

*Planning Commission: Jeffrey Adler, Katherine Grier, Cynthia Holdren, John Labadie, Jim McGowan, Paul Weitzel*  
*Mayor: Fletcher Fosque | Town Manager: Matt Spuck*

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**Planning Commission**  
**April 7, 2025**  
**6:00 PM Council Chambers**  
**Agenda**

- 1) Call to order
- 2) Attendance – establish quorum
- 3) Approve minutes from March 3, 2025
- 4) Public comment
- 5) New Business
  - a) Review and Discuss the Comprehensive Plan Process
- 6) Old Business
  - a) None
- 7) Town Manager update
- 8) Commissioner comments
- 9) Adjourn

**Town of Onancock**  
**Planning Commission Meeting**  
**March 3, 2025**  
**6:00 PM**

- 1) **Call to Order** – Chairperson Grier called the meeting to order at 6:00 PM.
- 2) **Attendance/Establish Quorum** – Commissioners Jeff Adler, Cindy Holdren, Paul Weitzel and Chairperson Grier were present. Commissioners John Labadie and Jim McGowan were not present. Town Manager Matt Spuck and Town Clerk Debbie Caton were also present.
- 3) **Approval of November 4, 2024, and February 3, 2025, meeting minutes** – Commissioner Weitzel moved to approve the meeting minutes with amendments. Commissioner Adler seconded the motion. The motion passed with a 4-0 vote. A quorum was established.
- 4) **Old Business**
  - a. **Discussion of bylaw revisions** – Commissioner Holdren discussed her revisions to the bylaws. The revisions were also sent to Town Manager Spuck via email. Town Manager Spuck will forward the revisions to the town attorney for approval. The final bylaws will be voted on at the next Planning Commission meeting scheduled for Monday, April 7, 2025.
  - b. **Setting VA Freedom of Information Act training (VFOIA)**– The Town of Eastville is hosting VFOIA training by Michelle Gowdy with the Virginia Municipal League. The training is Tuesday, March 18, 2025. All commissioners will attend this in person training or do the on-line certification before the next Planning Commission meeting scheduled for Monday, April 7, 2025.
- 5) **New Business**
  - a. **Comprehensive plan: discussion of timeline and process**
    - i. Public comment – no public comments.
    - ii. Commissioner comments – Chairperson Grier will divide up the responsibilities at the next meeting.
  - b. **Discussion of “Planned Unit Developments;” distribution of Eastern Shore Post article**
    - i. Public comment – no public comments.
    - ii. Commissioner comments – The commissioners will review the article to help with the process for developing the comprehensive plan.
  - c. **Develop a process for sharing early information on proposed development and zoning request.**
    - i. Public comment – no public comments.
    - ii. Commissioner comments – All discussion will take place once an application has been submitted for consideration.

**Town of Onancock  
Planning Commission Meeting  
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6:00 PM**

- 6) **Public Comments** - no comments.
- 7) **Commissioner comments** – No commissioner comments.
- 8) **Adjourn** – Commissioner Holdren moved to adjourn the meeting. Commissioner Adler seconded the motion. The motion passed with a 4-0 vote. The meeting adjourned at 7:21 PM.



***Town Council:***

*Bob Bloxom, Ray Burger, Thelma Gillespie, Joy Marino, Sarah Nock and Maphis Oswald*

*Mayor: Fletcher Fosque | Town Manager: Matt Spuck*

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# **COMPREHENSIVE PLAN**

**ADOPTED BY TOWN COUNCIL**

**9/27/21**



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## ONANCOCK

The Town of Onancock is located on the Eastern Shore of Virginia in Accomack County, as shown in Figure 1, Location Map. Onancock is located at the headwaters of Onancock Creek, approximately four miles east of the Chesapeake Bay. Onancock's corporate limits cover 655 acres, approximately one square mile. The 2019 demographic information estimates the population for Onancock at 1,098.

### History

The Eastern Shore of Virginia and the Onancock area were originally inhabited by Native Americans. Captain John Smith explored the Chesapeake Bay region in 1608-1609, and his logbook shows that they sailed near the mouth of Onancock Creek and Tangier Island. Onancock is believed to be the Native American name for "Foggy Place".

Onancock's European history spans over four centuries since English settlement in the late 1600's. In 1680 the Virginia General Assembly passed an "act of cohabitation" requiring certain areas to set aside 50 acres for the development of ports and market towns. The lands were to be parceled into half-acre lots and sold for 100 pounds of tobacco. The deep-water harbor at the head of Onancock Creek was selected as one of Virginia's six original tobacco ports. Originally named Port Scarborough, the port came to be called Onancock. A courthouse was erected in Onancock and court was held here until 1693, when court functions moved to Accomac.

Onancock prospered from its favorable setting at the head of Onancock Creek. During the 17<sup>th</sup> and 18<sup>th</sup> centuries, tobacco warehousing and shipping established Onancock as an important community and port of trade. During the 19<sup>th</sup> century, grain trade and agricultural products gained dominance over the tobacco industry. Onancock was the principal center in the county for shipping produce to Baltimore, becoming one of the busiest ports on the Delmarva Peninsula. Grain and produce warehouses dominated the shoreline and most merchants owned one or more shipping vessels. Incorporated in 1882, the Town of Onancock served as Accomack County's leading port and commercial center through the early 20<sup>th</sup> century.

Development of the railroad in 1884 marked the beginning of Onancock's slow decline as a shipping port. Steamships continued passenger and freight service into the 1930's, when the Great Depression forced most lines to go out of business. The Town now serves primarily as a residential community with a downtown business district located within walking distance of the harbor and Onancock Wharf. The harbor area is used by pleasure boats, working watermen, and commercial barges delivering gravel. The Onancock's waterfront location, scenic beauty and historical character make it a popular destination for visitors.

Figure 1, Onancock Location Map



## The Comprehensive Plan

A Comprehensive Plan is an official public document adopted by a local government to be used as a guide for making policy decisions about the physical and social development of a community. The comprehensive plan includes an inventory and analysis of existing conditions in the community, proposed goals and actions based upon this analysis, future plans, and implementation strategies to achieve desired goals through managing land use and physical development. All land use controls, including zoning and subdivision ordinances, should be in accord with the comprehensive plan.

Recognizing the need and value for local planning within each area of the Commonwealth, the Virginia General Assembly adopted [Section 15.2-2223 of the Code of Virginia](#), which requires that each city, county, or town develop and adopt a comprehensive plan. Section 15.2-2223 states, "The comprehensive plan shall be made with the purpose of guiding and accomplishing a coordinated, adjusted, and harmonious development of the territory which will, in accordance with present and probable future needs and resources to best promote the health, safety, morals, order, convenience, prosperity, and general welfare of the inhabitants."

Due to the long-term purpose of the Comprehensive Plan, the Planning Commission must regularly review the Plan and update its contents to keep pace with events and development affecting the Town's well-being. Additionally, the Comprehensive Plan serves as a Strategic Planning document for the Town as directed by §15.2-4209 through §15.2-4212. As required by the Code of Virginia, the Comprehensive Plan shall be reviewed by the Planning Commission at least once every five years to determine whether it is advisable to amend the plan.

### The Chesapeake Bay Preservation Act

In 1989 the Virginia General Assembly, recognizing the economic and social importance of ensuring the long-term viability of state waters and in particular the Chesapeake Bay and its tributaries, enacted by the Chesapeake Bay Preservation Act. The original Act (§10.1-2100 et seq.) was repealed, and the Town is now following § 62.1-44.15:67 - Cooperative state-local program, which reads in part:

A. Healthy state and local economies and a healthy Chesapeake Bay are integrally related; balanced economic development and water quality protection are not mutually exclusive. The protection of the public interest in the Chesapeake Bay, its tributaries, and other state waters and the promotion of the general welfare of the people of the Commonwealth require that (i) the counties, cities, and towns of Tidewater Virginia incorporate general water quality protection measures into their comprehensive plans, zoning ordinances, and subdivision ordinances; (ii) the counties, cities, and towns of Tidewater Virginia establish programs, in accordance with criteria established by the Commonwealth, that define and protect certain lands, hereinafter called Chesapeake Bay Preservation Areas, which if improperly developed may result in substantial damage to the water quality of the Chesapeake Bay and its tributaries; (iii) the Commonwealth make its resources available to local governing bodies by providing financial and technical assistance, policy guidance, and oversight when requested or otherwise required to carry out and enforce the provisions of this article; and (iv) all agencies of the Commonwealth exercise their delegated authority in a manner consistent with water quality protection provisions of local

comprehensive plans, zoning ordinances, and subdivision ordinances when it has been determined that they comply with the provisions of this article.

B. Local governments have the initiative for planning and for implementing the provisions of this article, and the Commonwealth shall act primarily in a supportive role by providing oversight for local governmental programs, by establishing criteria as required by this article, and by providing those resources necessary to carry out and enforce the provisions of this article. The Onancock Comprehensive Plan includes the required Chesapeake Bay Preservation Act analysis and maps identifying the Chesapeake Bay Preservation Area.

#### Town Council and Planning Commission

The Planning Commission, which serves in an advisory capacity to the Town Council, has the primary responsibility of preparing and updating the Comprehensive Plan, Zoning Ordinance, and Subdivision Ordinance that are necessary to manage future growth. After a draft Comprehensive Plan is prepared by the Planning Commission, a public hearing is held to gather community comments. After the public hearing, the Planning Commission can vote to recommend approval of the Plan to the Town Council. The Town Council must also hold a public hearing on the draft Comprehensive Plan, after which it can adopt the Plan or return it to the Planning Commission for further work. The Town Council and Planning Commission can hold a joint public hearing instead of separate public hearings before recommending and adopting the plan.

#### Public Participation

The Town Council and Planning Commission held a Comprehensive Plan Workshop at Historic Onancock School in September 2019 to explain the plan update process and gather public input. Participants were asked a series of questions about their positive and negative opinions regarding the Town. The major concerns of Town residents were:

1. **Quality of Life:** The quaint small-town feel, walkability, friendliness, safety, sense of community, gardens and access to nature are positives. Negatives include derelict and abandoned buildings, lack of age and racial diversity, declining number of young families, and that some people do not feel welcome.
2. **Business & Cultural:** Marina, theaters, farmers market, businesses, Ker Place and Historic Onancock School are positives. Negatives include the lack of variety of stores and hotel accommodations, empty storefronts and buildings, and lack of public wi-fi.
3. **Transportation:** Participants like that there are sidewalks and no traffic lights in Onancock. The lack of parking, crosswalks and downtown pedestrian safety and speeding are negatives.
4. **Housing & Neighborhoods:** Affordability of homes was identified as both a positive and a negative. Other negatives include Northeast Onancock needs attention, including playgrounds, growing number of rundown houses and unkempt yards, large number of homes for sale, and illegal rentals/overcrowding.
5. **Town Services & Governance:** The police force, marina, public spaces, and ballfields are positives. Negatives include limited town budget, limited recycling, lack of consistent zoning enforcement, expensive water & sewer, and lack of communication by town government.

The results of this workshop were used by the Planning Commission to develop the following Onancock Vision:

***Onancock will continue to be a safe, thriving, year-round waterfront community that embraces its historic character and cultural assets while poised for the future.***

The Onancock Vision will guide the analysis and development of goals and actions for the Onancock Comprehensive Plan. Public participation is also encouraged at monthly Planning Commission meetings.

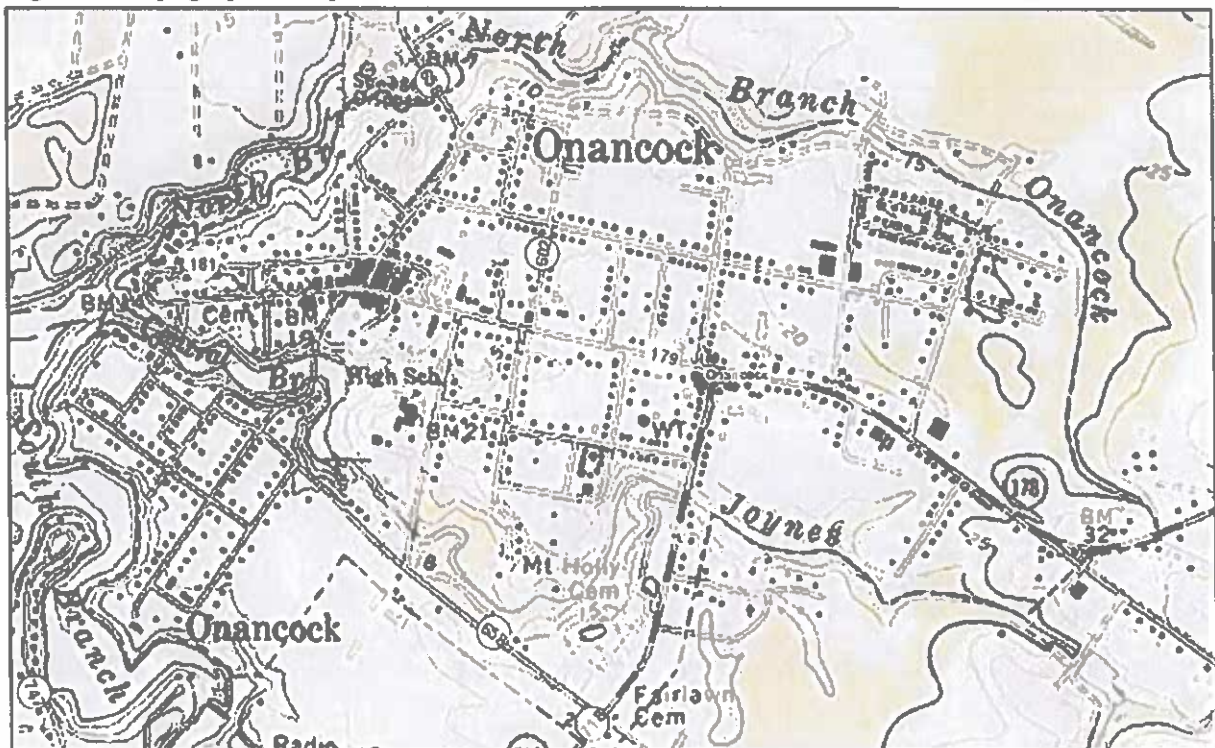
# EXISTING CONDITIONS: INVENTORY, ANALYSIS, AND NEEDS ASSESSMENT

## Natural Resources

### Topography

The Town of Onancock is situated on Onancock Creek, where it splits into three branches. (Figure 2, Topographic Map) The town is bordered by North Branch to the north and Titlow Creek (South Branch) to the south. Joynes Branch (Central Branch) runs through the middle of town, dividing downtown and the wharf area from the Mt. Prospect neighborhood. The town is a low lying and relatively flat land area with slopes of 2 percent or less throughout most of the town. The maximum elevation, 25 feet, occurs at the eastern edge of town. Land elevations slope gradually toward the creek branches and harbor, with slopes of 10 percent and 15 percent in some shoreline areas. Activities which disturb or alter natural vegetation along these shoreline areas can result in heavy soil erosion.

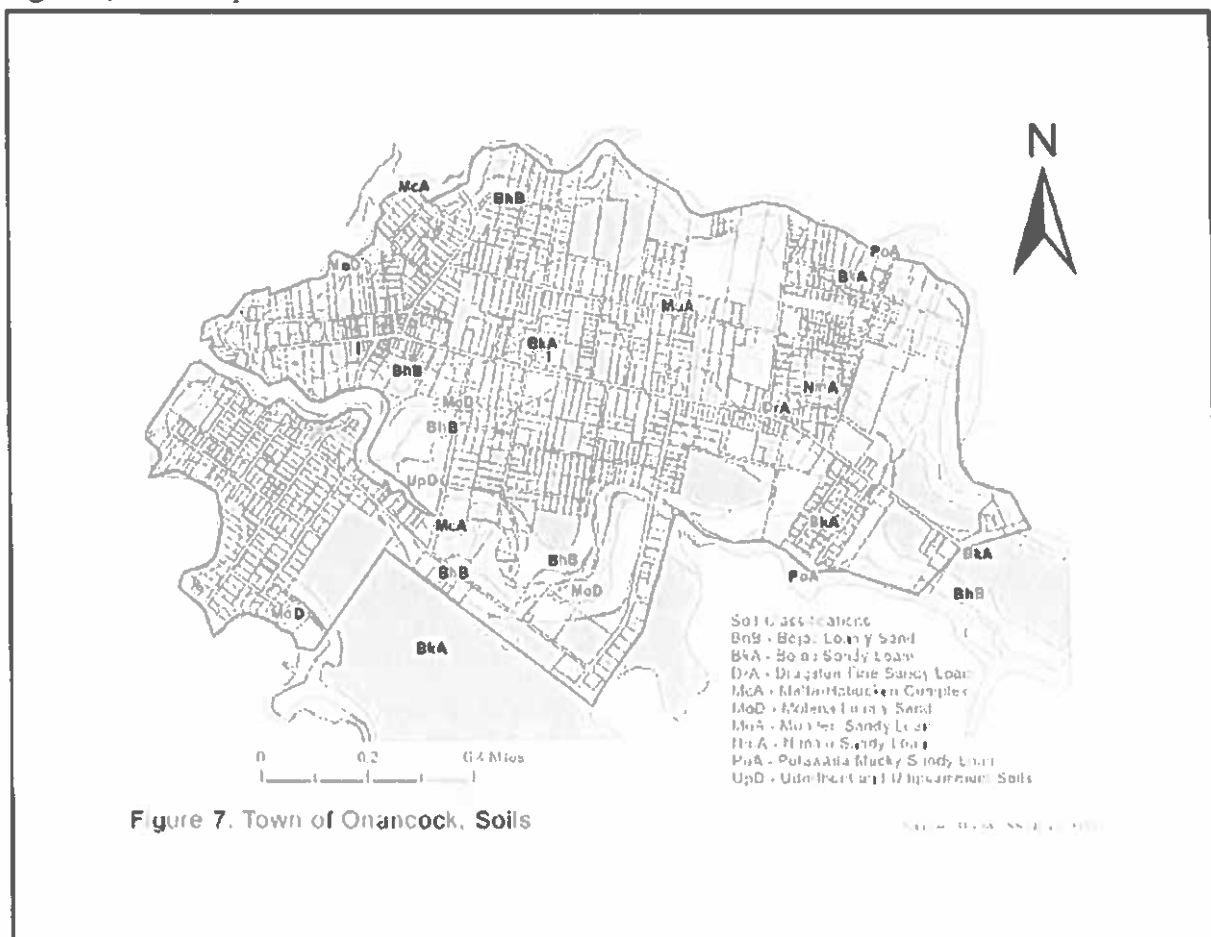
Figure 2: Topographic Map



## Soils

Onancock land includes several different soil types, as shown in Figure 3, Soils Map. As soil types are general and not site specific, variations in soil conditions within individual land parcels is to be expected. The most predominant soil types in Onancock are Bojac and Munden soils, which are generally well drained and suitable for development. Development should be avoided on Arapoe, Melfa, Nimmo and Polawana soils found bordering the North Branch, Joynes Branch and South Branch Creek due to severe physical constraints. Further details on Onancock's soil conditions can be found in the Accomack County Soil Survey.

Figure 3, Soils Map

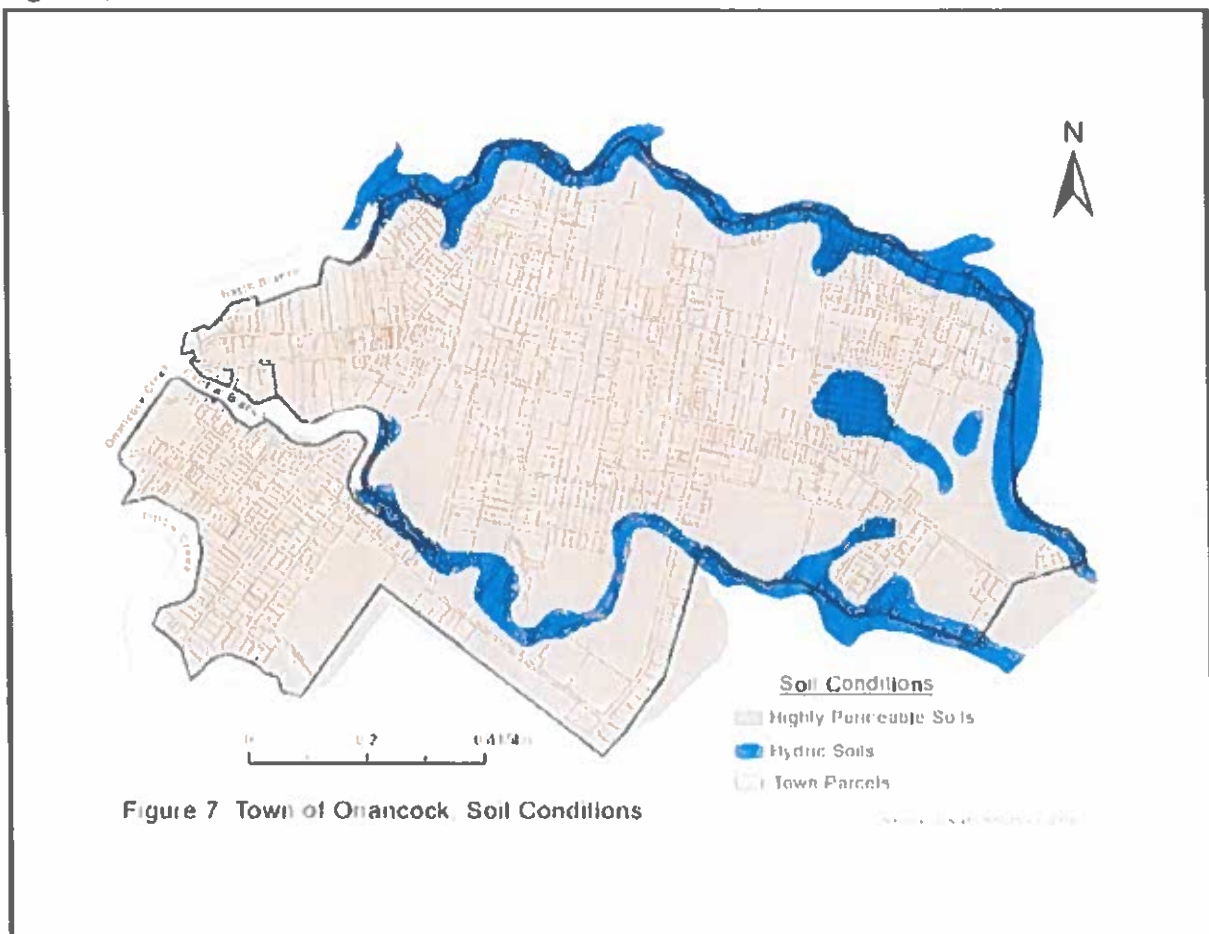


As shown in Figure 4, Soil Conditions, all soils in Onancock are highly permeable, with hydric soils located along the shorelines of the North Branch, Joynes Branch, and Titlow Creek. Highly permeable soils are extremely susceptible to pollutant leaching and have a high potential for groundwater pollution. Hydric soils are primarily wet and poorly drained. Public sewer serves

nearly all residents and businesses in town, so groundwater contamination due to septic tank drain fields is not an issue.

However, contamination from activities such as careless material handling and storage, machine operation and maintenance can cause groundwater contamination. Onancock property owners, residents, and businesses can properly dispose of unused biocides, oil paint and solvents, as well as used engine oil, antifreeze, batteries, and tires at Accomack County's solid waste convenience center in the Town of Painter.

Figure 4, Soil Conditions



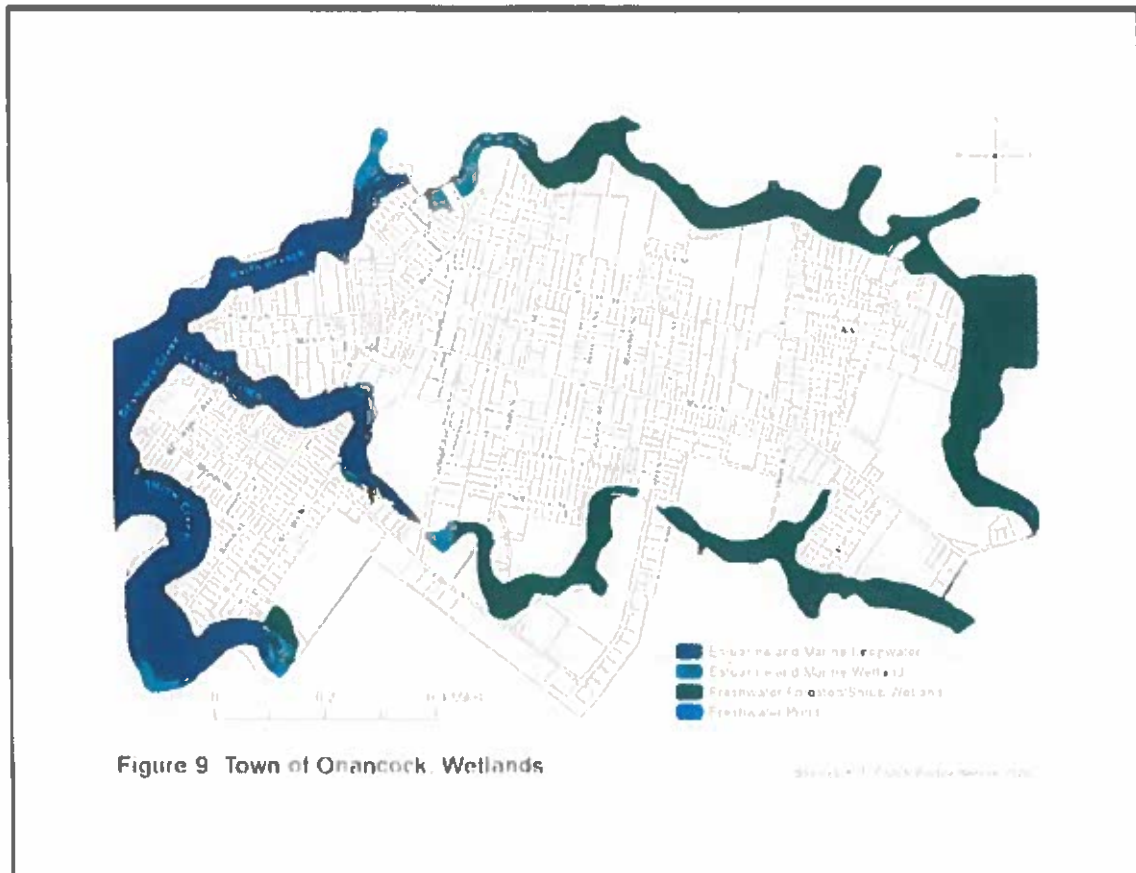
### Surface Water and Wetlands

While Onancock's surface waters are the focus of waterfront access and commerce, wetlands provide flood control, nutrient reduction, and provide important habitat for fish and wildlife.

As shown on Figure 5, Wetlands Map, Onancock Creek and its three branches are lined with marine and freshwater wetlands. Protection of these wetlands is critical to maintaining good

water quality, mitigating erosion, and flooding, and supporting fish and wildlife for recreation and commerce.

Figure 5, Wetlands Map



### Chesapeake Bay Preservation Act Program

The citizens of Virginia are dependent upon the economic benefits derived from the Chesapeake Bay and the town recognizes the importance of the Chesapeake Bay Preservation Act (Bay Act) in maintaining the integrity of state waters and the Chesapeake Bay. This is reflected in the goal of the natural resources plan, to protect the groundwater and surface water resources of the Commonwealth from an increase in pollution. One objective of this goal is to ensure adequate implementation and enforcement of the Bay Act, which provides localities with the framework to protect water quality and environmental features through land use planning techniques. Onancock has adopted a Chesapeake Bay Preservation Area (CBPA) Overlay District and regulations as part of the Zoning Ordinance and the town should continue to enforce the CBPA Overlay District.

The CBPA Overlay District establishes the Resource Protection Areas (RPAs), Resource Management Areas (RMAs) and Intensely Developed Areas (IDAs) discussed in the Existing Conditions section of the Plan. Redevelopment of existing land structures is allowed in RPAs, but new development is restricted to water dependent uses. New development and redevelopment are allowed in RMAs if they meet general performance criteria of the Bay Act, found in Article 10 of Onancock's zoning ordinance. As part of the town's Bay Act Program, erosion and sediment control is required town-wide for all land disturbing activities that exceed 2,500 square feet. Furthermore, all proposed development in the town that exceeds 2,500 square feet is required to undergo a land development review process to protect water quality and existing vegetation by using best management practices (BMPs).

The town requires the use of the BMPs for all development in the Resource Protection area and in the Resource Management Area to meet the no-net increase rule of non-point source pollution. BMPs include site design to minimize impervious cover and land disturbance, preserving existing vegetation on site and the use of vegetated filter strips. To explore options available for managing stormwater runoff in the town, the town should consider seeking information regarding stormwater management methods.

Addressing agricultural runoff into Onancock Creek has been identified as one of the town's objectives. The town realizes the importance of cooperation between jurisdictions in addressing water quality protection of the Chesapeake Bay and its tributaries, including Onancock Creek, and should work with Accomack County and the Eastern Shore Soil and Water Conservation District to address any agricultural runoff issues.

The Town should request Accomack County to consider requiring vegetated buffer areas for agricultural land uses in the Bay watershed to reduce the stormwater runoff and erosion from upstream farmland, which results in heavy sedimentation of the Onancock Creek branches.

#### Flood Zones

The Town's 100-year floodplain, delineated by the Federal Emergency Management Agency (FEMA), is shown in Figure 6. Development within a floodplain can pose a threat to the safety and welfare of the individual property owner because of periodic flooding and wetness. Land within the 100-year floodplain statistically averages one flood in a 100-year time, which equates to a one percent chance of flooding in any given year. However, certain weather conditions could cause flooding much more frequently. The Town encourages property owners to purchase flood insurance.



## Natural Resources Needs Summary

Onancock depends upon its natural resources to attract residents, visitors, and business. Our tree lined streets, town parks, open spaces, and extensive shoreline areas help provide the high quality of life valued by Onancock residents. However, inappropriate development and land management practices can degrade our natural resources, quality of life, and economy.

Protecting the water quality of our creeks and ground water supply, and protecting properties from coastal flooding, are key natural resource goals for the Town of Onancock.

## Natural Resources Goals and Actions

- **Goal:**
  - Improve and maintain surface water and ground water quality
    - **Actions:**
      - ◆ Communicate and enforce the Chesapeake Bay Preservation Overlay District
      - ◆ Complete RAFT scoring and develop resilience plan
      - ◆ Develop a landscaping and tree canopy plan
      - ◆ Communicate the benefit of reducing impervious surfaces to reduce stormwater runoff
      - ◆ Develop a multi-year plan to plant vegetative shoreline buffers to improve water quality and prevent erosion
- **Goal:**
  - Reduce the threat of flood damage to properties in town
    - **Actions:**
      - Communicate the benefits of flood insurance
      - Complete and implement the County Hazzard Mitigation Plan
      - Ensure town-owned properties are properly protected and insured against flood damage
      - Develop an ongoing plan to clean and maintain storm water drains and ditches
      - Secure non-tax funding sources to mitigate the impact of sea level rise
      - Install backflow prevention devices in all drains that back up from the Creek
      - Install generator for Town Hall (police department) for power during emergency
- **Goal:**
  - Better Town management of stormwater
    - ◆ Develop an ongoing plan to clean and maintain storm water drains and ditches
- **Goal:**
  - Reduce light pollution to increase the visibility of the night sky, reduce the effects of electric lighting, improving the well-being of both people and wildlife
    - **Actions:**
      - ◆ Develop and adopt a Dark Sky policy
      - ◆ Develop a comprehensive lighting plan for each distinct neighborhood within Onancock

- ◆ Begin to replace light fixtures Downtown and at the Wharf with ornamental fixtures that meet Dark Sky policy requirements

➤ **Goal:**

- Highlight the environmental experiences in and around Onancock
  - **Actions:**
    - ◆ Create a sunset viewing boardwalk-type park at the water's edge in the parking lot at the bulkhead
    - ◆ Create nature trails in town that encourage exposure to our natural beauty
    - ◆ Create bike trails to connect Onancock to the Route 13 corridor (and eventual Rails-to-Trails bike path)

## DEMOGRAPHICS

The latest complete U.S. Census data for Onancock is from 2010. Demographic data used for this section is sourced from the American Community Survey (ACS, 2014-2019). While 2020 population estimates are available, detailed demographic information on population, race, employment, and income will not be available until the full 2020 Census data is released in 2021. The following analysis is based on historic data and the estimates available in 2020. This section of the plan should be updated when the full 2020 Census data becomes available.

**Table 1**  
**1970 - 2019 Historic Population Change**  
**Town of Onancock and Accomack County**

Year	Onancock Population	% Change – Previous (vs. 1970)	Accomack Population
1970	1,614		29,004
1980	1,461	(9.5%), (9.5%)	31,268
1990	1,434	(1.8%), (11.2%)	31,703
2000	1,525	6.3%, (5.5%)	38,305*
2010	1,263	(17.2%), (21.7%)	33,164
2019*	1,098	(13.1%), (32.0%)	32,769**

\* The 2000 U.S. Census count for Accomack County had a large error. This resulted in abnormally high population growth from 1990 to 2000 and a large population decline from 2000 to 2010.

Source: Weldon Cooper Center for Public Service, University of Virginia

\*\* 2019 Population Estimate to be updated with 2020 Census data when available.

**Table 2**  
**Town of Onancock Demographic Information**

	2019	2014	2013	2010	2000
<b>Population</b>	1,098	1,226	1,381	1,263	1,525
<b>Median Age</b>	57.3	51.6	50.1	51.1	45.3
<b>Disability</b>	159	101	73	NA	NA
<b>Median Income</b>	\$50,347	\$39,927	\$40,313	\$41,372	\$28,214
<b>English Language</b>	89.9%	92.7%	94.7%	93.5%	94.0%

Source : U.S. Census Bureau, 2010 Census and 2014-2019 ACS

## EXISTING LAND USE AND ZONING

The Town of Onancock encompasses approximately 665 acres. The predominant land of the Town is residential, comprising 56.5% of the total acreage within the Town limits. Residential neighborhoods in Town consist mostly of single-family dwelling units. Several multi-family residential buildings are in the eastern portion of Town. Residential areas include a large variety of lot sizes. Neighborhoods are quiet and relatively stable and diversified, providing a suitable environment for family life, with many residential land uses separated from the commercial land uses. The character of Onancock's single-family neighborhoods is an important factor and valued element of the quality of life of the residents.

Agricultural uses comprise the second leading land use category, containing 15% of the total acreage. Vacant lands and those areas in public and semi-public uses follow at 13% and 8.5% respectively. Commercial land uses make up approximately 5% of the Town's land and are concentrated on Market Street and the first block of North Street. Areas of commercial land use can be separated into three district groups. The first area is located at the easternmost stretch of Market Street extending approximately ½ mile into Town. The commercial land uses in this area are characterized by heavy truck and vehicle traffic, which may sometime be a nuisance to nearby residents. Another cluster of commercial land use is in the downtown area, separated from the previous commercial area by residential land uses. The downtown commercial area is characterized by older, historic buildings directly fronting on Market Street. A cluster of approximately six water commercial land uses, including water dependent land uses, is located next to the public wharf.

Vacant parcels, and those in agricultural use, represent prime areas for future development. As growth pressures occur in the future, these areas will represent the most affordable and marketable locations for residential and commercial uses. Vacant and agricultural parcels existing within the Town include small and relatively scattered areas as well as several larger tracts. The small, isolated parcels represent areas where residential infill is likely to occur, with many of these parcels surrounded by single-family homes. Larger parcels are evident in the section of Town north of Kerr Street, and to the eastern edge of Town where Market Street begins. Vacant land accounts for approximately 13% of the total land area, and agricultural land accounts for approximately 15% of the land area. In combination, these two land types comprise 28% of the Town's total acreage and are potential sites for future development.

**Commercial** – This land use category includes business activities, service-oriented structures, and offices

**Public/Semi Public**- This land use category includes playgrounds and parks for the general population, churches, institutions, and structures that are used in local government.

**Agricultural** – This land use includes agricultural and farming activities

Vacant – This includes vacant land, excluding park areas and agricultural land use.

<b>Existing Land Use</b>	<b>Acreage</b>	<b>Percent of Total Area</b>
Water	11	2%
Residential	375.6	56.5%
Commercial	34	5%
Public/Semi Public	57.4	8.5%
Vacant	89	13%
<b>Total</b>	<b>665</b>	<b>100%</b>

Source: Land Use Survey, A-NPDC, 1998

## Zoning

The Town's zoning ordinance, originally adopted in 1962, includes residential districts, business districts and a parks and open space district. Most of the land in Town is zoned residential and includes four categories of residential zoning districts. R-1A Single Family Residential district is a low-density residential district for single family houses. Minimum requirements generally consist of a 10,000 square foot lot size with a 35-foot front setback and a 75-foot width. R-1B Single Family Residential district is a low-density residential district, which is like R-1A except that the lot sizes are generally smaller. Regulations are basically the same as in the R-1A district, although some requirements differ to account for the smaller lot size, including a 10-foot front setback and a 50-foot lot width. R-1C Single Family Residential district is a low density, which allows manufactured homes. All other regulations in the R-1C are the same as those in R-1B. R-2 Multi-Family Residential district is a residential district for multi-family dwelling units such as apartment buildings.

Other zoning districts in the Town consist of business districts and a district for parks and open space. In September 2008, Cultural, recreational and Community Facilities zoning was adopted for the property commonly known as the Onancock High School grounds. The zoning was designed to facilitate the further development of this property into a cultural campus. The Parks and Recreation Open Space District allows for publicly owned parks, recreational facilities, and undeveloped open space. Business districts consist of three categories. The B1 Business Downtown District generally allows for offices, retail, and service establishments in the downtown area. The B2 Business Highway District allows for a broad range of commercial activities (including all permitted uses in B1 Business Downtown District), characterized by heavy truck and vehicle traffic. The Business Waterfront District allows for certain water dependent businesses, which have waterfront locations and other commercial uses allowed by special use permits. Most of the vacant land in Town lies within the R-1A, Parks and Open Space, and Cultural, Recreational and Community Facilities Districts.

## Land Use

The land use section of the Comprehensive Plan serves as a general guide to direct future growth in the Town of Onancock. It is outlined to encourage future development in the town occurs in an efficient, organized and aesthetically pleasing manner which protects and enhances the existing character of the town while meeting the needs of the residents. Because most of the town is already developed and the town wants to preserve the existing character of its residential neighborhoods, the future of the town should, for the most part, represent a continuance of the current land uses. The following is narrative description to give guidance.

### Residential

This land use category is the predominant land use in Onancock and is intended to preserve the existing character of the town's neighborhoods. New residential development would constitute infill development in areas which are predominantly characterized as residential. The residential land use category is broken into two categories: low-density and high-density.

Low-density residential development should generally consist of single-family houses on individual lots. The low-density residential category should remain the predominant land use category in the town, in keeping with the town's goals of promoting and preserving the existing character of Onancock's residential neighborhoods. The largest areas available for new development are located within the town's northern limits, adjacent to the North Branch, and in the southernmost part of town, south of Liberty Street.

High-density residential development was also designated to provide a range of housing options for town residents. High-density residential development should be limited to existing multi-unit facilities or redevelopment. High-density development designations are mostly located in the eastern portion of town and should serve as buffers between the commercial development on Market Street and low-density residential development.

### Business

Business land uses should continue to be concentrated in the areas where they currently exist and should be discouraged in adjacent residential areas. The town should also discourage large-scale commercial development which would detract from the existing character of the town. The business designation is divided into three subcategories: business highway, business downtown and business waterfront.

The business highway designation is in the easternmost part of town along Market Street. The intention of this designation is to allow highway orientated businesses, characterized by a larger volume of car and truck traffic and associated dust and noise, to locate where existing roads and other public facilities can adequately serve the needs of these businesses without infringing in residential areas. New business development should occur on infill lots concentrated along Market Street.

The business downtown designation covers the downtown area of Onancock which is characterized by historic brick one-story and two-story structures. This designation promotes the continuing concentration of retail businesses and services in this predominantly commercial area.

It is the intent of this designation to provide a strong sense of downtown and to protect the adjacent residential areas from encroachment.

The business waterfront land use designation is concentrated along the Onancock Harbor. Most of this area is already developed with water-dependent uses. It is the intent of this designation to provide a sense of water related commerce.

#### Parks and Open Space

The Parks and Open Space designation includes parks and open spaces which are scattered through the town on individual parcels of land. The Cultural, Recreational and Community Facilities designation was granted to the school grounds September 2008. It is the intent of these designations to provide adequate open spaces and recreation facilities to meet the needs of the residents and to enhance the aesthetic appeal of the town.

#### Downtown Revitalization Plan

Improving the visual quality and attractiveness of the downtown commercial area is a land use goal of the town. In 1980, the Delmarva Consortium prepared the *Onancock Downtown Development Plan*. Even though it was created more than 40-years ago, many of its contents and recommendations are meaningful today. Onancock Main Street is an independent organization that is organized to support the Downtown District in all matters regarding economic development and revitalization. Onancock Main Street (OMS) is a volunteer-driven, nonprofit organization that works to develop and sustain our historic downtown as a vital economic, cultural, recreational, and residential center for our community. OMS works in partnership with community and business stakeholders and the Town of Onancock to ensure our downtown not only grows but thrives. The Town's partnership with OMS will serve to fulfill much of the Downtown Revitalization Plan, certain components of which are detailed below for reference.

#### Building Facades

Building Facades would ideally be restored in a manner which is historically consistent with the original architectural style of Onancock's downtown area. The most effective way of doing this is to clean, repair and restore the existing masonry facades with their intricate brick details. Onancock is fortunate to have a large variety of historic buildings that are relatively intact from the late 19<sup>th</sup> and early 20<sup>th</sup> century, illustrating the history of this unique town and the evolution of various architectural styles. The sensitive restoration of this unique recourse is a key factor in successfully recapturing the vitality of the downtown commercial district. Particular attention should be given to the intricate ornamentation in brick, wood, iron, glass, and brass. Proper restoration of this wealth is desirable. Stripping or covering original ornamentation for the sake of "modernization" is discouraged; and so is the remodeling from one original architectural style to another.

#### Signs

Signs determine the quality of a downtown district. Whereas good signage can add variety and life to a commercial district, poorly designed signage can destroy the historic quality of the downtown and negate any of the positive effects of restoration. Signs should be compatible with the historic character of the downtown area. Internally lit or "light box" signs are discouraged.

### Streetscapes

For downtown commercial revitalization to succeed increased numbers of people need to be attracted to shop, browse, socialize, and do business. Much will depend on providing a safe and appealing pedestrian environment in conjunction with restored building facades and improved merchandising. Accordingly, the public streetscape needs to keep with a carefully prepared design that is befitting the character of the historic town. Wayfinding signage with design that compliments the architecture should be considered and existing modern streetlights should be replaced with ornamental lights to highlight the historic nature of Downtown Onancock. Colorful plants, functional while decorative waste and recycling containers as well as style-appropriate benches should all be considered.

### Town Parking & Pedestrian Links

Parking areas near the backs of buildings should have paved and lighted walkways connecting to streets. Parking areas should have landscaped setbacks and interior tree planting with rear access to Market Street, connecting with the parking lot

### Existing Land Use and Zoning – Needs Summary

The character of Onancock's existing single-family neighborhoods is an important factor in the quality of life the residents enjoy. Many of these neighborhoods contain single-family housing of historic character. These neighborhoods provide a low-density atmosphere that is essential to the quality of life the residents who live there. The character of Onancock's existing single-family neighborhoods should be a valued element of the town. It is important to protect and promote the character of Onancock's existing single-family residential neighborhoods for the current and future residents of the town. Approximately 13% of the land in town is vacant, including several large tracts and smaller individual lots existing in developed areas. An additional 15% of the land is being used for agricultural purposes. Vacant and agricultural land combined make up 28% of the town's total land area, which constitutes a substantial portion of land that could potentially be developed. It is important to ensure that infill development and other future residential development is compatible with the character of Onancock's existing houses and neighborhoods. It is also important to ensure protection of the town's existing open space and to carefully consider its potential for the dedication of parks, bicycle paths and protection of the town's character and natural resources.

## Existing Land Use and Zoning – Goals and Actions

### ➤ Goal:

- Promote and preserve the existing character of residential neighborhoods
  - **Actions:**
    - ◆ Enforce town zoning ordinances on a complaint basis
    - ◆ Create a zoning map that shows vacant or undeveloped properties to ensure zoning alignment with strategic vision and plan
    - ◆ Create pocket-parks throughout the community to encourage walking, bike riding, gardening, and small gatherings
    - ◆ Add flower boxes and planters throughout the Downtown and Marina, maintained by the Town

### ➤ Goal:

- Improve the visual quality of the Downtown commercial area
  - **Actions:**
    - ◆ Work with Onancock Main Street to develop street scaping, way finding, and façade plans for the Downtown district
    - ◆ Create collaborative promotions, marketing, and advertising initiatives to attract visitors
    - ◆ Secure non-taxpayer funding to develop a formal plan for Downtown and community improvement
    - ◆ Support Onancock Main Street to achieve and further its mission and strategic plan

### ➤ Goal:

- Enhance the Downtown Onancock business district
  - **Actions:**
    - ◆ Offer incentives to attract new businesses and retain existing businesses
      - Remove gross receipts portion of Business License
      - Create collaborative promotions, marketing, and advertising initiatives to attract visitors
      - Secure non-taxpayer funding to attract and retain businesses to the Downtown district
    - ◆ Develop pricing for water that reduces the price of water for businesses that require heavy water usage for core business operations while continuing to encourage conservation whenever possible
    - ◆ Encourage businesses to remain open for hours that are conducive to visitors and working customers
    - ◆ Arrange for one major event each season to attract Shore residents and visitors to Onancock
      - Begin preparation for a substantial 7/4/2026 celebration that involves fireworks and a tall ship in the Creek

# TRANSPORTATION

## Inventory and Analysis of Existing Conditions

Onancock has transitioned from a steamboat-oriented community to a charming town with 21st century needs. Maintaining its small-town character while accommodating the demands of modern transportation is critical to the strategic survival. Car and truck traffic through Onancock are constant elements of concern while many residents and visitors walk and ride bicycles as a means of transportation and recreation. The town's challenge is to maintain the balance between pedestrians, bicycles, and motor vehicles.

### Streets

Market Street, Route 179, serves as Onancock's "Main Street" and provides access in and out of town. Route 179 begins as a four-lane arterial at US Route 13 in Onley and becomes a two-lane road at Hill Street. Market Street continues as a two-lane street to its terminus at the Onancock Wharf. Other major roads in town include Hill Street, and North Street. Hill Street provides access to Onancock from the South and serves various communities, including the communities of Cashville, Savageville, East Point and Pungoteague. North Street terminates at Market Street and provides access to the town from communities including Poplar Cove, Schooner Bay, Deep Creek, Bayside and Chesconessex. The most active internal collector roadways in town are Kerr Street, Liberty Street and Boundary Avenue, which conduct traffic from local streets and provide an alternative around downtown for vehicles travelling through Onancock arterial streets in the northern portion of town. Although these roads are substantially used daily traffic flows freely with no traffic problems. The Virginia Department of Transportation (VDOT) maintains approximately 75% of the town's roadways with the town maintaining the remaining 25%. Many of the streets in the town require some maintenance including repairing potholes from regular traffic or potholes from correcting water and sewer lines.

### Parking

Parking in the town is generally adequate with limited on street parking downtown and three nearby parking lots. Parking at the wharf is sometimes inadequate during busy summer weekends but during these times parking lots in the downtown business district are not fully used. Businesses on the eastern end of Market Street provide private parking for customers.

### Pedestrians and Sidewalks

Pedestrians are active throughout Onancock, with the most pedestrian traffic in the downtown area on Market Street and North Street. Pedestrians consist of both residents and visitors who come to the downtown commercial area to shop, sightsee, eat, and exercise. Sidewalks are in the downtown commercial area and along most residential streets within the Town, with exception of Mount Prospect and Northeast Onancock neighborhoods. Downtown vehicular and pedestrian traffic can be significant during mid-day. However, there are only two crosswalks and vehicular traffic does not yield to pedestrians. There is also significant pedestrian traffic across the four-lane section of Market Street in front of the laundromat. As with the streets, VDOT owns and maintains 75% of the sidewalks. The town owns and maintains approximately 25% of the sidewalks.

### Bicycling

Bicycle riding is a popular activity on Onancock for people of all ages. Many town residents and visitors ride bicycle, both as a form of transportation and as a recreational activity. Generally, Onancock's quiet residential streets provide safe bicycling areas. However, the parking lane on Market Street has eliminated three-foot paved shoulder on each side that functioned as a bike lane. The four-lane section of Market Street presents a special challenge to bicyclists, who compete through traffic and vehicles entering and exiting roadside businesses. Onancock residents have expressed interest in a bike path connecting the town to Four Corners Plaza and the Town of Onley. The Rails-to-Trails program is designing a regional bike trail, which encompasses the entire Eastern Shore. Onancock has been on record in favor of the regional bike trail and will partner with this endeavor. VDOT also sponsored a transportation plan for Onancock which includes bike trails.

### Public Transit

STAR transit offers weekday bus service to Chincoteague and Cape Charles with stops at all major communities, shopping centers, health care facilities and government offices. Bicycle racks enable STAR transit passengers to ride on to final destinations such as Assateague National Seashore.

### Tangier Ferry

Tangier Island is part of Accomack County but is in Chesapeake Bay and accessible only by boat or airplane. The ferry service is privately owned and runs between Onancock and Tangier Island.

## Transportation Needs Summary

To meet the challenge of maintaining the balance between pedestrians, bicycles and motor vehicles, Onancock must develop a transportation plan. The transportation plan should include an inventory of transportation facilities, an assessment of future transportation needs and a prioritized list of proposed improvements, including streets, sidewalks, crosswalks, parking, and bicycle facilities.

The mix of motor vehicles, pedestrians and bicycle traffic in town can result in conflicts and safety problems. Many parts of town do not have adequate sidewalks and residents have expressed interested in a bike path connecting Onancock to the Four Corners shopping center and Onley. There is a need for improved sidewalks, pedestrian crosswalks, safe bicycle access and bicycle racks.

## Transportation Goals and Actions

➤ **Goal:**

- Provide for safe and efficient pedestrian and vehicular movement while protecting the character of Onancock
  - **Action:**
    - ◆ Install speed controls where allowable on streets approaching and leaving Downtown
    - ◆ Better speed enforcement in areas with resident complaints
    - ◆ Arrange with VDOT to bring curb cut ramps to ADA standards (completed summer 2021)
    - ◆ Arrange for consistent road repair of Onancock maintained streets
    - ◆ Work with VDOT to develop a schedule for repairs for all VDOT secondary roads
    - ◆ Develop an Infrastructure plan to repair/replace Jackson Street, Warren Street, Justis/Jefferson, King Street to meet VDOT secondary system standards
      - Secure major project funding for road repair and walking paths
- Develop a comprehensive transportation plan
  - **Action:**
    - Inventory transportation facilities
    - Assessment future transportation needs
    - Prioritize a list of proposed improvements, including streets, sidewalks, crosswalks, parking, and bicycle facilities.

## ECONOMY

### INVENTORY AND ANALYSIS OF EXISTING CONDITIONS

Onancock was once an active maritime shipping center for the export of locally grown agricultural commodities. While it remains an active maritime port for seafood landings and commodity imports, the development of the railroad and of truck shipping supplanted the export by marine transport of locally grown produce.

Commercial activity in the town is concentrated along Market Street and clustered into three distinct areas, separated from each other by residential land uses, with a few commercial land uses scattered in between. The first commercial cluster is located at the easternmost end of Market Street, running approximately ½ mile between the town boundary and Jackson Street. This commercial area is referred to as the “business highway” area, and consists of a concentration of commercial establishments, including a Laundromat, auto repair and sales, and other businesses that are somewhat regional in nature, serving the town and a customer base beyond the limits of the town boundaries.

The second commercial area is the downtown area, located farther west on Market Street. This area is the town’s Downtown District and is characterized by historic one-story and two-story brick buildings arranged in compact, continuous rows. Commercial activity in this area consists mostly of services and specialty retail shops, restaurants, real estate offices and a few art galleries as well as government services entities. Upper stories originally housed a mixture of office and residential uses. However, over the past several decades the upper stories became mostly vacant or served as storage space for use by ground floor businesses.

Sidewalks line the streets in the downtown area, with public parking lots located north and south of Market Street and limited on-street parking.

The third area of commercial activity is located at the end of Market Street on the Onancock Creek and is referred to as the Onancock Wharf, zoned as Business Waterfront. Commercial land uses in this area include a restaurant, an aggregated materials marine uploading area, an outfitter and commercial fishing operations. The town’s public boat ramp, Harbormaster House, and floating docks as well as Onancock Landing are in this area, attracting pleasure boaters who walk uptown to shop, eat, and sightsee.

Over the past twenty years, the downtown area has evolved and is increasingly characterized by the presence of restaurants and specialty shops. In addition, while the number of vacant buildings/spaces has increased from 3 to 8 since 2004, the overall number of active businesses has increased by eight, from 41 to 49, for a net gain of 8. The growth trend of the restaurant trade and specialty retailing is indicative of the growing importance of tourists and regional visitors in the town. Several Bed and Breakfast establishments have opened in town which offers overnight accommodations.

Onancock's waterfront location, small town atmosphere and historic character, spanning over 300 years of history, are important resources which embrace its desirability as a destination for visitors and tourists. The downtown commercial area has many assets which it draws upon to enhance its image. The approach into the downtown area is marked by large houses, church steeples, and the stately Ker Place house museum which is home to the Eastern Shore of Virginia Historical Society. The view upon entering the downtown area is framed by a compact, continuous row of two-story commercial brick buildings producing a pleasing visual impact. This impact is further strengthened by the curving of Market Street which causes facades to bend, vistas to change, producing visual variety.

The general appearance of the downtown commercial area is a key element in economic vitality for the town. Improvements have been made in the past several decades including the removal of overhead wires and poles from Market to North Streets, the addition of streetlamps and various improvements to facades. Façade improvements have not always followed a coordinated pattern, which has resulted in a lack of continuity of style. It is important to ensure that the aesthetics of this area are maintained and improved for continued economic revival.

### **Economy Needs Summary**

A competitive business environment is important for Onancock, especially since larger shopping center development has increased on Route 13 and the addition of sewer and wastewater pipelines to Route 13 will result in expanded offerings nearby. The three distinct districts warrant three different economic development plans. The Town should consider a communication plan to supplement the business efforts and bring visitors to Town from around the Shore and region. For Onancock to promote its commercial areas, it is important to ensure that the town has a positive business environment which is competitive with other commercial areas in the region to attract and retain interesting businesses that capture the nature of Onancock.

### **Economy Goals and Actions**

(none named)

# HOUSING

## INVENTORY AND ANALYSIS OF EXISTING CONDITIONS

According to the 2000 U.S. Census, Onancock consists of 733 total housing units, the majority of which are owner-occupied, single-family houses. As shown in Table 7, owner-occupied, single-family houses account for 79% of the housing stock, multifamily dwelling units account for 20% of the housing stock, and manufactured homes account for 1% of the housing stock. The 2000 US Census indicates that the median value for owner-occupied housing units in Onancock is \$79,400. In 2000, almost twice as many citizens in Onancock owned their homes as compared to those that rented theirs (58% as compared to 33%) as can be seen in Table 7.

**Table 7  
Housing Occupancy and Types  
Town of Onancock  
2000**

<u>Housing Types</u>	<u>Units</u>	<u>Percent</u>
Single-family	578	79%
Multifamily	147	20%
Manufactured homes	8	1%
<b>Total Units</b>	<b>733</b>	<b>100%</b>

Source: 2000 U.S. Census

**Table 8  
Housing Units  
Town of Onancock**

	2019	2014	2010	2000
<b>Housing Units</b>				
<b>Occupied</b>	<b>547</b>	<b>649</b>	<b>594</b>	<b>656</b>
<b>Vacant</b>	<b>224</b>	<b>145</b>	<b>159</b>	<b>77</b>
<b>Owner-Occupied</b>	<b>359</b>	<b>394</b>	<b>350</b>	<b>411</b>
<b>Renter-Occupied</b>	<b>188</b>	<b>255</b>	<b>244</b>	<b>245</b>

Substandard housing has been greatly reduced in Onancock over the past 30 years. Approximately 65 substandard houses have been rehabilitated with approximately 30 of these houses receiving first time indoor plumbing. Funding for rehabilitation projects was provided through Community Development Block Grants (CDBG), United States Department of

Agriculture (USDA) grants and town funds. CDBG funding was also used for the construction of an apartment complex, Pine Street Apartments, to expand and improve the supply of affordable rental housing. USDA funding was used for the construction of another apartment complex. As a result, substandard housing in Onancock has been greatly reduced, with all houses in town equipped with complete indoor plumbing. Windshield surveys indicate that some substandard housing still exists in Onancock where several houses have peeling paint, leaking roofs and windows and doors in disrepair.

One new subdivision has been approved in Onancock, north of Kerr Street on Jackson Street. That proposed subdivision is for approximately 29 homes. Although approved in 2007, no new infrastructure, water, sewer or other utilities or roads have been started. No homes have been built. The town has sufficient water and sewer capacity for this development without ongoing improvements to the sewer plant.

The vacant land owned by the Onancock Fire Department sold in early 2021 to a developer who has started to build up to 20 single family homes using existing tax parcels.

In late 2006, the national and local housing market began a significant decrease in sales, sale price and increased mortgage defaults. The latter has had less impact on Onancock to date. After enjoying a real estate boom in the years between 2001 and 2005, when median prices and the number of transactions increased, the past years have seen decreasing prices, sales, and more homes on the market. The median housing value according to the American Community Survey was \$196,900 in 2019 which is up from \$183,000 in 2014.

Onancock is becoming more popular for second homes and short-term rentals.

## Housing Needs Summary

While in the Spring of 2021, the Town's housing market is gaining momentum in certain neighborhoods, the impact on home values, blighted properties, and police resources are dramatically affected by vacant, rented, and low-income housing.

The vibrancy of the Downtown district would be enhanced by encouraging the upstairs of retail buildings to be renovated to provide rental housing but the parking spaces for these units need to be considered as to promote customers for the adjoining businesses.

The community, according to the ACS, is aging and our community needs to accommodate our aging population with resources that allow for easier access to businesses, age-in-place resources, and codes to make accessibility more commonplace.

## Housing Goals and Actions

- **Goal:**
  - Provide safe, adequate housing for present and current residents
    - **Action:**

- ◆ Encourage and promote the development of affordable middle class long-term rentals
- ◆ Fill or remove abandoned houses
- ◆ More mosquito spraying and weed control in drainage ditches
- ◆ Change zoning on Market Street to promote mixed use retail/residential
- ◆ Develop an aging-in-place system in town that provides adequate services to seniors to remain Onancock residents
- ◆ Develop a community initiative to support homeowners unable to maintain their homes
- ◆ Promote the building and installation of bat and bird houses to eradicate mosquito population

## HISTORIC RESOURCES

### INVENTORY AND ANALYSIS OF EXISTING CONDITIONS

Chartered in 1680, Onancock is one of the oldest towns in Virginia. The town has long recognized and appreciated its rich heritage and abundance of historic resources. Beyond this awareness and appreciation, however, historic preservation has not yet been integrated into the planning and community development process until recently and its integration is not yet comprehensive or complete.

According to the Onancock Historic District Survey, by the Virginia Department of Historic Resources, the town contains a cohesive and architecturally significant collection of buildings that provides a tangible reminder of the town's rich history. Many historic architectural resources in Onancock are dwellings and commercial structures that were constructed during the late 1800s and early 1900s. Most of the historical homes are simple Victorian-period vernacular frame and weatherboard structures with a front porch. Few buildings remain that were built prior to 1887 when a fire destroyed many businesses in the town. In rebuilding, residents and merchants primarily chose the Victorian styles, which were prevalent in the late nineteenth and early twentieth centuries. The town's commercial area, extending along Market and North Streets, contains mostly two-story flat roofed, brick buildings from the early 1900s, with modernized first floor storefront windows. The present brick buildings replaced earlier nineteenth century frame commercial buildings that were destroyed by a second devastating fire in 1899. As a result of this fire, the town specified in 1900 that all buildings constructed in the main business district would be constructed of brick.

The town was surveyed by the Virginia Department of Historic Resources and a National Register Historic District was created and listed on the National Register of Historic Places. Within this district are 273 contributing historic properties. The extent of information collected includes architectural descriptions, map locations and exterior photographs. The Historic District designation is only honorary and means that the listed properties have historical significance and integrity. Properties listed in the historic district can donate easements and are potentially eligible for tax credit. The Historic District listing does not affect property rights or insure protection. For a building to be protected, the building can either have an easement or the town government can develop a local historic district preservation ordinance. Onancock has no local historic district preservation ordinance and consequently no zoning controls to protect its historic buildings from demolition or any renovation or repairs which may be detrimental to the building's historical integrity.

Several years ago, the development of a local district preservation ordinance was discussed in detail between the town council and approximately 75 to 100 residents. The residents were extremely vocal in their opposition to any formal ordinance or regulations governing their property. The town council agreed not to pursue any local ordinance or regulations pertaining to the development of an historic district other than as an honorary designation at that time.

The late nineteenth/early twentieth century character of the town is a key element in the town's interest to tourists. A strong, attractive community character and interesting stock of historic buildings contribute an historic style and authenticity which attracts tourists to the town. It is important that the historic character be protected to continue the economic and physical revival of the town. Numerous historic landmarks exist in the Town of Onancock, many of which are listed in the Virginia Historic Landmark register and the Virginia Register of Historic Places. Listed below are landmarks of noted significance to the town.

Ker Place. An elegant manor house built in 1799. The style is a federal translation of early Roman architecture and is a Virginia historic landmark, listed on the National Register of Historic Places. Ker Place was purchased by the Eastern Shore of Virginia Historical Society in 1960 as its headquarters and as a museum with collection of period furniture, paintings, memorabilia, and a curator to assist the public.

Grave of Commodore Whaley - The commanding officer of a local Revolutionary War battle.

Hopkins and Brother Store - located on the Onancock waterfront, is also a designated Virginia Historic Landmark and is listed on the National register of Historic Places. First opened in 1842, it was owned and operated by the same family until 1965. In its prime, the store served as the base of operations for a fleet of sailing vessels that delivered grain, produce, hardware and coal to eastern cities. The Eastern Shore Historical Society now owns Hopkins and Brothers Store. Among other things, the store place is leased to a restaurant.

Cokesbury United Methodist Church - Cokesbury was the first congregation to organize in Onancock after the Revolution. The present Cokesbury Church was built in 1854.

Site of Francis Makemie former home - bronze marker commemorating Francis Makemie, the founder of Presbyterianism in America, marking the site of his former home.

Bagwell Bridge - A wooden bridge rebuilt in 1920, originally constructed as a private bridge linking the Prospect Heights residential area with the town. The wooden bridge functions today as a public thoroughfare and serves as a key focal point for the town's waterfront.

Samuel Outlaw Blacksmith Shop - A thriving African American owned business during the early to mid-1900s, the shop is in working order and opened during special events.

Also present in Onancock are archeological resources documenting the town's long history. Should a comprehensive archeological survey be conducted, it likely would identify significant resources associated with the inhabitants of the town since its founding and earlier Native American settlements.

### Historic Resources Needs Summary

Onancock is attractive to tourists who visit the area because of its charming historic atmosphere and waterfront location. Tourism is a visible industry in the town, with visitors walking throughout the downtown area to shop, eat and sightsee.

It is important to protect the historic character of Onancock, especially in the downtown commercial area. Aesthetics of the downtown area are also an important element in attracting visitors to the town.

The historic character of the town needs to be considered as a valuable resource and protected as such by ordinance.

### Historic Resources Goals and Actions

- **Goal:**
  - Protect and promote the historic character of Onancock
    - **Action:**
      - ◆ Make information available to residents regarding tax credits and other benefits of rehabilitating historic properties
      - ◆ Add central point of information that teaches the history of the town and area

## COMMUNITY FACILITIES

### INVENTORY AND ANALYSIS OF EXISTING CONDITIONS

Community Facilities comprise all the public services and facilities provided by the town to all residents. Those services include public water and sewage treatment facilities, police and fire departments, wharf, parks and recreation facilities and solid waste management. Water and sewer are discussed separately in another section.

#### Public Safety

The town currently employs five full-time police officers, headquartered at the police station located on North Street inside the Town Hall. Officers are dispatched through a central dispatcher in the Accomack County Sheriff's office. Assistance is provided as needed from the County Sheriff, State Police, and other local police departments. Fire protection and rescue service are provided by the Onancock Volunteer Fire Department, Inc. The volunteer fire department serves the Town of Onancock and outlying areas. All fire hydrants in Onancock are owned and managed by the Town and have been updated to meet the requisite fire codes.

#### Onancock Wharf and Marina

The wharf is located at the foot of Market Street, at the head of the Onancock Creek. A portion of the wharf area is owned by the town and the remainder is owned by private commercial interests. A deep-water harbor serves both areas. Referred to locally as the "wharf" or the "dock", the town's portion includes a boat ramp, an office for a harbor master, fourteen boat slips with connections for water, electrical and sanitary services, and a parking lot for vehicles. One slip is rented to the Tangier Ferry, which serves customers daily from May through October.

Onancock Creek is approximately five miles long from the wharf to its mouth, where it enters the Chesapeake Bay. A 12-foot channel extends from the wharf into the bay and is well marked with lights, buoys, and day beacons. Both the harbor and the channel are currently in need of dredging, as silt and shifting sand have reduced the depth to as little as 8 feet or less in some places. The large vessels that bring materials by barge to the docks of one commercial enterprise, T&W Block, use tug services that clear the channel to make and keep it navigable for commercial and recreational vessels alike.

The wharf and marina have had significant renovations/upgrades in the last few years. These renovations include a renovated Harbormaster building, a new gas and diesel tank, new floating docks for transient boaters, and the boat ramp has been replaced with a wider, steeper, and deeper ramp to allow for much better and safer access by trailered boats. In June of 2021, the Town was notified that the Virginia Port Authority awarded it \$270,000 to repair and replace the bulkhead on the creek side of the wharf. This project will put the value of upgrades to the Wharf and Marina and nearly \$1.5 million in the last 10-years.

### Parks and Recreation

In addition to the public wharf, several other recreational facilities exist in town. Onancock's town Square, which serves as a memorial to World War I and World War II, is located on Market Street. Family picnics and community events are the primary uses to the Town Square, which features a gazebo and a monument to civil war hero General Edmund R. Bagwell. The Northeast Onancock Community Park, located east of Boundary Street on School Street, is in desperate need of renovation. The Samuel Outlaw Blacksmith Museum (located on Boundary Avenue), the Onancock Landing property (located adjacent to the wharf), are other public areas for residents and visitors to enjoy. There are other properties owned by the town that are zoned for parks and recreation with tentative plans for a dog park, pocket park, and small picnic pavilion.

The town also owns the former Samuel Outlaw blacksmith shop, located in the northeast part of town on Boundary Avenue, which is used as an historical site operated by an independent nonprofit.

The Town supports other nonprofit organizations and entities that sponsor events in Town such as the Christmas Homes Tour, the July 4<sup>th</sup> Ice Cream Social, and other parades and events that highlight the character of the town.

### Town Hall

Onancock's Town Hall, built in 1936, serves as Town Council Chambers and houses the town's administrative services, public bathrooms, and police station. There is area upstairs in the Town Hall that is offered to local groups for use, but there needs to be air conditioning to make them accessible all year. There is also no elevator, no accessibility is an issue.

### Broadband

During 2007, both Accomack and Northampton Counties formed an ad-hoc committee to pursue the installation of a Broadband backbone from Cape Charles north to the Maryland border. In 2008, they formalized this group, establishing the Eastern Shore of Virginia Broadband Authority. Construction on the backbone began in early 2009 and services the Town well.

Other service providers have entered the market and businesses and residents have a choice of providers. Additionally, the County has made concerted and tangible efforts to ensure underserved and under resourced communities have access to broadband.

### Solid Waste

The town contracts with a private waste disposal company for weekly residential trash collection, which is transported to a county landfill. A private contractor is responsible for emptying large dumpsters within the town that are used primarily by commercial establishments. The town also picks up brush and large household items monthly. The town encourages its residents to use the "Tasley Convenience Center" recycling drop off site provided by Accomack County. The town has a litter control program that includes the provision of trash receptacles throughout the downtown area.

## Community Facilities Needs Summary

Ensuring public safety is the most important service provided by the Town which will require significant investment to compensate the police officers at a competitive rate. The fire hydrant infrastructure needs to be consistently maintained and the significant investment in the Wharf and Marina needs to be protected by ensuring the Creek doesn't fill in or shoal to the point where navigating the creek becomes impossible.

The public buildings, parks, and facilities need to be cared for to avoid significant deferred maintenance. This will require appropriate staffing and budget resources to care for.

## Community Facilities Goals and Actions

- **Goal:**
  - Continue to provide police and fire protection services
    - **Action:**
      - ◆ Develop a plan to work toward robust police coverage
      - ◆ Develop a community policing and auxiliary program
      - ◆ Renovate Town Hall to manage building access and promote safety to employees, officers, and visitors
      - ◆ Renovate public bathrooms to ADA and high aesthetic standards
- **Goal:**
  - Promote the utility of Onancock Creek for boat traffic
    - **Action:**
      - ◆ Coordinate with the County to pursue dredging and maintenance of the Creek and channel
      - ◆ Develop a long-range plan to ensure permanent commercial activity in the Creek to maintain channel quality and depth
- **Goal:**
  - Maintain and improve recreational facilities
    - **Action:**
      - ◆ Market and advertise the Samuel Outlaw Blacksmith Shop
      - ◆ Support recreation and cultural programs of local non-profit organizations
      - ◆ Promote the Wharf for recreational use
      - ◆ Endorse and support a bicycle path from town to Route 13
      - ◆ Dog Park
- **Goal:**
  - Stimulate intellectual growth and public education
    - **Action:**
      - ◆ Promote increased awareness of Eastern Shore history
      - ◆ Use public facilities to support public and community educational programs
- **Goal:**
  - Provide high speed fiber optic internet service
    - **Action:**
      - ◆ Work with the County and the Broadband authority to improve and expand service

- **Goal:**
  - Improve number of and diversity in community events
    - **Action:**
      - ◆ Partner with OBCA to create and hold unique and high-quality community events
- **Goal:**
  - Improve tourism
    - **Action:**
      - ◆ Strengthen partnership with ESVA Chamber of Commerce, Tourism Commission, and County Economic Development
- **Goal:**
  - Improve communication between Town and residents and businesses
    - **Action:**
      - ◆ Develop newsletter from Town to residents and businesses
      - ◆ Develop dual direction text communication between the Town and residents
      - ◆ Enhance online transaction capabilities with the Town

## WATER/WASTEWATER

### INVENTORY AND ANALYSIS OF EXISTING CONDITIONS

#### Water

The town operates one of the few municipal water systems on the Eastern Shore. In March of 2008, the town completed a \$5,078,000 upgrade of the water system. This included three (3) new wells with submersible pumps capable of pumping 600 gallons per minute, a new 300,000-gallon elevated storage tank, a new chlorine injection system, the installation of eight (8) new fire hydrants, the replacement of deficient hydrants, the replacement of 30,000 feet of old water line with new 6", 8" and 12" PVC waterlines and the removal of the old 150,000-gallon storage tank as well as the capping of the old wells at the Justis Street location. The town also infuses the water with fluoride. The tower and wells are located on a 17-acre parcel on Hartman Avenue purchased in 1995. This site also serves as the new home of the Central Accomack Little League and the Town Department of Public Works.

Funding for these improvements has been through a grant from Rural Development for \$748,000 and two loans, one from the Virginia Department of Health Revolving Loan Program for \$2,349,811 for thirty years at zero percent (0%) interest; and the other from the USDA for \$1,070,000 for forty years at four percent (4%) interest. The water rates in town include funds to cover the loan obligations.

An existing network of wells within the region surrounding Onancock is used to monitor groundwater supply and quality. The State Water Control Board has concluded the groundwater quality is good and supplies are adequate to the year 2030. The monitoring of these wells should supply adequate warning if water quality begins to deteriorate, or withdrawal begins to exceed natural resupply of the groundwater.

The town has no known existing pollution sources. There are no illegal dumps in town. There are no known underground storage tanks, septic tanks, or abandoned wells on any of the properties surrounding and immediately adjacent to the town well site(s).

#### Wastewater

The town owns and operates one of the three municipal wastewater treatment facilities in Accomack County. The Town is currently in the process of transferring ownership of the wastewater treatment plant and the entire collection system to Hampton Roads Sanitation District (HRSD).

The facility is located just outside of the town limits on North Street, on the North Branch of Onancock Creek. The facility serves all residents and businesses in town, through approximately 700 connections as well as the Airport Industrial Park and a few businesses and commercial establishments located along Route 13 in Onley. The facility has a capacity of 750,000 gallons per day.

The wastewater treatment plant conforms to all various governmental regulations.

## Surface Water

Surface water in Onancock includes North Branch, Joynes Branch and Titlow Creek. North Branch and Titlow Creek form a significant portion of the town's boundaries, while Joynes Branch lies within the town and covers approximately 11 acres. The town is characterized by extensive shorelines. North Branch, Joynes Branch and Titlow Creek include approximately two miles of shoreline within the town, with an additional two miles of shoreline along the tributary streams in the town, which feed Onancock Creek. Most of the shoreline in Onancock is fringe marsh except at the wharf area, which is extensively bulk headed. Some hardening of the Joynes Branch shoreline has occurred, with several small areas of bulk heading constructed on residential properties. Hardening of the shoreline reduces the land's capacity to filter water running off the property, and diminishes the ecological benefits performed through natural shoreline habitats.

Stormwater runoff from the town flows into three branches of Onancock Creek, which flows westward into the Chesapeake Bay. The Chesapeake Bay has played an important role in the history and identity of the Eastern Shore, serving as the nation's largest and most productive estuary, and providing both commercial and recreational fishing for Eastern Shore residents and tourists. Water quality of the Bay is threatened by pollution, including nonpoint source pollution.

Nonpoint source pollution is pollution that occurs from a variety of diffuse sources including stormwater runoff, atmospheric deposition, drainage, and seepage. Land use and development in the town can affect the water quality in Onancock Creek and the Bay through nonpoint pollution including stormwater runoff from development areas and farmland. Pollutants, including phosphorous and nitrogen, oil, sediments, pesticides, metals, and other toxic substances on land and are carried into surface water by rainfall.

Runoff is also channeled into the stormwater drainage system, which discharges into Onancock Creek. Sedimentation from agricultural runoff of the surrounding farmland is a noticeable problem in the branches of Onancock Creek after heavy rains. Activities at boat docking facilities along the shoreline can also potentially contribute to water quality degradation through dumping of waste and spills of fuel and oil. The town has reduced these threats by providing a waste pumping station and trash facilities at the Onancock Wharf.

The Commonwealth of Virginia enacted the Chesapeake Bay Preservation Act (Bay Act) in 1988, which established a program to protect and improve the waters of the Chesapeake Bay. The Bay Act is administrated by the Virginia Department of Conservation and Recreation and provides local governments in the Bay watershed with the legal authority to protect water quality through local land use regulations, implemented and enforced at the local level. Land use regulations can reduce water pollution by requiring development setbacks from shorelines and allowing natural vegetation to prevent erosion and filter stormwater. Certain lands that are next to the shoreline have intrinsic water quality value due to the ecological and biological processes they perform. Other land areas have severe development constraints because of flooding, erosion, and soil limitations. With proper management, these lands offer significant

environmental benefits by providing water quality maintenance and pollution control, as well as flood and shoreline erosion control.

The town recognizes the importance of maintaining the integrity of state waters and the Chesapeake Bay and has adopted a Chesapeake Bay Preservation Area Overlay District (CBPA) as part of its zoning ordinance. The CBPA delineates Resource Protection Areas (RPAs) and Resource Management Areas and requires that certain development standards be applied to these areas. RPAs and RMA consist of the most ecologically sensitive lands, including tidal shorelines and wetlands, which have important value to the water quality of the Bay. RPAs also include a 100-foot vegetated buffer area landward of these features. Certain developed areas within the CBPA may be designated as Intensely Developed Areas (IDAs), where little of the natural environment remains. IDAs are exempt from the 100-foot buffer requirement but require a 10% reduction of nonpoint source pollution for redevelopment.

The town has considered implementing measures that would establish a buffer in the areas included in the IDA and concluded that because of the narrow configuration and shallow depth of the few properties involved, it would be impractical to require a buffer, in event of redevelopment. It is not likely that the properties in question would redevelop into uses different from their current uses.

There is one privately owned and operated oil storage plant located at the wharf, which is an IDA designation. The Department of Environmental Quality and other environmental agencies closely monitor and conduct annual inspections of this facility. The owner has emergency spill plans on file with all environmental agencies necessary and regularly conducts scheduled drills to negate the possibility of harm to the water quality of Onancock Creek.

Information used to delineate the town's CBPAs include United States Geological Survey maps, National Wetland Inventory maps, Soil Conservation Service Accomack County Soil Survey maps. In Onancock, RPAs include all lands extending 100 feet landward of the shorelines of North Branch, Joynes Branch and Titlow Creek. RMAs include land contiguous to RPAs, generally extending from 100 feet to 1,100 feet beyond the RPAs. IDAs cover the Onancock wharf area, including the oil terminals and gravel facility.

### **Water/Wastewater Needs Summary**

The town's improvements to the water system addressed many water supply and distribution issues. It is important that water resources in the town are protected from an increase in pollution. The town's water supply is drawn from three wells on Hartman Avenue which provide wellhead protection and security. There is a need to constantly monitor whether potential problems threaten the water supply and warrant protection measures.

The transfer of the wastewater treatment plant and collection system will allow the Town to eliminate the risk of operating a wastewater plant and collection system. These risks include the impact of tidal rise, new and increased regulations, and collection system failure. The financial benefit is long term by eliminating the capital risk of further investment and material deferred

maintenance costs. HRSD will pay off all existing debt, and while the debt service is covered by current revenues, this will also provide financial relief for the Town.

### Water/Wastewater Goals and Actions

- **Goal:**
  - Transfer ownership of wastewater plant and entire collection system to Hampton Roads Sanitation District
    - **Action:**
      - ◆ Complete full title transfer of all wastewater assets and collection system
- **Goal:**
  - Protect the groundwater and surface water resources from pollution
    - **Action:**
      - ◆ Develop emergency response plan for clean water emergency
      - ◆ Secure water grants annually to enhance clean water care
      - ◆ Provide professional development for new water technician to move toward license
      - ◆ Develop long-term capital plan for water lines and tower
      - ◆ Budget for post-HRSD water rates that result in reduced or stable use, depending on volume