

October 6, 2008

The Honorable Meyera E. Oberndorf
The Honorable City Council

Dear Mayor Oberndorf and members of Council:

As the City of Virginia Beach updates its Comprehensive Plan, we ask that you include a section that would assess the areas of the city where rising sea level would have significant impact on existing and planned development, infrastructure and water quality. The Comprehensive Plan should further provide guidelines for mitigating impacts and ensure future city infrastructure is designed and positioned to accommodate projected incursion.

Recently, Virginia Beach Vision received a briefing on projected sea level rise and its probable impact on Virginia Beach and the Hampton Roads region. The study shows a 1.5 to 2.7 foot relative rise in sea level over the next century. We were surprised to find out that a recent study by an international organization listed Virginia Beach as having the 10th highest dollar value of assets in the world in danger from sea level changes. The impact to existing infrastructure, oceanfront developments and neighborhoods are expected to be significant and widespread.

Measurements show that over the past few centuries the rate of sea level rise in our area has been about 1 foot per century. Direct measurements over the past eighty years around the Bay, however, indicate a recent increase in the rate of sea level rise, ranging from 1 ½ to as much as 3 feet per century. Combined with storm surge, a category 1 hurricane in 2100 would put much of the oceanfront, Sandbridge and the Back Bay areas under water. As base sea level rises over the next few decades, a Noreaster could flood many areas of the city causing significant damage to public and private properties.

North Carolina, Maryland, Delaware, New Jersey and Maine have all undertaken major studies and produced reports addressing the economic and environmental impacts of coming sea level rise. Unfortunately, Virginia has made no similar progress.

Virginia Beach needs to evaluate and incorporate projections from recently produced flood level mapping to mitigate such impacts and assess the adequacy of zoning and land use regulations to protect our coastal assets, neighborhoods and public infrastructure, and to preclude future investment of city-funded services and infrastructure in areas that will be routinely underwater as time passes.

We thank you for your consideration.

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Sincerely,

Stephen R. Davis
President

Cc: James R. Spore, City Manager
R. Steven Herbert, Deputy City Manager
Members, Virginia Beach Planning Commission
Jack Whitney, Director, Planning Department