

## 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 micro-grants;
- 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, as there is strong organizational support for working on resilience efforts. Specific 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 is one example that 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 localities have road or other infrastructure project that they think would be important for local resilience, they are advised to first go to their local governments. For privately-owned infrastructure, localities or residents can contact the Middle Peninsula Planning District through the Fight the Flood (FTF) tool.

Next, Molly Mitchell of VIMS discussed a project examining three types of infrastructure that are vulnerable to sea level rise: [roads](#), [wastewater infrastructure](#), and [wells](#). Some of this information was shared directly with Middle Peninsula localities during the October 31<sup>st</sup> regional implementation team meeting on septic and well-water vulnerabilities. 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.

The [Resource Sheet Overview](#), developed by The RAFT Project Team, was created to provide resources that localities might access or apply for following the formal year of RAFT Implementation. During the year of implementation, The RAFT Project Team has also supported localities on incorporating resilience into their Comprehensive Planning efforts. We hosted a



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webinar with speakers from various localities talking about how they accomplished this successfully and provided examples of model Comprehensive Plans. Videos from this workshop are also available on The RAFT website.

The RAFT Project Team also developed an emergency/risk communication planning tool that could also be beneficial for communicating risk to a wide range of stakeholders moving forward. The RAFT website also curates a number of other useful tools for localities including a small business resilience self-assessment, and worksheet to assist localities in developing a long-term Resilience Committee to advance resilience objectives beyond The RAFT's formal implementation. These tools may have been developed as a pilot with a past locality or region, but are designed to be applicable in other contexts and communities. These tools and other resources are available on The RAFT website's [Resources page](#).

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

Sherry Graham, Director of Planning with King William County, shared that during the past year of implementation, the county Implementation Team met with various agencies to identify needs like transportation, food, and mental health. She expressed appreciation for the diversity of new contacts and networks built through the process and noted that moving forward, King William County would like to partner more closely with localities nearby. Sherry noted that the County adopted their Comprehensive Plan last year and was able to address some of the issues identified through The RAFT. Sherry also noted that King William County would be joining the Community Rating System (CRS) program. Through The RAFT, and resilience workshops coordinated by The RAFT Project Team, the County also engaged in discussions around living shorelines and how affordable housing and access for the elderly is connected to broader resilience issues. Moving forward, King William County will be working on updating its ordinances, and addressing road access issues through the creation of a local stakeholders group. Shery expressed interested in also reaching out to the Pamunkey and Upper Mattaponi Tribes as well as the Town of West Point to be part of some of these new initiatives.

Next, Haley Moog, a Community Health Specialist with Thrive Virginia, reflected on her engagement as a representative of a nonprofit organization with The RAFT process in King William County. The biggest success has been gathering diverse stakeholders and building relationships in the area. Haley shared that one of the main things she took away from The



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RAFT process was that a lot of valuable discussion took place and networking between new partners that could continue to be advanced through more face-to-face work in the future. She noted that King William County and partners would like to have an in-person meeting, incorporating West Point and the Tribes, and convene a stakeholder group quarterly to discuss resiliency. The RAFT process has helped Thrive VA to also round out their resiliency programming.

***Town of West Point: Spencer Cheatham, Fire Chief, Town of West Point***

Spencer Cheatham, Fire Chief for the Town of West Point, offered reflections from the Town of West Point's participation in The RAFT process and next steps. Spencer shared that the town has been working on hosting a Fight the Flood event that they would like to continue collaborating on in the future. Solutions for Kirby Street have been infrastructure projects in the Town that continue to be challenging. College students at RAFT partner universities have been contacted and consulted and the Town is now 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. Through The RAFT, West Point has identified areas that we need to concentrate on for effective resilience planning moving forward. The Town will be looking for sources of funding for these projects. Spencer noted that the Town of West Point also had several in-person meetings throughout the year of implementation that helped to strengthen new relationships and bonds that are critical to effective resilience work. "We moved from incredulity to progress," Spencer reflected. "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."

***Mathews County: Nicole Hutton, Old Dominion University, RAFT Facilitator***

Next, Nicole Hutton with Old Dominion University, and member of The RAFT Project Team, provided an update on progress made in Mathews County during RAFT Implementation. Nicole noted that Mathews County had a very active implementation team of 14 members, and The RAFT very grateful for the robust participation. 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 County: Tommy Hicks, Interim Chief of Emergency Services, Essex County and Stephen Moore, Disaster Program Manager, American Red Cross***

Tommy Hicks, Interim Chief of Emergency Services for Essex County provided an update on Essex County, noting that for Emergency Management and Operations it has been a year of transition. Tommy noted that the County had a significant amount of leadership turnover in the



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past year. Regional plans are often a foundational element for grant funding, but the institutional knowledge and partnerships has to be there to begin with. Tommy noted how the Essex County Implementation Team recognized that “blue skies” are the time to talk about inclusive emergency response and resilience planning. Additionally, other more structural barriers that the community faces such as access to affordable housing and food can radically exacerbate the vulnerability of certain communities and make it difficult for them to respond in a crisis. Through The RAFT, Tommy Hicks and partner organizations facilitated an in-person meeting in July that brought together stakeholders across the county to discuss an equity-focused approach to emergency response and tangible ways Essex County can improve its services. The outputs of this conversation helped the County identify concrete gaps and needs it would have to address to build a more community-driven EMS program. “We realized that we didn’t know who was doing what,” Tommy reflected. “With support from The RAFT, we created an emergency resource directory that is internal and will be hosted on the Town of Tappahannock’s page.” Through relationships built through The RAFT and formalized at the July meeting, the County is continuing to work on emergency shelters and long-term sheltering issues.

Stephen Moore with the American Red Cross also added that Essex County and The RAFT Implementation Team have also held a series of housing and sheltering strategic meetings. Essex Churches Together invited the Red Cross to present programs, and they will be maintaining connections and continuing conversations after The RAFT’s formal implementation. Developing strategic goals and continuity plans is important, and many of the participating organizations in the Essex RAFT Implementation Team are committed to this work moving forward.

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

Dawn Shank, Former President of the Mattaponi and Pamunkey Rivers Association (MPRA) shared some reflections from her engagement with the King and Queen County RAFT Implementation Process. “Our first goal was to educate shoreline owners and local residents about Fight the Flood and related programs,” Dawn shared. MPRA helped to distribute information to community members and residents through their newsletter about how to engage with and benefit from the Middle Peninsula PDC’s Fight the Flood Program. During the course of The RAFT process, King and Queen County Implementation partners applied for funding to offer some additional resilience education workshops through the Chesapeake Bay National Estuarine Research Reserve (CBNERR) in Virginia.

Dawn shared that another King and Queen County resilience goal was to increase education about and connections to the watershed and resilience. The RAFT Implementation Team had

planned to do a River Day for the King and Queen County Public School's sixth graders. Due to several cancelations because of inclement weather, the new date was set for the end of March 2023. During the course of RAFT Implementation, the King and Queen County RAFT Implementation Team also worked on education about resilience and the importance of protecting ground and surface water from failed septic tanks. CBNERR, MPRA, Friends of the Rappahannock, and others have been collaborating on a public engagement and education campaign with funding from a RAFT mini grant. There are other initiatives that RAFT supported in the county, including work on expanding the availability of fresh food with Just Harvest, Thrive VA, and others.

Jessica Gardner, an Options Counselor with Bay Aging, provided a brief updated on a survey The RAFT Team and Bay Aging designed and distributed across the region to determine how Bay Aging programs are being perceived, accessed, and could be improved in the region. The survey results confirmed that barriers to food and medicine access include transportation. Many people are unaware of Bay Aging and Bay Transit programs, and greater outreach and awareness around programs that already exist is critical. Ken Pollock with Bay Transit is leading the Regional Resilience Equity Workgroup (RREW)s Transit Subgroup, which will be a critical space for transit related resilience issues in the region to be advanced post-RAFT. RAFT helped form coalitions of people, and the RREW will serve as a critical space to continue to focus on getting local government involved in solutions.

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

Carla Minor-Blake, a Community Outreach Liaison with the Three Rivers Health District, and LuAnn Johnson with Virginia Master Naturalists, provided a summary of some of the activities pursued in Middlesex County during The RAFT's year of implementation. Both expressed appreciation for The RAFT Team's guidance and expressed commitment to keep momentum up moving forward.

Carla reflected that Middlesex County shares a lot of similar resilience priorities and challenges with King William County, which provides opportunities for trans-county collaboration. It is particularly important to get the word out regionally when there are opportunities for solutions to be addressed across multiple counties, or when there are events that need volunteers or that can serve the needs of nearby residents. Through The RAFT, Middlesex County wanted to incorporate faith-based community networks and grow relationships with Indigenous communities. Emergency preparedness is one particular space where coordination can continue to be advanced through effective partnerships facilitated by The RAFT. LuAnn also noted that Virginia Master Naturalists cover five counties in the region and can continue to be a resource and education vehicle for resilience efforts in Middlesex County and the region.



Lessons learned through the Middlesex County RAFT process, Carla and LuAnn noted, include: the importance of good communication, the need for robust 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,” Carla insisted. “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, Old Dominion University***

Next, Nicole Hutton with Old Dominion University provided a summary of The RAFT Fund’s Mini and Micro Grant program that was offered to localities, Tribes, and community organizations in the 10-county Northern Neck and Middle Peninsula region with generous funding from the Jessie Ball duPont Fund. A total of 14 grants were made to 12 organizations. Groups have already been making progress and reporting on a diversity of effective projects that address resilience with some focus on equity. The Middle Peninsula Planning District Commission, for example, funded septic pumpouts for 33 low-income households. The Mattaponi Tribe 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 households in attaining permanent housing. The RAFT Project Team is still collecting progress reports as the last round of funding distributed in January. The full list of grantees and details about the awards is on the [funding page of The RAFT website](#).

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

Sierra Gladfelter, Associate with the University of Virginia Institute for Engagement & Negotiation provided an overview of the Regional Resilience Equity Workgroup (RREW), which was established in January of 2023 to coordinate on issues at the intersection of equity and resilience. 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 during the Northern Neck and Middle Peninsula RAFT Implementation processes. The core workgroup has representatives from the Planning District Commissions, state and federally recognized Tribes, nonprofits, faith organizations, Departments of Social Services, and other critical service providers. The planning phase for the workgroup was conducted in the fall to come up for a structure and series of subgroups. The workgroup will meet monthly and are working on building out subgroups focused on critical issues including: 1) Economic Development & Living Wages, 2) Health and Mental Well-being, 3)

Affordable Housing and Shelters, 4) Transit, 5) Food Security, and 6) Programs for Youth and Families. 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. Please contact Sierra Gladfelter at [sg6us@virginia.edu](mailto:sg6us@virginia.edu) for more details on how to engage the core workgroup or subgroups.

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

Next, Curt Smith with the Middle Peninsula Planning District Commission (MPPDC) provided some background on the PDC, which 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,” Curt noted. As the formal RAFT process comes to a close in the region, Curt suggested that next steps can be hosted and facilitated by the PDC. The Fight the Flood program, in particular, has come up multiple times and can continue to be a long-term resilience resource and portal for addressing needs regionally. Curt noted that thanks to the RAFT Mini and Micro-grants provided by Jessie Ball duPont Fund, the MPPDC has been using some of the RAFT dollars to make improvements to their website. “We’re creating videos that should be launched in the coming months as well as greater functionality. We have funds for septic repairs and living shorelines.”

Curt emphasized that the MPPDC is still actively working for grants to bring resilience resources to the Middle Peninsula region. “We were awarded half a million dollars for a dozen shoreline construction projects on private property,” Curt shared. “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.” All localities are encouraged to reach out to the MPPDC for any needs and assistance with resilience moving forward.

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

Finally, Jesse Palma with Old Dominion University 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 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 Environmental protection - connecting people to the environment. We (especially children) are more and more disconnected until a disaster happens.



- o Space for coordination around actions.

### 3. Suggestions for improvement?

- o No specific suggestions were shared.

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



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| <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>28. Shaleigh Howells – Pamunkey Indian Tribe, Cultural Resource Director; KWC Museum Director</li> <li>29. Sherry Graham – Director of Planning, KWC</li> <li>30. Stephen Moore – Disaster Program Manager, American Red Cross</li> <li>31. Will Isenberg – VA CZM Program</li> <li>32. Zoom User*</li> <li>33. Ken Pollock – Transit Director, Bay Aging</li> <li>34. Chris*</li> <li>35. Aaron Wendt – VA Dept of Conservation and Recreation, Shoreline Erosion Advisory Service (SEAS)</li> </ul> | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>36. Andrew Terry – Assistant Emergency Manager, King William County</li> <li>37. Audrey Mitchell – Mattaponi and Pamunkey Rivers Association, King William County</li> <li>38. Cindee Dickens – Community Engagement Liaison, American Red Cross KWC, K&amp;Q County</li> <li>39. Dana Smook – Essex Public Library</li> <li>40. Danette Machen – Mathews County</li> <li>41. Cornelius Holmes – First Baptist Church, Just Harvest</li> </ul> |
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\* did not have their full name and/or role displayed

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