Workshop Helps Cape Charles Prepare for Flooding

By Stefanie Jackson

Research indicates that Virginia’s southern coastal region faces greater risk from sea level rise than anywhere else on the east coast. This summer, a dozen Cape Charles community leaders and residents attended a coastal resilience workshop where they learned about the RAFT (Resilience Adaptation Feasibility Tool), designed to assess and develop coastal communities’ resilience to the impacts of flooding.

The workshop was conducted by Michelle Covi, of Old Dominion University, and Elizabeth Andrews, of the Virginia Institute of Marine Science, both members of the Virginia Sea Grant, a “multi-university organization that advances the ecological, economic, and social sustainability and resilience of Virginia’s coastal and ocean ecosystems and the communities that depend on them.” They presented a recap of the RAFT workshop to Cape Charles town council Sept. 21.

At the workshop, Covi and Andrews used a RAFT scorecard to outline the town’s strengths and weaknesses regarding flooding resilience, and with the help of participants, drafted a checklist of goals the town would like to achieve within the next year to improve related legislation and policy, communication and education, community engagement and action, and emergency preparedness for flooding. The top three priorities for developing coastal resilience in Cape Charles, chosen by the 12 workshop attendees, were: educating town council on flooding and coastal resilience, developing a coastal resilience council or commission, and compiling a coastal resilience FAQ for the town’s website.

Ideas for raising Cape Charles’ emergency preparedness which would take longer than a year to develop included establishing an emergency medical facility in town for all residents, with particular concern for the aging population, and arranging a partnership with STAR transportation to assist residents evacuating during emergencies at no cost.

The RAFT multi-university organization will provide ongoing technical assistance to Cape Charles as it works toward its coastal resilience goals, and help the town acquire funding for the project.

Council member Dora Sullivan mentioned the town once had an “in-house emergency plan,” and asked her fellow council members if anyone remembered what happened to it. She said the town owned a generator and had designated the firehouse — which had a working siren at the time — as an emergency meeting place. The plan had designated essential personnel who could help evacuate residents who are elderly, don’t drive, or would otherwise be disadvantaged during an emergency.

Police chief Jim Pruitt responded that the firehouse wouldn’t work as a meeting place and a siren would not be necessary.

Council member Joan Natali recommended scheduling a work session over the winter during which a town-wide emergency plan could be discussed in preparation for the following spring and summer.

Wendy Walker, president of the Garden Club of the Eastern Shore, announced that Cape Charles would be the focus of the club’s annual Eastern Shore of Virginia House and Garden Tour on April 28, 2018. There will be six homes featured on the tour, three in town and three in Bay Creek. About 1,000 people attend the annual event, but interest is so high in the upcoming Cape Charles tour that attendance is anticipated to double. Walker said the club’s guidebook reaches 80,000 people.

The Cape Charles Main Street Affiliate Program was formed earlier this year to preserve the town’s history and restructure its downtown economy. The town qualified for the program previously but lacked the necessary paperwork. Council member Andy Buczkos recommended replacing the existing 501(c)(3) to give the program a “clean slate.”

The town renewed their $500,000 line of credit with Xenith Bank, reserved for working capital. The credit line has never been used, but is available in case of an emergency.

Storm Leaves Slim Pickings for Parking at Assateague

By Stefanie Jackson

The Assateague Island National Seashore is looking for ways to increase parking availability at the island’s many beaches and scenic areas. The seashore announced that the new parking lot at the Wildwood Beach in Ocean City, Md., will accommodate 210 vehicles and is expected to be completed by the end of the year.

The parking area, which is part of a larger project to improve access to the island, will be located near the oceanfront and will feature restrooms, showers, and picnic areas. The new parking lot will help alleviate traffic congestion during peak seasons and provide visitors with easy access to the beach.

The Assateague Island National Seashore is home to more than 100,000 acres of protected land and is a popular destination for outdoor recreation, bird-watching, and wildlife observation. The seashore is part of the National Park Service and is managed by the U.S. Department of the Interior. The seashore currently offers 10 different beach access points, each with its own parking facilities.

The new parking lot at Wildwood Beach is one of several improvements being made to the seashore, which is facing increased visitation from tourists and local visitors. The seashore has recently implemented a reservation system for beach parking, allowing visitors to reserve spots in advance and reducing the number of vehicles on the island.

The Assateague Island National Seashore is committed to providing visitors with a safe and enjoyable experience while preserving the natural beauty of the island. The seashore is committed to increasing access to the island and is continuously improving its facilities to meet the needs of visitors.