

Chapter 2

BACKGROUND FOR PLANNING

REGIONAL SETTING and DEVELOPMENT TRENDS

Tappahannock is an incorporated town located in the eastern portion of Essex County, Virginia. The town is situated on the shores of the Rappahannock River within the concave of the urban crescent formed by the metropolitan areas of Washington, D.C., Richmond, and Hampton Roads. In less than three square miles of land area, Tappahannock exhibits many positive features including a waterfront, a historic downtown, residential subdivisions, schools and other public facilities, an airport and industrial center, a business corridor and extensive wetland areas. These characteristics combine to make Tappahannock a regional commercial, industrial, and employment center while keeping a rural, small town feeling.

Settled in the 1600s, the town was first called New Plymouth and grew as a port and trade area due to its proximity to the beautiful Rappahannock. Tappahannock, which currently serves as the county seat, was first incorporated in 1926. Additional territory was annexed in 1939, 1966, and again in 1976. According to the 2000 census, Tappahannock encompassed an area of 2.75 square miles and had a population of 2,068.

Population projections for the Middle Peninsula region predict that by the year 2030, the population will double the 1980 census count. The largest growth in population is expected to occur in the counties closest to major urban centers (King William, Gloucester). In 1998 it was estimated that Essex County would grow from 8,689 residents in 1980 to a projected population of 8,801 in 2000. The actual Census count in 2000 showed a population of 9,989 reflecting an increase well beyond what was anticipated. Projections released in 2005 estimate that Essex County had grown to 10,339 residents in 2004 and will attain a population approximating 12,000 by 2030. Given this modest rate of County growth, rates of growth for Tappahannock can also be expected to be modest. However, the town growth rates can be expected to be somewhat higher than the County's since the town is the designated growth center in Essex County.

Indications of the economic stability of the Town of Tappahannock can be seen by looking at data for the county and region. According to the Virginia Employment Commission, the December 2005 unemployment rate for Essex County (4.6 percent) is above both the state average (3.0 percent) and those of the Middle Peninsula (3.0 percent) and the Northern Neck (4.0 percent). The unemployment rate for Essex County actually increased during this period while it dropped in all the other areas. While unemployment rates are generally high for the region,

income figures on a per capita, family, and median household level historically have been lower than the state average. This is partially due to the large number of retirees and elderly on fixed incomes, and also partly due to the high salaries found in northern Virginia which skew the average). Another consideration could be that a large portion of the population may be underemployed, a common phenomenon in areas where many people have historically derived their income from farming and seafood harvesting.

Figure 2-1
2004 & 2005 Unemployment Statistics

Locality	December 2004	December 2005
	Unemployment Rate	Unemployment Rate
United States	5.1%	4.6%
State of Virginia	3.4%	3.0%
Essex County	3.7%	4.6%
Middle Peninsula Counties	3.2%	3.0%
Northern Neck Counties	4.4%	4.0%

Perhaps most impressive is Essex County's per capita taxable sales for 2004. Essex County reported taxable sales of \$145.8 million, an increase from \$89.3 million in 1993. According to information provided by the Virginia Department of Taxation and the U.S. Census Bureau, \$14,599 in per capita sales was generated from which state and local sales taxes were collected. This amount exceeded the state's per capita sales by more than \$3,800. As the primary commercial and retail center in the County, Tappahannock's taxable sales account for a large portion of Essex County's total taxable sales dollars.

Other factors showing economic growth in the region are an increased work force and rising income averages. In addition there has been an increase in the housing market in the Middle Peninsula. Comparing increases in households and populations between 1990 and 2000, the number of households has risen almost 20 percent, while population has increased by almost 15 percent. Two factors play a role in this phenomenon. First, the region is within 45 to 90 minutes travel time to the major metropolitan centers of Hampton Roads, Richmond, and parts of Northern Virginia. This allows new residents reasonable commuting time to job centers. Second, the waterfront amenities of the region have attracted many retirees from outside the area to locate here to enjoy the rural and water-related lifestyle.

The Town of Tappahannock and the County of Essex maintain a good relationship, working together to address mutual concerns. There are several reasons for this cooperation. First, the town serves as the governmental seat for the county, affording ease of communication and visibility among the leaders of each. Next, most of the county's health and public facilities are located in the town. This central location of schools, library, health department and social services, provides ease of access for both town and county residents. Also important is the fact that the civic and business interests of the town and county are not exclusive of each other. In addition, the Middle Peninsula Planning District Commission provides a forum for cooperation among local governments, including Tappahannock and Essex. This regional cooperation will likely continue to be an important asset in the future as the Virginia General Assembly's Commission on Local Government Structure and Relationships explores incentives for public service consolidation among local jurisdictions.

In summary, Tappahannock serves as a regional center for the County of Essex as well as portions of the Middle and Northern Neck peninsulas. The business and commercial activity in the town benefit the area by providing employment and a strong tax base. Being the seat of county government, Tappahannock residents enjoy easy access to county services and administrative offices.

POPULATION TRENDS AND PROJECTIONS

Recognition of the amount, distribution and timing of population growth and development are fundamental to the Town's achievement of Growth management objectives. These factors are, in turn, directly related to the cost of providing the facilities needed to support the new population and also determine non-residential growth facility needs of the Town.

The 2000 post census review for Tappahannock indicated the Town had a gain of 241 residential units since the 1990 census. During this period, the Town's population increased from 1,550 to 2,068, an increase of one-third. The Census Bureau estimates the July 2003 population of the Town at 2,155.

Figure 2-2: Current Population & Housing Estimates & Projections

Year	1990	2000	2004 (est.)	2010
Housing units	776	946	-----	1165
Population	1,710	2,068	2,144	2,567

This continued development trends scenario is one in which Tappahannock's occupied housing inventory grows at the average rate as evidenced through the period 1980 to 1998 (approximately 16 residential units annually). Population and housing forecasts shown in Figure 2-2 indicate that, by 2010 there would be 1165 housing units and about 2,567 residents in the Town. Such a

growth pattern would correspond to the continuing attractiveness of Tappahannock as a place to live and work.

The following kinds of factors will influence whether such a continued growth scenario is high or low:

- The economic growth pressures of the "urban crescent" between the Newport News and Norfolk Metropolitan areas, Richmond and northern Virginia.
- Employment opportunities in Tappahannock and Essex County.
- Construction of a Route 17/360 bypass or truck route alternate within the planning period.
- Expansion of sewer and water facilities in the Town and surrounding County service area over time.
- Growth of commercial services.
- The influence of major regional transportation improvements (Washington Bypass or I-95 corridor modifications) on regional traffic and growth patterns.
- Implementation of growth management and development strategies.
- New households can be expected to locate in the Town during the next 20-year period. The form, pattern and distribution of new development needed to accommodate this growth in population, together with the qualities of commercial and industrial development to meet these residents' shopping and employment needs, will influence a number of factors which taken together will strongly influence the future quality of life in the Town.

Cost of Public Services

Among the factors which influence quality of life are the costs to provide requisite public services to Town residents, including constructing community facilities necessary to house many of these services. The public facilities and services included include schools, roads, police protection, fire protection, recreation, water access, and provision of adequate water supplies and wastewater treatment and solid waste management facilities.

Sense of Community and Small Town Character

While the future costs of Town services are of obvious and tangible import, a number of other more subtle Town qualities can also be influenced by the amount, form, distribution and quality of growth that takes place in the Town.

Quality of the Natural Environment

Tappahannock's natural environmental assets include an extensive shoreline, broad estuarine river, forested areas, and scenic vistas of the Rappahannock. These features create a setting of notable beauty. Ironically, the development which accompanies population growth can threaten the natural features which attract people to the area.

The consumption of land by development has resulted in the loss of some of these important environmental features, and can diminish the environmental quality of the Town and its aesthetic appeal. As development proceeds, floodplains, wetlands, upland natural areas, steep slopes, and shoreline areas are altered and wildlife habitats are lost. As woodlands are cleared for development, watersheds are denuded, soil is washed into streams and rivers, and upland wildlife habitats reduced. Improper development in floodplains often results in both property and natural environmental damage from increased flooding. The loss of wetlands may result in increased runoff, erosion, siltation, water pollution, and the loss of shellfish, fish and other wildlife habitats.

GROWTH MANAGEMENT PLANNING CONSIDERATIONS

The potential growth of Tappahannock over the next 20 years underscores the need for attention to growth management. A 2005 study of vacant lands zoned for high density residential use found the lands could allow for 987 new housing units housing an estimated 1,995 additional residents. At least 350 new residents in approximately 170 new households can be expected to locate in the Town during the next 20-year period. The form, pattern and distribution of new development needed to accommodate this growth in population, together with the qualities of commercial and industrial development to meet these residents' shopping and employment needs, will influence a number of factors which taken together will strongly influence the future quality of life in the Town.

