

MUNICIPALITIES UNITING TO LEARN, GROW TOGETHER



The Maryland Coastal Bays Program has undertaken a regional planning effort to unite Eastern Shore counties in Delaware, Maryland, and Virginia. Since 2005, the Coastal Bays Program has been working with Sussex (DE), Worcester (MD), Accomack (VA), and Northampton (VA) counties to take a look at the shore from a regional basis and to help states and counties learn from one another. In December 2007, this work culminated in build-out scenarios, which planning and zoning professionals fashioned to examine what their counties would look like when completely built out. The workshops, attended by more than 150 residents, showed what is allowable in current planning and zoning laws in each county.

THE NATIONAL ESTUARY PROGRAM IN ACTION

What came out of the efforts, called the Delmarva Atlantic Watershed Network or DAWN, was the sobering fact that in just a few decades, with current laws, not much would be left of the Eastern Shore's farms and forests. Easily recognizable in the work was Maryland's ascension to a planning paragon. With strong agricultural zoning, and a comprehensive plan that keeps most new growth out of forests, wetlands, and floodplains and adjacent to existing infrastructure, the state serves as an ideal model to follow. At build-out, Worcester County, Md., should have less than 80,000 full-time residents, a little more than twice

the current population. In stark contrast, Sussex County, Delaware's 500,000 acres have no agricultural zoning. At the permitted two lots per acre and after extracting wetlands, built lands, and protected lands, the county is facing a build-out of around two million residents sprawled across the county. The number is more than 10 times its current population of 184,000. At its current pace, the county will lose close to 80 percent of its forestland, 80 percent of its agricultural land, and is looking at a four-fold increase in nutrients over much of the western and northern parts of the county.

Things are changing for the better on the eastern shore of Virginia. The newly proposed comprehensive plan in Accomack County and the proposed zoning change in Northampton represent a giant leap forward for those two shore gems. At build-out, both counties combined are projected at 100,000 people from 44,000 today. Like Worcester, Virginia's plans aim to direct residents around existing infrastructure and away from sensitive areas.

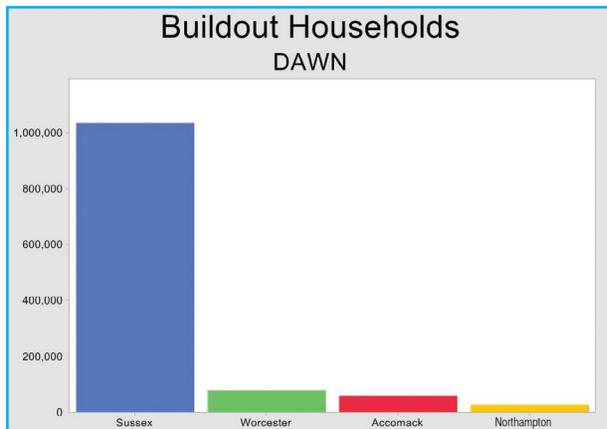
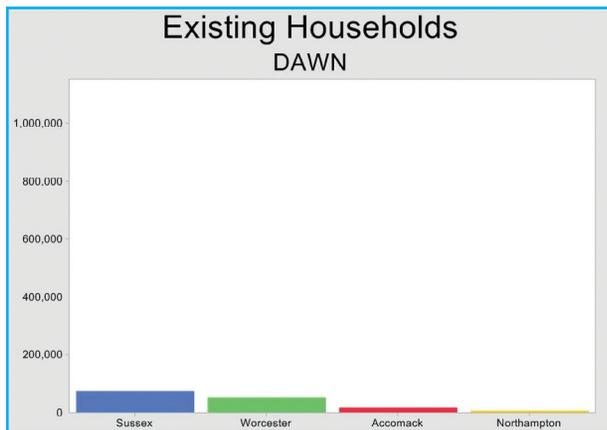
In June, both Virginia counties held a workshop as part of the DAWN effort to show residents how the new plans would affect

their counties' water quality and farms and forests versus what would happen if nothing changes. The workshop started with an overview of the effects of impervious surfaces on water qual-

ity. Northampton County then compared its old zoning plan with its proposed revision and Accomack weighed its proposed plan against its current one. Changes in nutrient inputs, land

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consumption, population, and even school enrollment were measured and shown graphically. In both cases the new proposals showed a significant advancement in planning along with equally significant conservation of natural resources.

In Sussex County, DAWN undertook a massive campaign to educate the public about the county's shortcomings. The Sussex Heart and Soul campaign asked county residents to send photos of the things that make Sussex County the place they want to live. This work culminated in an early summer workshop to show how the changes in landscape mesh with what its residents desire and to contemplate alternatives. The forward-thinking work in Worcester, Accomack, and Northampton counties has also allowed planning professionals in Sussex to point to these neigh-

bors when showing elected officials what is possible on the peninsula. The Coastal Bays Program took on this work mainly because its Chincoteague, Isle of Wight, and Assawoman Bay watersheds extend into surrounding states. But the work has taken on more than a water quality component with the data from the DAWN work and has increased the interest of residents who think the shore's legacy should be preserved. The work shows that historically, people seldom get what they want in planning. Through this effort, these four counties are working together to change that tendency.

Visit www.mdcoastalbays.org to learn more about this and other MCBP efforts.

EPA's National Estuary Program (NEP) is a unique and successful

coastal watershed-based program established in 1987 under the Clean Water Act Amendments. The NEP involves the public and collaborates with partners to protect, restore, and maintain the water quality and ecological integrity of 28 estuaries of national significance located in 18 coastal states and Puerto Rico.

For more information about the NEP go to www.epa.gov/owow/estuaries.