

The RAFT

Middle Peninsula One-Year Progress Workshop

Wednesday, March 22, 2023

Executive Summary

The Middle Peninsula RAFT workshop was held virtually on March 22, 2023, and a full recording is available on [YouTube](#). The workshop was an opportunity for the RAFT core team to share tools that were developed over the course of the past year of implementation and to share information about upcoming funding opportunities and other resources available to localities. Presentations from Maria Mutuc of VDOT and Curt Smith of the Middle Peninsula Planning District Commission shared ongoing resilience efforts that complement the work of localities. A panel featuring Sherry Graham (Director of Planning, King William County), Haley Mogue (Community Health Specialist, Thrive Virginia), Spencer Cheatham (Fire Chief, Town of West Point), Tommy Hicks (Interim Chief of Emergency Services, Essex County), Stephen Moore (Disaster Program Manager American Red Cross), Dawn Shank (Former President, Mattaponi and Pamunkey Rivers Association), Jessica Gardner (Options Counselor, Bay Aging), Carla Minor-Blake (Community Outreach Liaison, Three Rivers Health District), and LuAnn Johnson (President, Virginia Master Naturalist) shared lessons learned and achievements amongst localities. Each locality has plans to continue resilience work. A full participant list is also included at the end of the meeting summary.

Welcome & RAFT Overview – *Tanya Denckla Cobb, IEN and Elizabeth Andrews VCPC*

Tanya Denckla Cobb of IEN welcomed and celebrated the work toward advancing resilience in the Middle Peninsula. She thanked the Planning District Commission (PDC) for the opportunity to work with six of the local communities and noted that there have been many iterations of the RAFT, but a number of firsts occurred in the Middle Peninsula including:

- the most community members involved from the start
- the first time the concept of resilience was broadened into concepts of equity and resilience
- our first chance to support resilience priorities in the region through mini and microgrants
- the formation of the Regional Resilience Equity Workshop (RREW) that will continue working to advance resilience in the region.



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Next, Elizabeth Andrews of VCPC provided a brief overview of The RAFT process. The goal of the RAFT is to help Virginia's coastal communities improve their resilience to flooding and other coastal storm hazards while remaining economically and socially viable. RAFT partnered with the PDC, state agencies, and community members to work through the Resilience Action Checklists. Making connections across the community is important to the RAFT. On behalf of the RAFT Team, she thanked the attendees and the communities and organizations they represent for a great year of implementation.

Tools and Resources from The RAFT – Maria Mutuc, VDOT; Jess Kraus, VCPC, and Wie Yusuf ODU

Recognizing changing hazards and threats prompted VDOT to study and identify cost-effective solutions for the impacts of hazards and threats. Ongoing planning efforts including the VA Coastal Resilience Master Plan, Flood Protection Master Plan, State Hazard Mitigation Plan, and other coordinated efforts. VDOT felt the need to align statewide and local objectives. The first step was to define resilience as “the capacity of a transportation project or strategy to anticipate, prepare for...” There is organizational support for resilience efforts. Resilience touches many groups. The Resilience Plan is a framework. The objectives include promoting data-driven decisions, engaging and coordinating with stakeholders, identifying at-risk infrastructure and prioritizing needs, finalizing resilience measures, and conducting feasibility and cost benefit analyses. The PROTECT Program can provide funding. VDOT will continue coordinating with Federal, State, and local agencies, continue outreach and engagement with communities and stakeholder groups, and continue strategy development and implementation. If someone here has a road/ infrastructure project that they think would be important for local resilience first go to your local government. You can first go to the local government for public road projects. For privately-owned infrastructure, you can use the Fight the Flood (FTF) tool.

A project with Molly Mitchell of VIMS looked at three types of infrastructure that are vulnerable to sea level rise: [roads](#), [wastewater infrastructure](#), and [wells](#). Some of this information was given during the October 31 workshop. These factsheets are available on the RAFT Website on the Reports Page. The Roads factsheet, for example, outlines the issue investigated: sea level rise impacts to road access, a blurb about state agencies who could be involved, as well as potential solutions. The solutions include code sections for the law. Some additional resources including funding, and considerations for solutions are also provided since no solution is perfect. The fact sheets include brief descriptions of case studies. FTF and pump and haul are also available solutions. You can also reference the Coastal Master Plan.

The [Resource Sheet Overview](#) is a document to provide resources that we might not have been able to cover during our Implementation Team meetings. One of the things we've honed in on is how to incorporate building resilience into the Comprehensive Planning efforts. We hosted a webinar with speakers talking about how they did that. We included some sample



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comprehensive plans. We have some videos as well. The region has updated the Hazard Mitigation Plan. The RAFT developed an emergency/risk communication planning tool that could also be beneficial for communicating risk to a wide range of stakeholders. We also have small business resilience self-assessment and guides. These tools were based on the region we're in. We've been encouraging our RAFT communities to develop Resilience Committees after implementation. We have a worksheet to help think through that as well. This is a selected list but please know that there are other resources available on the RAFT website, such as the September 7 Resilience Education Workshop that included FTF, SLR and flooding, Master Gardeners, and more.

Locality Presentations: Community Achievements & Application of RAFT Tools— *Moderator, Jessica Whitehead, ICAR*

Jessica opened the Implementation Team reports with the reminder that resilience is a marathon not a sprint.

King William - Sherry Graham – Director of Planning, King William County and Haley Moog - Community Health Specialist, Thrive Virginia

Sherry - during the past year we've been able to meet with agencies to identify needs like transportation, food, and mental health. It's been a good group of people that we've been able to work with. I would like to partner with localities nearby. We adopted our comprehensive plan last year and did address some of these issues. We're going to be in the Community Rating System program. During RAFT, we've been able to identify needs. We had the resilience workshop with the presentation, talked about living shoreline, and had a talk about affordable housing. We're working on updating our ordinances. We've identified road access issues and created a local stakeholders group. I want to reach out to the Pamunkey and Upper Mattaponi to be a part of that as well as the Town of West Point. We talked about the elderly and the disabled, we've gotten a list of churches willing to help, and reached out to the schools to see what they would be willing to provide.

Haley - one of the main things we took away was that while there was a lot of valuable discussion, a face-to-face conversation would be helpful. Resilience has many facets that are important to consider. The biggest success has been gathering diverse stakeholders and building relationships in the area. We would like to have an in-person meeting, incorporate West Point and the Tribes, and convene a stakeholder group quarterly to discuss resiliency. The RAFT process has helped Thrive VA to round out our resiliency programming.

West Point - Spencer Cheatham, Fire Chief, Town of West Point



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Spencer - we're working on hosting a FTF event. Solutions for Kirby Street have been challenging. We've reached out to some college students. We're also trying to have a study of the area done to look at the hydraulics and hydrologics. There has never been a comprehensive survey of critical infrastructure weaknesses. We identified areas that we need to concentrate on. We are looking for sources of funding for these projects. We moved from incredulity to progress. We developed a network of people we wouldn't have known about. We're confident that through these connections we will be able to continue to make progress. I'm glad that we got to meet a few times in person, it strengthens those bonds and I think it was important to do that instead of solely virtually.

Dawn requested a list of shoreline owners to use for a workshop MPRA will be putting together with the York River and Small Coastal Basin Roundtable with Circe Gonzales at VIMS on this.

Mathews - Nicole Hutton, RAFT Facilitator

Nicole - it was a very active county, thank you to all involved. I'm going to give a holistic view of how we tackled these. We expanded the group from 11-14 members. The MPPDC provided background on efforts and initiatives available and contextualized how preserving the working waterfront plan fits with the Comprehensive Plan. Locality planning staff provided background on vulnerability of shorelines and context to work within the working waterfront master plan.

Essex - Tommy Hicks, Interim Chief of Emergency Services, Essex County and Stephen Moore, Disaster Program Manager, American Red Cross

Tommy - it's been a year of transition in Essex County. We had leadership turnover and wanted to focus on how to help the county focus and tell our story. Regional plans are often a foundational element for grant funding. We have been able to make some progress. We drove home the point that blue skies are the time to talk about these issues. There were efforts put toward affordable housing and food access. We had a meeting in July that brought together our stakeholders to talk about resilience. Essex County has brought on a full time GIS person. We realized that we didn't know who was doing what. We created an emergency resource directory that is internal and will be hosted on the Town of Tappahannock's page. We're working on emergency shelters and long-term sheltering.

Stephen - we have begun the housing and sheltering strategic meetings. Essex Churches Together invited the Red Cross to present programs. Maintaining connections and continuing conversations is important. Developing strategic goals and continuity plans is important.

King and Queen - Dawn Shank, Former President, Mattaponi and Pamunkey Rivers Association and Jessica Gardner, Options Counselor, Bay Aging



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Dawn - my focus was to represent the MPRA. Our first goal was to educate shoreline owners and local residents about FTF and related programs. We sent info to people in our newsletter. We've been working with CBNERR to plan some workshops. We also wanted to increase education about and connections to the watershed and resilience. We had planned to do a river day for the K&Q sixth graders. We're planning to have it at the end of March. We do a similar program in King William. We also are trying to work on education about resilience and the importance of wetlands, septic tanks, and other issues. We've been working with CBNERR, FOR, and others. We also wanted to expand the availability of fresh food. Lots of groups including Master Gardeners, Thrive VA, and others.

Jessica - we wanted to develop a survey to determine how Bay Aging programs work. The barriers to food and medicines are transportation. Many people are unaware of Bay Aging/Transit programs. Ken Pollock is leading the RREW transit sub-group. Lessons learned include the size of the county and it's difficult to get information to people. RAFT helped form coalitions of people. One of the items that the RREW will focus on is getting local government involved.

Dawn - for the future, we plan to continue the river day annually. Thrive VA is bringing a resource center to K&Q. It's hard for people to know what's going on.

Middlesex - Carla Minor-Blake, Community Outreach Liaison, Three Rivers Health District and LuAnn Johnson, President, Virginia Master Naturalists

Carla - appreciate the RAFT team's guidance. I want to make sure that this doesn't fall away.

Luann - we cover five counties and I have a new respect of the issues we're facing. I want to get the Master Naturalists more involved in projects and take these considerations into account.

Carla - we share a lot of our RAC with King William. K&Q is the longest county, not the widest, in Virginia. We wanted to get the word out to let people know when we have events that need volunteers. We wanted to incorporate faith-based community networks and grow relationships with indigenous communities. There is a need to raise awareness of public events. Emergency preparedness is important to raise awareness about. Lessons learned - the importance of good communication, the need for community involvement, and the fact that everyone has a voice and a strength to share. "The way to get started is to quit talking and begin doing (Disney)." Continue meeting, work closely with small businesses, indigenous communities, watermen and women, and others. Think livable communities for everyone.

Resilience Planning Going Forward: Role of Localities, PDC, and Ongoing Collaboration

RAFT Fund Mini and Micro Grants to Support Continued Resilience, Nicole Hutton, ICAR



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Nicole - we started giving out these in October. A total of 14 grants were made to 12 groups. Groups have already been making progress. The PDC funded pumpouts for 33 properties. The Mattaponi addressed safety issues in their fish hatchery. The Cople Fire Department completed over 40% of its activities to inventory emergency resources. Bay Aging has financially assisted three (3) households in attaining permanent housing. We have several cross-cutting groups including Bay Aging. We are still collecting progress reports as the last round of funding was distributed in January. The full list of grantees is on the [RAFT website](#).

Regional Resilience Equity Workgroup to Support Continued Resilience, Sierra Gladfelter, IEN

Sierra - the RREW covers the 10 counties of the Middle Peninsula and Northern Neck and is supported by the Jessie Ball duPont Fund. The need for the workgroup emerged from conversations with community leaders. The core workgroup has representatives from the PDC, state tribes, nonprofits, faith organizations, DSS, and others. We had a planning phase in the fall to come up for a structure for the workgroup. The workgroup will meet monthly and are working on building out subgroups. The team co-leads are working to build out participants and will be hosting meetings that are open to anyone who is interested in participating. I would be happy to connect you with the leads of any of these groups.

MPPDC Planning Support: Fight the Flood, Curt Smith, Middle Peninsula Planning District Commission

Curt - some background, the PDC has been in existence for 50 years and active in the resilience space for the last 15-20 years. We're much more active working with businesses and citizens on resilience. I'd like to suggest that we shift back to the way things have always been. All of the next steps can be hosted through the PDC. The FTF program has come up multiple times. We're using some of the RAFT dollars to make improvements to the website. We're creating videos that should be launched in the coming months as well as the functionality. We have funds for septic repairs and living shorelines. We're still actively working for grants. We were awarded half a million dollars for a dozen shoreline construction projects on private property. We know that there may be a path forward in future rounds for that grant. We're up to \$25M in the Middle Peninsula for resilience activities. One of the questions we ask as part of the FTF survey is about shoaling needs. We're in the process of purchasing a dredge. People can log on and find solution providers for whatever their needs. Don't hesitate to reach out.

Moving Forward Together— Jesse Palma, ODU and Nicole Hutton, ICAR

Jesse led a facilitated discussion around progress made during RAFT implementation. She invited participants to respond to three questions about the RAFT process:

1. How do you move forward with resilience planning in your community while balancing all of the different pressures and needs and interests?

o Stephen Moore - competing priorities, trying to keep focus and continue communication. The RAFT has been a good way to focus.

2. Any other things that need discussion?

o Dawn - Environmental protection - connecting people to the environment. We (especially kids) are more and more disconnected until a disaster happens.

o Sierra - space for coordination around actions.

3. Suggestions for improvement?

o No

Nicole reminded participants that feedback could be shared with RAFT core team members in the anonymous [evaluation form](#) and thanked the participants and funders including:

- Jessie Ball duPont Fund
- Virginia Environmental Endowment (VEE)
- Virginia Sea Grant
- Virginia Coastal Zone Management Program (CZM) National Oceanic and Atmospheric Administration (NOAA)

Meeting Attendees

1. Jess Kraus – RAFT Team & Staff Attorney, Virginia Coastal Policy Center
2. Sierra Gladfelter – IEN at UVA, RAFT Associate
3. Maddy Duval – IEN at UVA, RAFT SRA
4. Sophie Delzell – IEN at UVA, RAFT SRA
5. Tanya Denckla Cobb – IEN at UVA
6. Libby Cook – RAFT Team & Fiscal and Program Coordinator VA Coastal Policy Center, W&M Law School
7. Elizabeth Andrews - RAFT Team & Director, VA Coastal Policy Center, W&M Law School
8. Jess Whitehead – RAFT Team & Executive Director, ODU Institute for Coastal Adaptation and Resilience (ICAR)
9. Nicole Hutton - RAFT Team & Assistant Director, Institute for Coastal Adaptation and Resilience
10. Wie Yusuf – ODU School of Public Service
11. Curt Smith - Middle Peninsula Planning District Commission
12. Jesse Palma – Student at ODU
13. Dr. Melissa Mason – Mathews County
14. Alan Walker – Assistant Director, Multifamily Housing Development at Bay Aging
15. Carla Minor-Blake
16. Christina Ruszczyk-Murray – Extension Agent, King William and King and Queen Counties
17. Dawn Shank – Mattaponi and Pamunkey Rivers Association
18. Deborah Briggs*
19. Haley Moog – Community Health Specialist, Thrive VA
20. Jessica Gardner – Options Counselor, Bay Aging

21. Jonathan Matthews*
22. Kathleen Hughes – Essex Churches Together
23. Rev. Kristie Askew – Executive Director, GUEST Shelter
24. Libby Bieri – Friends of the Rappahannock
25. Lisa Deaton - Virginia Department of Forestry
26. Luann Johnson - President, Virginia Master Naturalists
27. Maria Mutuc – VDOT
28. Shaleigh Howells – Pamunkey Indian Tribe, Cultural Resource Director; KWC Museum Director
29. Sherry Graham – Director of Planning, KWC
30. Stephen Moore – Disaster Program Manager, American Red Cross
31. Will Isenberg – VA CZM Program
32. Zoom User*
33. Ken Pollock – Transit Director, Bay Aging
34. Chris*
35. Aaron Wendt – VA Dept of Conservation and Recreation, Shoreline Erosion Advisory Service (SEAS)
36. Andrew Terry – Assistant Emergency Manager, King William County
37. Audrey Mitchell – Mattaponi and Pamunkey Rivers Association, King William County
38. Cindee Dickens – Community Engagement Liaison, American Red Cross KWC, K&Q County
39. Dana Smook – Essex Public Library
40. Danette Machen – Mathews County
41. Cornelius Holmes – First Baptist Church, Just Harvest

* did not have their full name and/or role displayed

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