of bear that roamed around our area a couple of years ago! In the autumn, these black and brown bristly caterpillars are seen crossing roads and sidewalks. They are creatures of lore. As children, many of us learned that if a woolly bear caterpillar's brown stripe in his middle is thick, the winter weather will be mild; if the brown stripe is narrow, the winter will be severe.

Apparently this legend has been circulating since the 1600's. Those who don't believe it have come up with other explanations for the brown bands' variation. Some believe that it reveals the habitat of the caterpillar, with those living in wet places having more black than those in dry places. Many believe that the band thickness shows how close to maturity the caterpillar is.



-Photo Credit – David Godfrey

Whatever the reason, the woolly bears are out and about in the fall, looking for a safe place to hibernate in a rock or log. In the spring, they return to activity, spin a fuzzy cocoon, and emerge as the tannish Isabella tiger moth. If you want to capture a bear for the winter and watch it spin its cocoon in the spring, check out www.backyardwildlifehabitat.info/capturebear.htm.

1914 – James Adams Floating Theatre begins a quarter century of touring with live, mostly comedy, theatre. It stopped regularly at Centreville, as well as at Crumpton, Queenstown, Stevensville, and other Eastern Shore locations. The Floating Theatre had 850 seats, a repertory company, a band, and an orchestra. In 1925, Edna Ferber spent a week on board; her novel and the musical “Show Boat” followed during the next two years. In 1941, the theatre was destroyed by fire while being towed to Savannah to be refitted.

EDITORIAL: PUBLIC COMMENT

The *Chronicle* – and, we are sure, the public -- appreciates the enormous amount of time and work that the County Commissioners commit to doing their job. Their compensation, for a time-consuming and demanding job, doesn't begin to approach the minimum wage.

We also appreciate that it is not pleasant to have your policies and decisions questioned and criticized, particularly when you are giving so much of yourself to the job. But hearing the public's thoughts, concerns, problems, and objections is an absolutely essential part of an elected official's job. In a representative democracy, decision-makers are doing the people's business. They need to provide a forum where they hear what the citizens' thoughts are on public matters.

For years, QAC citizens had the opportunity to "comment" (limited to three minutes) at a set time at the beginning and end of each Commissioners' meeting. Now, apart from the occasional hearing on a particular piece of legislation, there is only one opportunity for public comment, usually towards the end of the meeting, at a time that varies from meeting to meeting.

In the past, a citizen who wanted to address an issue on the Commissioners' agenda could do so before the issue was discussed (and perhaps resolved) by the Commissioners. Now, the public's one opportunity for comment on agenda items comes too late for their input to be timely.

Then there's the inconvenience factor. When public comment was at the beginning of the morning meeting, you could share your concerns at 9 a.m. and be a little late to work. Now, public comment at morning sessions is scheduled for anywhere from 10 a.m. to noon, and you have to take half a day off if you want to be heard. The public comment at evening meetings, previously scheduled regularly for 6 p.m., is now scheduled anywhere from between 7 and a little before 9.

The explanation for cutting public comment time, and moving it around, has been that the other items on the agenda had to slide a little time-wise if the comment period at the beginning ran over its allotted time, which it did on occasion. It should be noted that the Planning Commission and the Ethics Commission have retained their practice of scheduling public comment at the beginning and end of each meeting.

The opportunity for citizens to be heard by their elected officials is an integral part of open and accountable government. In many ways, it is the most important, least dispensable item on the Commissioners' agenda.

We hope the County can return to scheduling public comment at times convenient to the public and at a point in the meeting when citizens' input can be timely for the other items on the agenda.

COMMISSIONERS' MEETINGS

Here are a few items relevant to governance and land use summarized from the approved minutes of the County Commissioners' meetings.

June 29, 2011

The Commissioners:

- Made appointments to the Economic Development Commission and the Redistricting Committee.
- Designated the Character Counts! Pillar of the Month for July 2011 as "Citizenship".
- Adopted a Budget that included (1) an increase in the real estate tax rate from \$.7671 to \$.8471 per \$100 of assessed valuation for FY 2012 and (2) an increase in the income tax rate from 2.85% to 3.2% effective January 1, 2012.
- Held a hearing on (and at the next meeting adopted) an ordinance to amend Critical Area buffer performance standards.

July 12, 2011

The Commissioners:

- Reviewed, in closed session with counsel, several noise complaints, the State noise law, and a possible County noise ordinance.
- Agreed to a pilot program at Centreville Elementary School for naturalizing planting on County properties to reduce mowing costs.
- Awarded a contract to pave 3,000 feet of the Route 8 Park Fitness Trail.
- Acted on proposals to change the zoning on various parcels of land.

July 26, 2011

The Commissioners:

- Discussed the proposed Chester Haven Beach project with counsel in closed session.
- Designated the Character Counts! Pillar of the Month for August as "Respect".
- Heard reports on economic development from the Economic Development Commission and the Department of Economic Development and Tourism.
- Held hearings, and took "straw votes", on several citizen-sponsored amendments to the zoning code, including an amendment (on which the straw vote was 3-2 in favor) sponsored by developer Peter Sheaffer to allow "big box" retail stores in the Suburban Commercial zone.



-Photo Credit – David Godfrey

The Queen Anne's Chronicle

The Queen Anne's Chronicle is published by Queen Anne's Conservation Association.

Chris Pupke – Chairman of the Board

Jay Falstad – Executive Director

Mary Campbell – Editor

Queen Anne's Conservation Association (QACA), a nonprofit 501(c)(3) corporation, is the Eastern Shore's oldest conservation organization. Its mission is to promote stewardship of Queen Anne's County's natural resources and to protect its rural character and small towns while encouraging the management of prudent and sustainable growth.

Queen Anne's Conservation Association

P.O. Box 157 | Centreville, MD 21617 | www.QACA.org

PLANNING COMMISSION: JULY/AUGUST MEETINGS

July 14, 2011: The Commission approved a change to the major site plan for Bay East Development at 100 Piney Creek Road in Chester, a development with 10 condominium units, commercial buildings, including some with housing above, and a commercial marina. The change allows the previously approved age-restricted housing units to be sold without the restriction on age. This change was made possible by the County's new method for counting enrollment at Kent Island High School, which resulted in some unused capacity at the high school.

The Commission also reviewed and approved a sketch plan for a proposed new development on Grasonville Cemetery Road, to include 14 lots planned for development and 3 open space lots. The developer agreed to meet with citizens in the adjacent community to discuss their concerns about storm water run-off and other possible impacts of development.

August 4, 2011: The Commission voted to give a favorable recommendation on a text amendment allowing the installation of solar arrays in the agricultural and countryside districts, with a 25 foot buffer from adjacent

parcels, to produce energy for commercial sale. The text amendment will be forwarded to the County Commissioners for final consideration.

As part of the on-going implementation of the Grasonville Community Plan, the Planning Commission considered, but did not complete work on, new zoning for lands east and west of Nesbit Road, including the property on which the Emergency Center is located. Options under consideration include a new Medical Center (MC) zoning classification, as well as increases in the density allowed in the Grasonville Village Commercial (GVC) zoning district.

Counsel to the Commission reported on a settlement of litigation concerning Kent Island, LLC.

Staff provided a report on the State's update of its Critical Area regulations and maps and the work to update the County's code to conform.

Subcommittees of the Planning Commission and the Economic Development Commissions have been working to coordinate planning for economic development. A joint meeting of both commissions will follow the Planning Commission's regular meeting in September.

MIGRATING MONARCHS

By ANDI PUPKE

Some butterflies from Queen Anne's County take part in one of nature's most amazing migrations.

- The Monarch butterfly is the only butterfly that migrates both north and south, as some birds do, on a regular basis. And it travels up to 3,000 miles to reach its southern wintering grounds in the Oyamel fir forests of central Mexico.
- Unlike most other migratory species, where one individual completes the yearly migration, no single Monarch makes the whole round trip. Monarchs perform a generational migration -- with a different generation responsible for each leg of the journey.

A Monarch that leaves QAC in the fall will overwinter in Central Mexico. This individual will return to the Gulf Coast states in the spring to lay its eggs and then die. The next, shorter-lived generation of Monarchs will travel farther north, and again they will lay their eggs and die. This cycle continues until a third or fourth generation reaches southern Canada, the northern limits of the Monarch's range, where its members live long enough to migrate south in the early fall, overwinter, and return to the Gulf Coast states.



-Chronicle photo

The Monarchs arrive in the wintering grounds en masse. They can reach densities of four million butterflies per acre. Overwintering conditions can be very harsh. These conditions can be aggravated by forest destruction. Illegal logging in the preserves changes the micro-climate that offers protection from the winter weather, causing many butterflies to die.

Habitat loss is not only a problem in Mexico. Intensive development, farming and other land management have destroyed habitat for Monarchs in the United States. This loss of habitat threatens the existence of the migratory Monarchs.

On a quest to gather data on the migration patterns of Monarchs, Chesapeake Wildlife Heritage (CWH) has been tagging migrating Monarchs since 1999. This work is part of a larger study conducted by the University of Kansas.

One of the Monarchs tagged by CWH at our Barnstable Hill Farm on Kent Island in September of 2005 was recovered in March of 2006 in El Rosario Monarch Butterfly Sanctuary near Angangueo, Mexico - a 1,960 mile flight from Chester, Maryland. Other Monarchs tagged by CWH in Queen Anne's County have been found to have made similar journeys.



-Chronicle photo

CWH will be holding tagging workshops on September 14 at 4 pm and September 17 at 10:30 am. at Barnstable Hill Farm. There is no fee, but folks have to sign up for the workshop as there is limited space: call 410-822-5100. By helping tag these amazing butterflies, participants are helping scientists from around the continent track the migration of the Monarchs.

CWH works to restore and protect habitat for a variety of wildlife. The types of habitat that benefit Monarchs (along with many other critters) are shallow water wetlands and native meadows with their variety of flowering plants like goldenrod, tickseed and asters. They produce nectar for summer and stopover migratory feeding for Monarchs. These meadows also produce milkweed to support the Monarch caterpillar. The caterpillars can only survive by eating milkweed.

By providing a little habitat for Monarchs in your own yard or farm, you can help these beautiful creatures complete a miraculous journey.

Andi Pupke is Education and Outreach Director of Chesapeake Wildlife Heritage (www.cheswildlife.org). CWH, headquartered in Easton, is dedicated to creating, restoring and protecting wildlife habitat, and to establishing a more sustainable agriculture, as demonstrated at its 540-acre Barnstable Hill Farm property on Kent Island. CWH is the only nonprofit in the Chesapeake Bay area taking habitat projects from conception to fruition by designing, building and managing habitat for the purposes of increasing the diversity of habitat in the region and improving water quality in the Chesapeake Bay.

MOVING IN THE RIGHT DIRECTION ON THE EASTERN SHORE

By ROB ETGEN

All of us – individuals, businesses, local, state, and federal governments – are in a hangover from a spending and consumption binge over the last 40 years which is unsustainable.

In Maryland over the last 20 years we have consumed land for development at five times the rate of population growth – spreading ourselves out in patterns that maximize road use, drive times, home heating/cooling costs, lawn care burden, and public service needs. We've built our lives around massive government funded infrastructure, and now our government is going broke.

What to do?

A key first step is for more of us to live in compact towns and communities where many daily needs can be met by walking or biking and where we can more easily support Eastern Shore businesses. The Maryland Department of Planning estimates that if Maryland can grow over the next 20 years primarily in existing growth centers, and not in cornfield subdivisions, we will save \$39 billion (35% less) in new road construction costs and \$383 million (36% less) in additional road maintenance costs.

Perhaps as importantly, smart growth patterns over the next 20 years will save about 400,000 acres

of beautiful Maryland farms and forests -- a whopping 71% savings in developed acres.

Can we do it?

There are signs everywhere that we are already moving in the right direction. Nationally, housing values in cornfield subdivisions have plunged while urban housing values have held steady or are climbing. There is also renewed enthusiasm for farmers markets, shopping downtown, local heritage tourism, and walkable, bikable, energy-efficient housing choices.

These trends represent a future for the Eastern Shore that can be fiscally sustainable, environmentally sustainable, better for our health, and better for our communities.

Rob Etgen is the Executive Director of the Eastern Shore Land Conservancy (ESLC) (www.eslc.org). Since its founding in 1990, ESLC has preserved nearly 50,000 acres of the Eastern Shore's important natural habitat areas and prime farmland. Earlier this year, ESLC launched its Center for Towns (www.centerfortowns.org), an initiative aimed at strengthening and supporting the small towns of the Eastern Shore. This article is condensed from ESLC's bi-annual newsletter "Panorama" and is reprinted here by permission.

SOUTHERN KENT ISLAND SEPTIC DISCUSSION NEEDS BALANCE

Special from NICK STOER, Chester

The Public Works Advisory Board, on which I served as a member, recommended in July in favor of a proposal to build an eight-mile sewer line along Route 8 to Romancoke from the County's wastewater treatment plant in Stevensville. The vote was 8-5. I was one of the no votes.

We in the minority believed that the Board should investigate alternative, lower-cost solutions – notwithstanding advocacy from individuals who have been purchasing non-perking lots on southern Kent Island that would become buildable if public sewer became available. If one approaches the Kent Island “failing septic” issue in a balanced way, without speculative interests intruding, one will conclude, I believe, that there are far better alternatives to the 8-mile pipe.

Let me summarize the principal considerations favoring the investigation of alternatives.

First, on the merits of the majority's recommendation itself, **the eight-mile pipe, and the infrastructure upgrades it would require, are simply too costly.** The line itself is \$65-\$75 million, but according to the Board's consultant study, when school and road improvements are included, the overall cost impact would be \$190-\$336 million. A sewer line down Route 8 guarantees that County property taxes and piggy-back income taxes for ALL County residents will rise further in the future to cover new debt, schools, teachers, and other costs. For those directly affected, the sewer line scenario would require all 1,512 current homeowners in the study area to hook up to sewer at a cost of \$30,000 or more, regardless of how well their septic system is functioning.

Second, **viable alternatives do exist.** In contrast to Queen Anne's County, many other jurisdictions across the country actively pursue advanced non-sewer alternatives to mitigate drain field problems in areas with high water tables. Problems are dealt with on a targeted, case-by-case basis. Micro-filters, ultra-violet light disinfection modules, and recirculating sand filters are but a few of the options that treat both nitrogen and pathogens. The Chester River Association has facilitated the installation of BNR solutions to correct more than 130 failing septic systems in Queen Anne's County along the Chester River, with similar success in Kent County.

Third, **the “health” issue should not be over-blown.** All septic fields in the southern Kent Island area were approved and inspected by the County Health Department years ago. To be sure, standards are tighter

now. The issue is mainly the depth of some drain field pipes and their proximity to ground water levels at certain times of the year. The issue is a technical one about the extent and frequency that some septic fields do not function perfectly all the time.

Health alarms have not been sounded on Kent Island. Unlike Anne Arundel County, which imposes swimming restrictions in the Severn, Magothy, and other waters from time to time due to septic tank issues, Kent Island has not had such restrictions. None of the well water in the affected areas has been jeopardized. Some area septic systems with performance problems have been replaced or upgraded. Quite a few work perfectly as designed.

Fourth, **building many hundreds of new residential units on southern Kent Island is undesirable.** Developer proponents of the sewer line support it because it could render buildable as many as 1,600 lots that now, because they don't perk, cannot be developed. But all these new residences would:

(a) Require many new classrooms and teachers in schools that already are crowded and putting pressure on County finances;

(b) Further degrade the deplorable traffic situation on Route 8;

(c) Put additional structures and families at risk in an area threatened by sea-level rise, land subsidence, and storm surge;

(d) Compound evacuation challenges in the event of a Category 3 or greater hurricane; and

(e) Add hundreds of acres of impervious surface (paved streets, driveways, roof area) which will further stress Kent Island during every heavy rain storm.

Fifth, **pushing the pipe is counter-productive.** Constantly toying with a big pipe not only encourages speculation in lots but also delays consideration of alternatives and individual decisions on upgrades. State agencies have consistently encouraged low-cost, targeted solutions to septic issues on Kent Island. Southern Kent Island is not a Priority Funding Area from the State's perspective, and certainly not a Growth Area in the 2010 County Comprehensive Plan. (The Plan actually recommends against any more major development on Kent Island until traffic and sea-level rise issues are addressed.)

From a State perspective, the 1,100 or so septic systems in the Critical Area on Southern Kent Island are fairly insignificant. Maryland has over 420,000 residential septic systems, of which around 52,000 are in the Critical Area. Other areas in Maryland (Patapsco River, Anacostia River, Severn River) have far more severe septic and waste water problems. All have had periodic

swimming restrictions due to poor water quality. For us to continue to push for an unaffordable sewer line on Kent Island will only delay, for a decade or more, improvements requiring State assistance.

Bottom Line: A connection between under-performing septic fields on southern Kent Island and an actual health problem has not been demonstrated. Given that reality, it makes far more sense to use existing grant programs to fix

the more severe septic field situations on a case-by-case basis, rather than beat our collective heads against the wall by trying to start the ball rolling on a quarter billion to one-third billion dollar sequence of projects that, if they could ever be financed, would forever change the character of Kent Island and the Eastern Shore.

Nicholas Stoer is a consultant and retired federal senior executive.

POTENTIAL VACANT LOT DEVELOPMENT ON SOUTHERN KENT ISLAND

<u>Community</u>	<u>Vacant Lots</u>
Matapeake Estates	1
Normans	6
Sunny Isle of Kent/ Chesapeake Estates	242
Kentmorr	371
Queen Anne's Colony	73
Kent Island Estates/ Romancoke on the Bay	889
Tower Gardens	30
Total	1,612

(Data courtesy of R. S. Altman)

KENT ISLAND RESIDENTIAL PROJECTS IN DEVELOPMENT PROCESS

<u>Development</u>	<u>Units</u>
Bay East	49
Jamal	221
Chester Haven Beach	180
Gibson's Grant	260
Four Seasons	1,438
Ellendale	280
Cloisters	240
Total	2,668

(Data, as of 7-31-10, courtesy of R. S. Altman)

“THE VISION WE SHARE”

The VISION is to continue the ethic that the County remains a quintessential rural community with the overall character of the County preserved as:

- *A predominantly rural county with small towns connected by creeks and county roads through fields and forest – **a great place to live;***
- *A county that encourages agriculture, seafood and maritime industries, tourism and outdoor sports, small business and high tech enterprise – **a good place to work;***
- *A county that is a faithful steward of its natural and cultural heritage – **a good neighbor for the Bay and other Eastern Shore counties;***
- *A county in which development does not impair the quality of life enjoyed by all – **a community that protects the expectations and opportunities of all its citizens;***
- *A county that supports the **highest quality of education** that seeks to fully prepare its citizens for the future.*

(Queen Anne's County 2010 Comprehensive Plan, “Overall Community Vision”, page 2)

THE SCHOOL AT WILLOUGHBY

Fred and Marie Connolly, now in their nineties, still live on the farm where he was born, near Route 404 and Fox Meadow Road. Twenty-one years ago, for family and friends, Fred Connolly collected into a booklet, entitled "Remembering Willoughby", his memories, with photos and a map, of "a once busy and productive village in Queen Anne's County called Willoughby." What follows are excerpts from Mr. Connolly's reminiscences, principally those about the Willoughby School, published here with his kind permission. – Ed.

Willoughby . . . was near the farm where my father was born in 1883 and I in 1918. I still live there today with my wife, Marie. Roots don't grow much deeper than that. . . .

I am uncertain why Willoughby was located where it was. It was probably a combination of good access to the railroad which was built around 1880, and a road which is now Rt. 404. Perhaps land was available there.

The Cannery and the Railroad Station

The Willoughby Cannery was the center of business . . . Sweet corn, string beans, okra, bush beans were products of the cannery's own farming operation. Some produce was still purchased from local farmers. During the busy season as many as 75 workers were required to operate the cannery. Many were families from Baltimore known as "Bohemians" . . . who would spend their entire summers there. . . .

The Willoughby Railroad Station was a very busy place. It was located on what is now Fox Meadow Road. This was the departure point for passengers going to Baltimore or Washington. The train carried them to Love Point on Kent Island where they would cross the Bay by boat. Much of the area's freight and livestock were also moved by rail. Farmers would bring their animals to the stockyard, tag them and leave them in the care of the railroad to reach their destination.

Willoughby School

Just down the road was Willoughby School which was built around 1880. I was a student there for seven years from 1924 to 1931. My father started school there in 1889. There were no buses in those days so all students walked to school. Some lived three miles away. Grades 1 thru 7 shared one classroom and one teacher. Total enrollment was usually around 25. . . .

The school property consisted of about 1 acre of large trees and bushes. At the back of the property on either side were the rest rooms or "privies" as they were called. The school building itself was identified by a sign across the gabled front which read "School No. 6, District No. 6". There were two windows on the front and three on each side. At the entrance was a small room about twelve feet square for coats and lunch pails. It was unheated and separated from the classroom by a door.

The Classroom -- and Mrs. Harrison's

When entering the classroom the first thing you saw was the large pot-bellied stove in the center of the room. Soft coal stored in a shed behind the school provided heat during the winter. Mondays were always cold since the fire was untended all weekend. The teacher would allow everyone to sit or stand near the stove until the rest of the room was bearable.

Behind the stove was the teacher's desk centered between two large blackboards. The interior walls were made of tongued and grooved boards. I can still picture cracks and small imperfections in those walls. Seven years is a long time to spend in one classroom.

. . . In the left corner of the room was a three-gallon galvanized pail which held our drinking water. A long handled dipper was shared by all. When the pail became empty, the teacher would send two boys with the bucket and a broom handle to refill it.



Willoughby School

-Courtesy John O'Neill

The nearest well was at the Harrison farm about a quarter of a mile away. Mr. Joe and his wife Clara would invite us in to get warm before heading back. Usually cookies or cakes were offered. If a child was hurt while playing at school, they were sent to Mrs. Harrison for medicine and consolation. . . .

The Easter Egg Hunt – and the Dentist

I recall one Easter when the teacher asked each student to bring two hard-boiled eggs from home for an Easter egg hunt. My



Shed on the Connolly Farm. "Remembering Willoughby" author Fred Connolly served five terms (20 years) as a judge on the Queen Anne's County Orphans' Court, the court for wills, estates, and guardianships of minors.

-Chronicle photo

mother filled the order for my brothers and me, and off we went on our walk to school. As hard as I fought it, temptation was too great and one my eggs fell prey to a young boy's appetite. An understanding teacher allowed me to participate in the hunt with the surviving egg.

Another time a dentist came to school and examined everyone's teeth. I remember this day well because I was the only student in the school who did not have a cavity. I was "king of the mountain" and the envy of everyone. Especially when the dentist returned several days later to fill the cavities. He used a drill that was powered by pumping a pedal with his foot. Although the children may have had some bad teeth, there was nothing wrong with their lungs. You can imagine a teacher trying to conduct class with this going on in the back of the room.

Halloween

Halloween was always a grand occasion at Willoughby School. There was a party held in the evening after dark. Bed sheets brought from home were hung on a wire stretched across the front of the classroom. This served as a stage and curtain for plays and skits performed in homemade costumes. Others would sing to entertain their families. Parents brought plenty of cakes, pies and homemade ice cream for refreshments.

One year I was in a play titled "Four and Twenty Blackbirds Baked in a Pie". I was put in a washtub (the pie) and covered with brown paper (the crust). As the other children performed, I thought I would suffocate before

they sang "when the pie was opened" and I popped thru the paper. The washtub was borrowed from my mother on the condition that it be returned by Monday morning so she could do her wash.

Tribute to the Teachers

Willoughby School was closed in 1933. Some of the teachers remembered are Mabel Bishop, Lillian Boyce, Audrey Harris, Miss Eckstrom, Miss Morris, and Lila Bailey, who was the last to teach there.

In these days . . . Willoughby School seems very simple and crude. Indeed, it was. Many of its students received no further education. They had learned reading, writing and simple arithmetic. Compared to some in the community, this made them well educated.

. . . We all left Willoughby School with a sense of honesty, integrity and the importance of sharing. These things are not learned from a book or a computer screen. They are instilled through constant example set by sincere, moral, loving adults.

A model of Willoughby School, together with a full copy of "Remembering Willoughby", is on permanent display at the Museum of Eastern Shore Life near Centreville, www.museumofeasternshore.org.

TWELVE TOP MARYLAND DEVELOPMENT PROJECTS: THE CHRONICLE GOES ON TOUR

(A year ago, *Maryland Life* magazine, in cooperation with the Maryland Department of Planning, published a supplement titled “Maryland in 2030: A Look at the Free State 20 Years into the Future”. At the time, one article in particular caught our eye: an account of “The Top Dozen” projects that would likely be going forward in Maryland over the next 20 years. Reminded of this when the supplement recently resurfaced as a PlanMaryland hand-out, we decided to check out these mega-projects. Here’s our report. — Ed.)

First on the *Maryland Life* list, and our first stop, is:

1. SCIENCE CITY (GREAT SENECA SCIENCE CORRIDOR) — This is 10.5 million square feet of new commercial development and 6,500 new residential units in the Rockville-Gaithersburg-270 Corridor, epicenter of the almost 300 biotech firms and institutions already in Montgomery County. The Master Plan was approved last year, and now the prerequisites for stage one (of four, in a projected 20-year timeframe) are being worked through.

2. KONTERRA — A 2,200-acre mixed-use development in the Interstate 95 corridor in Laurel, Konterra is projected to eclipse Tysons Corner in size. Within the overall project, Konterra Town Center East is 488 acres retail-office-residential: first phase due to deliver in 2012. In 2014, the Intercounty Connector (see #8 below) will link up with Konterra.

3. U. S. CYBER COMMAND CENTER — Here we see BRAC at work. New facilities for U.S. Cyber Command are being built at Fort Meade, 8 miles east of the B-W Parkway, and NSA is expanding there; a few miles away Aberdeen Proving Ground has emerged as the Army’s technology hub (see #7 below). Officials from the affected counties (Anne Arundel, Howard, PG) say they are planning for more than 40,000 new people in the region between 2007 and 2015 — and 75% more vehicles on Route 175, with no money for widening the road, only for some intersection upgrades.

4. BALTIMORE WASHINGTON MAGLEV PROJECT — This \$5 billion, 40-mile long project would run a magnetic levitation train at speeds up to 240 mph between Camden Yards Baltimore and Union Station in Washington. The trip would take less than 18 minutes. But the project has been in the planning stage for over a decade and, in an era of budgetary restraint, seems unlikely ever to be built.

5. THIRD NUCLEAR REACTOR AT CALVERT CLIFFS — This \$10 billion project (“the largest construction project in the history of Maryland, adding a much needed emissions-free energy source to the regional grid”) was reported to be in “regulatory limbo” before what happened in Japan --where it is now? Still in limbo, over environmental and foreign ownership issues, but because of our enormous energy needs, not nearly so dead as Maglev. This may well be built.

6. DISNEY RESORT HOTEL & EXPANSION AT NATIONAL HARBOR — The time-table at National Harbor is unclear for Disney’s planned family-centered 500-room resort hotel, similar to its just-opened Aulani hotel at Ko Olina in

Hawaii. On the Maryland banks of the Potomac River, National Harbor, already considered the largest indoor hotel/conference center on the East Coast, is bustling forward with Tanger Outlets, 80 factory outlet stores expected to be open in 2013. (Comparison: there are 60 outlet stores at the 50/301 Split.)

7. BRAC ZONES AROUND BAINBRIDGE IN CECIL AND ELSEWHERE — BRAC is said by *Maryland Life* to be creating “the largest economic-development growth in Maryland since World War II” (or is it the ICC that’s doing that?). In any event, already underway on the 1,200-acre former Bainbridge Naval Training Center in Port Deposit (Cecil Co.) are four million square feet of commercial space, 1,200 housing units, and 1,000 retirement-community units. Also getting BRAC infusions: Aberdeen Proving Ground (Harford Co.), Fort Meade (Anne Arundel Co. — see above), Bethesda Naval Medical Center (Montgomery Co.), Ft. Detrick (Frederick Co.), Andrews Air Force Base (Prince George’s Co.).

8. ICC, PURPLE LINE, AND BALTIMORE RED LINE — Not to quibble, but if it’s mega-development they’re featuring, why didn’t *Maryland Life* put the ICC first on their list (or second, after BRAC) — and why did they lump a highway project together with two unrelated light-rail projects? Anyhow . . .



Intercounty Connector E of MD 28/Norbeck Rd (June 2011)

-www.iccproject.com

The famous 18-mile, \$2.6-billion Intercounty Connector (ICC) is a limited access, six-lane electronic toll highway with eight full interchanges that will connect I-270 in Gaithersburg with I-95 in Laurel. The first small piece opened last February and the rest of it is steaming ahead, with major sections projected to open later this year or early next year.

The proposed 16-mile, 21-station Purple Line light-rail system would connect Bethesda (Red) and New Carrollton (Orange) Metro stations via Silver Spring (Red), Takoma/Langley (Red), and College Park (Green). Cost is estimated at \$2 billion; federal approval for detailed engineering is said to be imminent; projected completion is 2015 at the earliest.

The proposed 14.5-mile Red Line light-rail system in Baltimore City and County would connect Woodlawn to John

Hopkins Bayview Medical Center in East Baltimore, with 18 stations along the way. Cost is estimated at \$2.2 billion; this summer received federal OK for detailed engineering; could begin operation 2020-21.

9. STATE CENTER — This is 28 acres on the NW corner of Downtown Baltimore anchored by 16 State agencies. The 15-year public-private \$1.5 billion development plan calls for 2 million square feet of office space (half State, half private) plus retail, restaurants, civic, parks, and 5800 parking spaces. Controversial in the city, in litigation, supported by the *Baltimore Sun* -- what will happen? Chances are it goes forward.

10. GREAT ALLEGHENY PASSAGE & TRAIL TOWN PROGRAM — The Great Allegheny Passage (GAP) is a bike trail that stretches 135 miles from Cumberland, MD, to Duquesne, PA, just outside of Pittsburgh (it should reach Pittsburgh itself this fall). At Cumberland, GAP meets the C&O Canal Towpath, which continues for another 184.5 miles of motor-vehicle-free biking and walking to Washington, D.C. (where it connects with the Maryland portion of the American Discovery Trail -- which, as the Chronicle’s last issue pointed out, runs into our part of the world through Tuckahoe State Park to the Atlantic.

The “Trail Town Program” is an economic development and community revitalization initiative working in tourism-benefitted “Trail Towns” along the GAP. Besides Cumberland, Maryland GAP Trail Towns include Frostburg and Oldtown.

11. MAJOR REDEVELOPMENT IN WESTPORT (BALTIMORE CITY) — In South Baltimore about a mile from the Inner Harbor, the “Westport, Middle Branch [of the Patapsco], and Green Harbor Project” is a 52-acre brownfield of old factories, smokestacks, and power plants now on its way to becoming 2 million square feet of office space, 2,000 residential units, 300,000 square feet of retail space, and 500 hotel rooms, plus waterfront amenities and wetland restoration. Estimated cost (public-private partnership): \$1.2 - 1.4 billion.

12. CHESAPEAKE BAY CLEAN-UP INITIATIVE — Here we come to the last “project” to make the List — the renewed Bay Restoration effort launched by the President’s 2009 Executive Order. The *Chronicle* thinks this should have been first on the *Maryland Life* list, rather than last. But even if one is ranking solely on economic grounds, we wondered whether it wouldn’t it qualify for a higher spot.

We asked the Chesapeake Bay Foundation what would be the economic cost to the region of letting the Bay become a big dead zone, something like Lake Erie when it caught on fire in 1969. CBF referred us to economic studies that put the value of the Bay — even in its not-too-healthy condition -- at over \$1 trillion, based on the Bay’s annual economic benefit to the region of \$33 billion to \$60 billion.

That’s even bigger than the ICC.



-Photo Credit — David Godfrey

