

**Northumberland County Planning Commission  
November 21, 2019  
Minutes**

The regular monthly meeting of the Northumberland County Planning Commission was held on November 21, 2019 at 7:00 p.m. in the New Courthouse at Heathsville, VA with the following attendance:

Chris Cralle	Absent	Garfield Parker	Present
Vivian Diggs	Present	Albert Penley, Jr.	Absent
Alfred Fisher	Present	Wellington Shirley, Jr.	Absent
Ed King	Present	Heidi Wilkins-Corey	Present
Patrick O'Brien	Present	Charles Williams	Present
Richard Haynie	Present		

Others in attendance:  
Stuart McKenzie (County Planner)

**RE: CALL TO ORDER**

The meeting was called to order by Mr. Fisher.

Ed King gave the invocation.

Alfred Fisher led the Commission in the Pledge of Allegiance to the Flag.

**RE: AGENDA**

Chairman Fisher asked if there is a motion to approve the agenda, Mr. O'Brien made the motion and Mr. Williams seconded. All members voted for the motion, and none against. Details on the vote are below:

Chris Cralle	Absent	Garfield Parker	Aye
Vivian Diggs	Aye	Albert Penley, Jr.	Absent
Alfred Fisher	Aye	Wellington Shirley, Jr.	Absent
Ed King	Aye	Heidi Wilkins-Corey	Aye
Patrick O'Brien	Aye	Charles Williams	Aye
Richard Haynie	Aye		

**RE: MINUTES- September 19, 2019**

With a motion from Mr. O'Brien, seconded by Mr. Williams, and approved by all, the September 19, 2019 minutes were approved. The vote was as follows:

Chris Cralle	Absent	Garfield Parker	Aye
Vivian Diggs	Aye	Albert Penley, Jr.	Absent
Alfred Fisher	Aye	Wellington Shirley, Jr.	Absent
Ed King	Aye	Heidi Wilkins-Corey	Aye
Patrick O'Brien	Aye	Charles Williams	Aye
Richard Haynie	Aye		

**RE: COMMISSIONERS' COMMENTS**

There were no commissioner's comments.

**RE: STAFF MEMBERS' COMMENTS**

There were no staff member comments.

**RE: CITIZENS' COMMENTS**

There were no citizen's comments

**RE: PUBLIC HEARINGS**

There were no public hearings.

**RE: WORK SESSION ITEMS**

There were no Work Session Items scheduled

**RE: DISCUSSION ITEMS**

Chairman Fisher stated that we would be discussing Potential Public Water Access Sites, focusing on a possible Canoe/Kayak Launch next to the Great Wicomico Fishing Pier, and asked staff begin the discussion. Mr. McKenzie stated that he, at the request of the Chairman, requested support letters for the canoe/kayak launch site at the Great Wicomico Fishing Pier from the Northern Neck Chesapeake Bay Public Access Authority (NNCBPAA) and the Northern Neck Tourism Commission (NNTC). Mr. Fisher stated that the support letter the county received was very favorable, and should help our effort to acquire the site for use as a canoe/kayak launch. Staff related that Mr. Davis chose to write one letter on behalf of the Northern Neck Planning District Commission, instead of two letters for each entity described above. Staff indicated that he would have preferred two letters supporting the proposed project, however that is not the case. Mr. McKenzie stated that this letter does give us additional support for the project. Mr. McKenzie stated he wanted to update the Commission on other efforts regarding the proposed canoe/kayak launch project. On October 29, 2019, Mr. McKenzie related, he attended a Virginia Outdoors Plan Update meeting at the NNPDC in Warsaw. At that meeting, Mr. McKenzie stated that he and others met with Ms. Robbie Ruhr from the Virginia Department of Conservation and Recreation (DCR) for an information gathering

session for the upcoming revision of the Virginia Outdoors Plan next year. After hearing about our proposed canoe/kayak launch project, Ms. Ruhr informed those present that the State has a MOU (Memorandum of Understanding) Committee whose goal is to increase public water access on land owned by VDOT. The MOU Committee has representatives from DCR, Department of Game and Inland Fisheries (VDGIF) and VDOT. Staff relayed that Ms. Ruhr and the MOU Committee are looking for local government sponsors that want to create public water access sites in their jurisdiction on VDOT land, where it is appropriate, and our proposed canoe/kayak project fits their mission goal exactly. Ms. Ruhr stated that she might be able to help Northumberland County in convincing VDOT to allow the county to use the VDOT land under the Rt. 200 Bridge. Mr. McKenzie stated that Ms. Ruhr emailed all of the MOU committee members about the possibility of this project in Northumberland County. Mr. McKenzie stated that he is encouraged by the fact that according to Ms. Ruhr, there are only a handful of these projects in the State and that our project seems like a perfect fit for the MOU Committee to work on. Mr. McKenzie stated that he has changed his approach to this project, instead of leasing the land from VDOT, he thinks it is advantageous for the county to enter into an MOU with VDOT, and thus avoid a lease. Mr. Ruhr seems like she is on the county's side, and wants to see this proposed canoe launch to come to fruition.

Mr. McKenzie stated that when he approached VDOT about the possibility of the county using the land under the bridge for a canoe/kayak launch, they asked the county to investigate who owns the oyster leases adjacent to the shoreline under the bridge. Staff stated that VDOT Right of Way Division owns the oyster lease, and that is good, because we won't be impacting a waterman's oyster harvest area. In addition, VDOT wanted county staff to investigate the property owners nearby and send any information we could find regarding land ownership. Mr. McKenzie stated that he pulled the deed for the Great Wicomico Fishing Pier, and for the property directly to the east of the Rt, 200 bridge. Mr. McKenzie noted, that just as Chairman Fisher had described, the area to the east of the bridge is the Common Area of the Wicomico Bluffs subdivision. In fact, the deed for the common area has a VDOT highway drawing that depicts the property, so Mr. McKenzie included that so VDOT could reference the property in relation to their bridge property. Mr. Fisher had stated previously that the turnaround under the bridge was a concession that VDOT made to appease the homeowners of Wicomico Bluffs, for taking away their access road for their common area when the Rt. 200 bridge was replaced and the road moved to the east. The access to the common area now is through a gate in the fence under the bridge on the east side of the bridge property, although the community pier has long since rotted away. Mr. McKenzie stated that he sent all the information he gathered that was requested to VDOT to the Northern Neck VDOT resident engineer and Scott Gagnon, also with VDOT. Mr. McKenzie read the email he sent to VDOT, noting that the VMRC Oyster Lease Number was 13324, and also noting all of the attachments included. Mr. McKenzie stated in the email that the county would like to sign an MOU with VDOT to be able use the property. Mr. McKenzie stated he expects it will take a while for VDOT to work on this, and reminded commissioners that he was told that this process will take some time work through the VDOT bureaucracy.

Chairman Fisher asked if the question came as to why we need this canoe launch, or the closest water access point from the proposed site? Mr. McKenzie stated that no, that question has not been asked. Mr. McKenzie stated that upstream the closet public boat launch is Coopers Landing (about 3 river miles upstream) and Cranes Creek Landing (about 6 river miles downstream).

Mr. McKenzie stated that he went and visited the site today to refresh his memory of the site, and he also stated he took some photographs of the proposed site under the Rt. 200 Bridge, which he passed around to the members. Mr. McKenzie went on to explain the orientation of each of the photos, the first photo is when you are standing on the access road looking down to the river, and the two reflectors show each side of the road leading under the bridge. Staff noted that there are some significant gullies in the road leading under the bridge, and the road is pretty steep, so there will have to be some work done to smooth out the eroded gullies in the road. Mr. McKenzie stated that the second photo shows the left hand side of the shoreline directly adjacent to the county fishing pier. Mr. McKenzie told those present that he thought that was where Mr. Fisher wanted the canoe/kayak launch to be situated. Staff stated that when he walked down on the left side, there is about a four foot high wall of rip rap stone that drops directly into the water, which would not be conducive to launching canoes or kayaks. Mr. McKenzie stated he thought a better place would be in the middle of the shoreline, between the two bridge pilings, as the rip rap is set back about ten feet from the waterline, and there is a natural dip in the rip rap where someone created a footpath to walk down to the water. Mr. Fisher stated he was thinking the left side would be best to avoid being under the bridge and closer the fishing pier which may make VDOT more secure in allowing us to use the site. Chairman Fisher stated that if VDOT is OK with the county using the middle of the shoreline that is great, as we do not want to disturb any of the rip rap that protects the bridge. Mr. Williams asked why don't we get VDOT down at the site and meet to discuss which options they would prefer. Mr. McKenzie stated that is what he would like to do, but are waiting for VDOT to process the information, and open a dialogue to set up that site visit. That would be the next step, staff related and he would notify the commissioner's when that site visit would take place, and would hope that some of the commissioners could try to attend the on site meeting. Mr. McKenzie reminded the members that currently a water trail exists on the Upper Great Wicomico River that links Coopers Landing with Bush Mill Stream Natural Area Preserve, and the water trail is available for viewing at [viriniawatertrails.org](http://viriniawatertrails.org). Mr. McKenzie stated that with the creation of another canoe/kayak launch down river, that water trail could be extended. Mr. O'Brien asked when the photo was taken with regards to tides, and it was determined it was near high tide.

Chairman Fisher noted that at some point we need to determine the proposed project cost, and asked about funding available. Mr. McKenzie noted that Northumberland County has approximately \$14,000 of funds in the Northumberland County account of the Northern Neck Chesapeake Bay Public Access Authority. Mr. McKenzie also said that there is possible grant money from the VDGIF Boating Access Fund, the Virginia Recreational Saltwater Fishing Development Fund, but both require you maintain the site for 20 years after construction, as well as other conditions. Mr. McKenzie prefaced his estimate of proposed project cost that he was no developer or had experience with construction, but stated what we discussed should cost between \$10,000 and \$15,000. Chairman Fisher agreed. Mr. Parker asked if Hampton Hall Landing is out of consideration at this time. Chairman Fisher stated that if you have to install a turn lane, then it would be, because that in an of itself would cost \$30,000. Mr. McKenzie stated that there is more acreage there, but the water depth is much more shallow in Hampton Hall, a little less than 3 feet deep. Mr. McKenzie stated he has not given up on Hampton Hall Landing, but it is on a main highway, and VDOT has access management measures that very well may require a right turn lane, which would increase the cost significantly. Mr. Parker then asked about

Rowes Landing. Mr. McKenzie stated that Rowes Landing was functional as far as he knew. Mr. Fisher stated he liked that staff are keeping that in mind, because this county has 450 miles of shoreline and very little for the citizens, or the tourists to enjoy the water. Chairman Fisher stated that we are blessed with several boat ramps throughout the county, and this is just another access point for smaller non-powered vessels. Mr. Fisher stated that there is a lot of people in the county that can't afford waterfront land, and they should be able to enjoy the waters of the county as much as waterfront landowners if they so choose. Chairman Fisher state that we need access for recreational as well as commercial use, because that is becoming more important these days. Mr. McKenzie noted that approximately 2.5 miles from Hampton Hall Landing, there is a public boat landing in the village of Kinsale in Westmoreland County. Mr. McKenzie stated that would be a nice sheltered, short, beginner water trail sometime in the future. Mr. Parker asked if there is nothing that can be done at Cedar Landing? Chairman Fisher stated that there is not enough land to make any improvements, it is only a little more than 0.25 acres, just like Sampson's Wharf across the river. Mr. Parker then asked are there abandoned oyster houses along the rivers? Chairman Fisher stated that there are many abandoned seafood house worth hundreds of thousands of dollars in the county, and some of them have had condos built over top of them.

Mr. McKenzie reminded all that VDOT had told staff that this would not be a quick process and make take quite a while for a decision to be made, but he felt we are making progress. Ms. Wilkins asked that if we can go the MOU route, it might take less time, and staff stated he hoped so. Mr. Parker asked if the Sunnybank Ferry is still in use. Mr. McKenzie stated that as far as he knew it was, and Ms. Wilkins agreed.

Chairman Fisher noted that the county is willing to compromise to meet VDOT's requirements, if need be, but it looks like we are making forward progress, and thanked Staff for his work. Chairman Fisher asked if anyone had asked about finances for the project, and staff stated not yet.

Chairman Fisher noted that he asked Staff to review the sign ordinance of the county. Mr. McKenzie gave a quick overview of the sign ordinance, Chapter 148, Article XII, Sign Regulations. Chairman Fisher asked if there are any color requirements, and staff stated no, that is not part of the ordinance. Mr. Williams asked if he could erect a sign off the highway between Reedville and Heathsville? Staff replied, you have to get a zoning permit for the sign. Mr. Williams asked is this for revenue or for restrictions? Staff stated both, revenue for the zoning administrator to go out an inspect the sign to make sure it meets the criteria in the zoning application, and to make sure that the sign conforms to our adopted standards. Mr. Haynie clarified that the sign has to be within 100 feet of a business, you can't just put a sign in a field, because we do not want to clutter up the roadside views.

Mr. McKenzie also summarized Chapter 50, Cemeteries section of the County Ordinances. Staff noted this ordinance is mainly applicable to commercial cemeteries, that is for profit cemeteries. Mr. Parker asked about abandoned cemeteries. Staff indicated that there are State Laws that prohibit disturbance of the dead. Chairman Fisher stated that there are abandoned cemeteries throughout the county.

Staff asked the Chairman if the Commission wanted to have a December Planning Commission Meeting, and the consensus was no. Staff duly noted that the next meeting will be in 2020.

**RE: PUBLIC COMMENTS**

There were no comments from the public.

**RE: PUBLIC HEARING**

There were no public hearings at this meeting.

**RE: ADJOURNMENT**

With a motion from Mr. O'Brien, seconded by Mr. Williams, and approved by all, the meeting was adjourned at 7:59 pm. The vote was as follows:

Chris Cralle	Absent	Garfield Parker	Aye
Vivian Diggs	Aye	Albert Penley, Jr.	Absent
Alfred Fisher	Aye	Wellington Shirley, Jr.	Absent
Ed King	Aye	Heidi Wilkins-Corey	Aye
Patrick O'Brien	Aye	Charles Williams	Aye
Richard Haynie	Aye		