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Town of North Beach

June 23, 2009

“The Impacts of Climate Change on the Chesapeake Bay”

The Chesapeake Bay is North America's largest estuary with over 11,000 miles of shoreline and its watershed encompassing six states and Washington DC. It is a national treasure that belongs to each and every one of us.

North Beach is a small municipality located on the Western shore of the Chesapeake Bay in Southern Maryland. With a population of 2000, we are less than an hour away from Capitol Hill. We take pride in our stewardship of the Bay and work very hard in managing our waterfront. Along with a small public beach we also enjoy a 535 foot fishing pier and a half mile-long boardwalk that runs the length of town. We are also doing our part to improve water quality within the Bay Watershed by growing oysters in baskets underneath our fishing pier. Once mature, the oysters are then transported to reefs in rivers throughout Southern Maryland.

There are only a few remaining public beaches along the entire shore of the Chesapeake Bay and North Beach is one of them. Public access is very important as many of the access points along the Bay have disappeared or are private. Keeping North Beach public is absolutely necessary for the enjoyment of all. Rising sea levels along the Bay have made it quite difficult to preserve what little beach we have left. Since 1847, we have lost close to 1000 feet of shoreline. The average annual rate of erosion is over 5 feet per year, and increasing.

Beach erosion is causing additional problems along our waterfront. I am concerned that erosion will start to undermine the boardwalk superstructure and the adjoining street that runs along the waterfront. Private homes and businesses will be affected by increased incidences of flooding and decreasing property values.

In 2002, North Beach, along with the Maryland Department of Natural Resources constructed off shore breakwaters to help curb erosion along our beach.

While this has helped it has certainly not eliminated erosion. I estimate within a decade with the current rate of erosion we will lose our beach. With an annual budget of \$2.2 million, and limited resources, North Beach, cannot battle this problem alone. The economy of North Beach is dependent on the bay, and its natural resources. Incorporated in 1910 the beach created the town. Now 100 years later, we are on the verge of losing what we have. Tourism dollars are the lifeblood of our local businesses.

Breakwaters and bulkheads are not the answer; beach replenishment is the only way to save our beach. We need help, and we need it today. The annual cost of replenishment is between \$25,000 and \$50,000. This is not a large amount of money compared to the value of losing our beach and continuing to have public access to this precious natural resource. Again, with limited financial resources North Beach, cannot manage this alone. We need awareness, assistance, commitment and cooperation from all levels of government. Building a coast-smart community is our goal moving into the next decade and beyond.

One area that needs to be researched and discussed is the permitting process. With today's environmental controls being stewards of our waterfront is extremely prohibitive. I currently have an administrative staff of three people and could easily create a full-time job for someone just to travel through the maze of bureaucracy. Being an elected public official, I am accountable for what I do and do not do. There are times when accountability does not exist with those who are in charge of this process. At this time, we are in need of five different permits to do work along our waterfront. This would include beach replenishment, storm water outfall maintenance, breakwater stabilization and rehabilitation, boat slip dredging and tidal tributary maintenance. An additional project that goes along with tidal tributary maintenance is wetland restoration.

Storm water outfall maintenance: this outfall empties out into the Chesapeake Bay and needs regular monthly cleaning of sand buildup to prevent flooding. In the past maintenance on this outfall was quite simple. We would take a backhoe and scoop the sand out from in front of the outfall and throw it onto the beach. This would take the public works department about an hour to do once a month. Now things are quite different. What used to be regular maintenance is now

considered dredging. The sand that is taken out must be loaded onto watertight dump trucks and disposed of at an approved disposal site after obtaining a permit. This is not a common sense approach and is very costly to the town.

Beach replenishment: the permit application for this work is now into its third year. The process to obtain this permit is taking way too long. The bureaucracy involved in obtaining this permit is frustrating. No less than seven different state and federal agencies must sign off on this permit application. We made this application in my first year in office in 2006 and I'm hoping to have it in my hands before my term is over four years later. In the meantime we watch as our beach gets thinner and thinner disappearing into the Chesapeake Bay.

Tidal tributary maintenance: there is a tidal tributary at the north end of town that is the only source of tidal flushing for a 440 acre wetland. This tributary silts in with sand which prevents tidal flushing of the wetland causing a slow death of a crucial environmental gem. Clearing this channel also reduces flooding of residential areas on the north side of town. The town's public works department has been cleaning this channel since the mid-1980s as regular maintenance. The sand that was removed was just simply put back onto the beach. Now permits are needed with an off-site disposal site. Again, a common sense approach is needed.

Wetland restoration: a feasibility study for this project was started by the Army Corps of Engineers and discontinued in 2001 due to the lack of funding. Upon taking office in 2006, I have worked side-by-side with our federal delegation in trying to resurrect this project. To date we have not been able to obtain funding to restart the feasibility study. This wetland is one of the few natural areas remaining along the shoreline near North Beach and represents critical aquatic habitat for 73 different species of breeding birds. This wetland represents one of the most substantial black duck breeding habitats in Calvert County and the Western shore of the Chesapeake Bay. This particular wetland is also amongst the largest contiguous segments of tidal marsh on the western shore providing the necessary acreage to support the breeding population of this species. The clogged drainage channel effectively serves as a fish blockage and limits access by species such as striped bass, yellow perch, summer flounder, winter flounder, shad, alewife and blueback herring. The whole marsh is experiencing degradation from many factors. This loss must be seen in conjunction with the overall loss of wetlands on the Chesapeake Bay, where, based on studies by the EPA's

Chesapeake Bay Program, an estimated 75 percent of the bay wetlands have been lost in the past century. One solution to restoration that has been proposed is to create additional channels to allow tidal flushing at more points. If no action is taken to reclaim this area, the wetland will continue to degrade. The town of North Beach has made wetland conservation a key issue, and without restoration activities, the citizens of North Beach and the state of Maryland will be denied the positive environmental, educational, recreational, and economic benefits that could be realized by improved habitat quality. In addition, it is likely that nuisance flooding will continue and the wetland will slowly decrease in size and quality.

As explained in the examples above the process is daunting. Working with the different agencies can sometimes be frustrating and confusing. Getting a status of permit applications can be impossible. No accountability or cooperation. The process takes so long that sometimes the original staff member who was assigned to help you has either retired or moved on and no one quite knows what the status is. I recommend that the process be streamlined in some way either through a clearinghouse of some kind or a tracking system. In North Beach we are developing our own tracking system for permits. When a permit applicant calls Town Hall we will be able to give them a status of where the permit is in the process what needs to be done next and when the permit will be issued.

North Beach is the “Jewel of the Chesapeake” and it is our mission to pass it on to our children and our children's children. It will take the effort of all of us here today to make this happen. But we must act now. Through fiscal responsibility and assistance, commitment and cooperation we can restore our beach for all to enjoy for decades to come.