

RLEP News



Newsletter of the Rappahannock League for Environmental Protection






Dedicated to preserving Rappahannock County

SUMMER 2005

RLEP launches Biodiversity Task Force

BY PAM OWEN

The Virginia Department of Conservation and Recreation lists five plant communities as being native to Rappahannock County:

-  Eastern hemlock-hardwood forest
-  Low-elevation basic outcrop barren
-  Montane mixed oak/oak-hickory forest
-  Mountain/piedmont basic woodland
-  Rich cover/slope forest

Most of us live in Rappahannock County because it offers gorgeous scenery and a quiet, rural way of life. But we also love the county because it gives us the opportunity to be in close touch with nature. While poison ivy and hordes of ladybugs may be the price we pay, we willingly do so to see bald eagles fishing the local rivers, bears eating berries along the trails we hike, and trillium and dogwood blooming in our woodlands in the spring. We enjoy the fact that nature is literally, abundantly at our door.

While we enjoy our native species in Rappahannock, just what do we know about them? Which are native to the county? Which species are plentiful and which are threatened with extinction? What can we do to maintain species diversity in Rappahannock? How should we deal with invading species that are not native? RLEP has formed the Biodiversity Task Force to explore these questions.

While healthy populations of diverse native species of animals and plants are essential to the very character of Rappahannock, such diversity also has broader implications for the wider ecosystem and the survival of all species in it, including *Homo sapiens*. Bees pollinate our crops, birds distribute seeds of native plants to keep our varied ecosystems diverse and balanced, and

voles keep our forests healthy by spreading the spores of fungi that digest food for trees. This is only a little of what we count on from our wild neighbors. We often are so thrilled just seeing them going about their business on a daily basis that we forget how critical they are in the web of life that supports us all.



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The Appalachian jewelwing damselfly (*Calopteryx angustipennis*), a Rappahannock County native, is listed as "imperiled" in Virginia. Damselflies are fierce predators of other insects, including mosquitoes.

For wild species to survive, they need proper habitat, including the right combination of soil, water, air, weather, and geography. The combination of these natural elements form the basis for the varied ecosystems required by different wild species. Conserving the species means protecting these ecosystems. Federal and state agencies, recognizing this interconnection, also list whole plant communities in their natural-resource inventories—and on their endangered lists.

In Virginia,

Continued on next page



many endangered species are generally not as glamorous as those that are in trouble in other states. While the beauty, size, and mystique of wolves can easily attract attention, Appalachian jewelwings (page 1) or greater purple fringed orchids (at right) can easily escape notice. Yet all native species are important.



© THOMAS G. BARNES

The large purple-fringed orchid (*Platanthera grandiflora*), another Rappahannock native, is designated as “critically imperiled” in Virginia.

Data on native species and their habitat in Rappahannock County do exist—from the federal and state governments and from some conservation organizations. However, no comprehensive assessment has ever been made of all the species that are native in the county, and the current status of many of these species is unknown.

The objectives of the task force are still being shaped, but essentially we hope to find out what data do exist on our natural resources, fill in the gaps where necessary through field research, determine which species most need protection, and educate residents on what they can do to help protect those and other native species in our county.

We’ll also explore the complex issue of how to balance the needs of native species against the county’s economic interests and the health and safety of our residents. We’ll be looking at species overpopulation issues as well as the impact of nonnative species—such as multicolored Asian lady beetles and tree of heaven.


The idea of this initiative is certainly not a new one. In January, conservation groups in neighboring Clarke County initiated a year-long study of the county’s natural resources. Other localities and preservation groups are watching what Clarke does and hope the study can serve as a statewide model. One of our task force’s first steps will be to find out more about this study and how Clarke County is going about it.

We want all residents to have input into the Biodiversity Task Force and gladly

accept any offer of help. We’re especially looking for volunteers with a background in wildlife biology, research, or conservation; who have computer and Internet skills; or with contacts in government agencies or other conservation groups that have data on the county or could help evaluate the data we hope to collect. However, anyone with an interest in native species and the time to get involved is welcome.

We on the task force see this initiative as a potentially great learning experience and look forward to working with the Rappahannock community and shar-

ing what we learn. We plan to have our first meeting in June. If you would like more information on the task force or would like to join us, please contact Pam Owen at 540-675-9989 or pam@flybynightbooks.com.

No matter what your interest in native species, we’d like your input. 

Species native to Rappahannock County and currently listed as “imperiled” or “critically imperiled” in the state are

-  Semionellus placidus (a millipede)
-  Appalachian jewelwing (damsel fly)
-  Roundleaf dogwood
-  Hazel dodder
-  Beaked dodder
-  Spotted joe-pye weed
-  Herb-robert
-  Marsh mihly
-  Large purple-fringed orchid
-  Bog bluegrass
-  Rand’s goldenrod
-  Nodding trillium.

For more on native species, go to the Virginia DCR Web site, www.dcr.state.va.us.

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How much traffic do we have in Rappahannock County?

BY DON AUDETTE

One way to measure development in Rappahannock County is to monitor the amount of traffic on its roadways. For example, back in 1960, the number of vehicles on Rt. 211 at Massie's Corner was 2,900 vehicles per day. For 2003, the year of the latest Virginia Department of Transportation traffic figures, the count was 6,100. A doubling in 43 years is not as bad as some of our neighboring counties have experienced.

Compare that with Rt. 211 at Clevenger's Corner. In 1960, the traffic was also 2,900 vehicles a day. But by 2003, it was up to 17,000 a day, more than a five-fold increase. This increase was due to development in Culpeper County, particularly along Rt. 229, where that road feeds into Rt. 211 at Clevenger's Corner. The author ran a regression analysis of past and current VDOT data, and added data from a build-out of Clevenger's Corner that used VDOT and Institute of Transportation Engineers "daily-trip" criteria. The analysis results show that, with Culpeper County's planned development at Clevenger's Corner, the traffic on Rt. 211 could be as high as 45,000 vehicles per day by the year 2020.

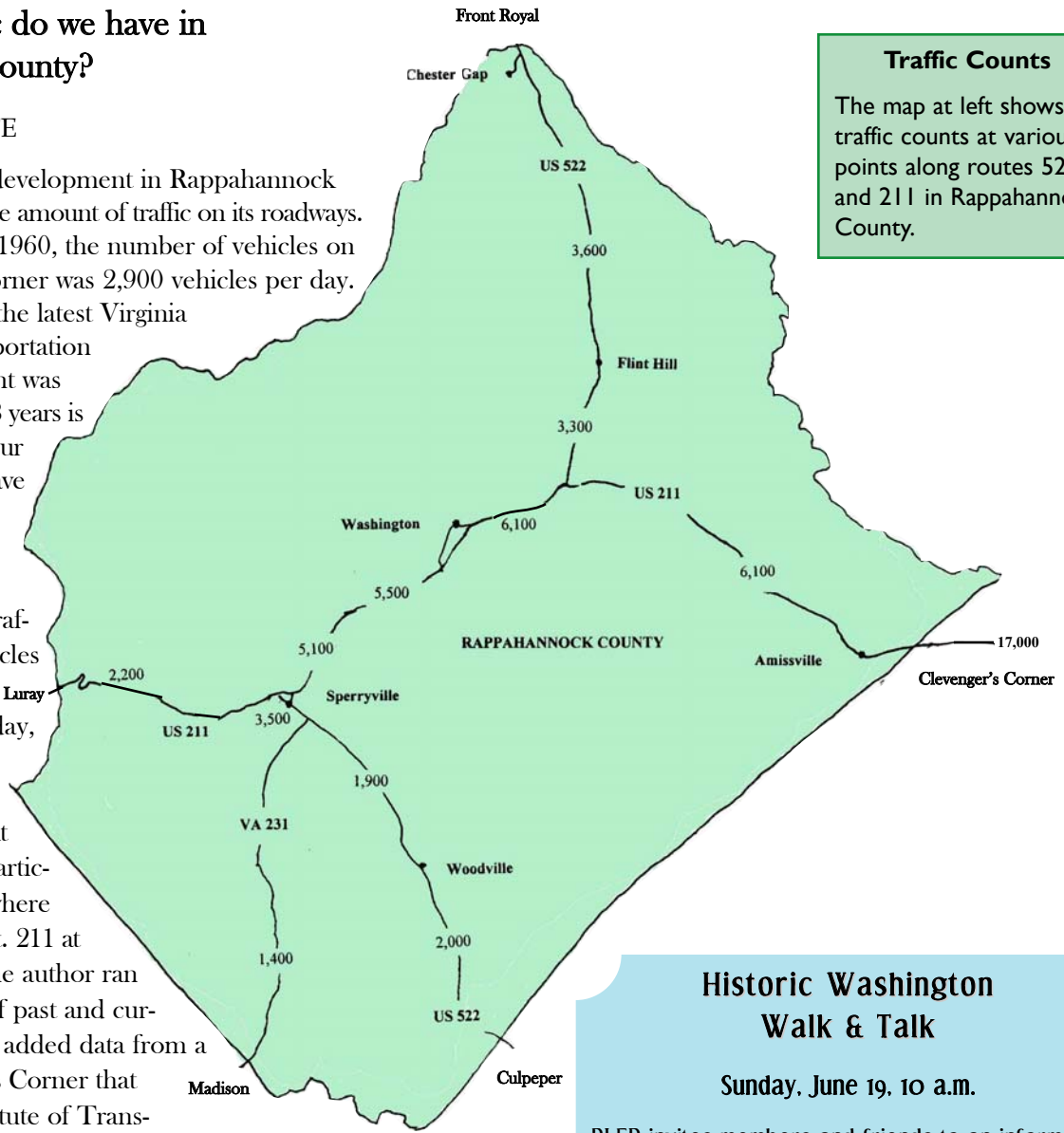
The map above shows the daily traffic on the main roads through Rappahannock County for 2003. The numbers are what VDOT calls "Annual Average Daily Traffic," which is "the estimate of typical daily traffic on a road segment for all days of the week, Sunday through Saturday, over a period of one year."

One notable aspect of the main roads through Rappahannock County is that two of them, US 522 and VA 231, are Scenic Byways. US 211 (Lee Highway) might qualify as a Scenic Byway or as a National Historic Highway. Back in the 1920s and 1930s this highway—which ran from New York City to San Francisco—was regarded as the southern counterpart of the famed Lincoln Highway, which was the northern transcontinental highway between the two cities. Either designation would require a grass-roots effort but could help deter development along these routes.



Traffic Counts

The map at left shows traffic counts at various points along routes 522 and 211 in Rappahannock County.



Historic Washington Walk & Talk

Sunday, June 19, 10 a.m.

RLEP invites members and friends to an informative walk through the Town of Washington with an architectural historian, Cheryl Shepherd. She will help us better understand and appreciate the historical heritage of the town. Shepherd has been studying the town's historical features for the Town Council and recommending revisions to the Historic District Ordinance administered by the Architectural Review Board.

The walk will be followed by a discussion and light refreshments at the Town Hall.

Please contact Kaye Kohler at 540-675-1373 or 540-937-6146 to find out more or to make a reservation for the walk.



Your planning commission is the county's future

BY PAUL R. FARMER

The Rappahannock County Planning Commission meets on the third Wednesday of the month, at 7:30 p.m. in the Rappahannock County Courthouse.

Visit the RLEP Web site, www.RLEP.org, often for updates on county issues and RLEP news. Telephone numbers for the commissioners are listed there. Click on "Current Issues," and check the right-hand column.

The Rappahannock County Planning Commission...its name says it all. The appointed members of this largely advisory panel are commissioned by our elected Board of Supervisors to plan the future land use of this county and to oversee the zoning and subdivision ordinances of the Rappahannock County Code.

This may seem like mundane work that you hope never to have to witness, but if you ever have the opportunity to watch the Planning Commission in action, you will be impressed by the obvious dedication of county citizens working together to serve the interests of every Rappahannocker. The commission struggles with some of the biggest local issues that affect us all: the county's comprehensive plan, land-use planning strategies, zoning and subdivision codes, lighting ordinances, special exceptions, property rights—or as summed up in the county code, "...the orderly growth and development of Rappahannock County."

The Planning Commission has a new chairman this year, Charles Strittmatter. He and his wife, Susan, live on their Clorevia Farm, where they enjoy their horses. Strittmatter is also Chairman of the Board for the Old Dominion Hunt. He is semi-retired from his own family business.

Strittmatter takes an eager, organized, business approach to challenges and work in general. "We planned the work; now we need to work the plan," he says, referring to the Planning Commission's 2004 rewrite of the county's comprehensive plan. The gleam in his eye suggests that he wants to ensure that the plan is more than a reference document that gets pulled down from the shelf

and rewritten every five years. He is clearly focused on the document as our guide for future land-use planning.

Strittmatter has nothing but praise for the other members of the Planning Commission, whom he commends for the cooperative way they work together, and for the county's supervisors, who he says are "...really supportive of the Planning Commission."

Besides holding the chair, Strittmatter represents Wakefield District. He strongly believes that the best way to protect the county from rampant residential development is for individual landowners to place their property in con-

servation easement. As successful as the easement strategy has already been in the county, he suggests that when landowners come to understand the financial as well as conservation benefits of donating easements, the practice will gain momentum here.

What should we expect from the Planning Commission for the remainder of 2005 and for 2006? No one is saying exactly, but it is clear that the commission is educating itself about how development issues are being addressed in surrounding counties, is positioning itself to implement the comprehensive plan to good advantage, and is receptive to citizen and community group input.

Rappahannock's requirement that the minimum average zoning density in conservation and agriculture districts be 25 acres is the most important deterrent to rapid, high-density development. This requirement was the brainchild of a former Planning Commission. The actions of our current commission will likely shape the future of key aspects of our environment as well.

Fortunately, the commissioners like to hear from those they represent, so make your views known, whether by coming to a Planning Commission meeting and speaking to the entire panel during the regular public comment period, or by phoning your commissioner.

Planning Commission

Charles Strittmatter—Wakefield District, Chairman
Raymond Brown—Jackson District
Al Henry—Hampton District
Tom Junk—Piedmont District
Tom Tepper—Stonewall-Hawthorne District
Ron Frazier—Board of Supervisors
Alex Sharp—Board of Zoning Appeals



Charles Strittmatter, new chairman of the Planning Commission

Progress continues at Washington courthouse grounds project

BY BOB LANDER

Your voice can make a difference.

Although the commission and the board do not normally meet together, they appear to operate with a great deal of synchronicity-

reflecting, no doubt, shared values and concerns for our county and its citizens, and shared outlooks for our future. This is good news for RLEP and for all of us.



The Washington courthouse grounds project is moving right along. The initial planting of native trees and shrubs in the garden area at the Porter Street end was completed in April. These complement the Norway spruce donated by John and Judy Tole to kick off the project. The spruce was planted by Steve Schadler.

The project has been progressing since March 2004, when RLEP introduced the idea to about 30 invited, interested people, including county and town officials, civic organizations and clubs, and private citizens. An RLEP ad hoc committee developed the design and a time line that moves the project through the end of 2005. Last fall, RLEP, along with other community groups, raised about \$5,000 to kick off the project through a program presented by Ron Maxwell about the Civil War in film.

Several community organizations are lending their ongoing support to this community effort. The Rappahannock Board of Supervisors gave their okay for the design late last year. The Rappahannock Garden Club was consulted regarding the first phase of the project this spring and will contribute their expertise to selecting the plants for the next phase, in the fall. RLEP has also discussed the project's purpose and design with the planning commissioners, the Washington Town Council, the Rappahannock Association for the Arts and the Community, and the Rappahannock Lions Club. All support the project's goal of being by the community, for the community.

Many individuals have volunteered their

time and effort to the design and execution of the project so far. Bruce Jones, Marc Malik, and landscape architect Jay Monroe collaborated in choosing the plants. Candace Clough planted the area according to the design previously approved by RLEP's ad hoc committee. Plants were obtained at cost from an area nursery. Several organizations have pledged to contribute funds to offset these costs. RLEP is soliciting help for planting and maintenance activities through the summer and fall months. Jim Gannon continues to research the nuances of restoring the Civil War monument as a part of the overall endeavor.

The overall design for the courthouse grounds project is subtle and nonintrusive. It includes outdoor furniture to make the grounds friendlier to visitors. Benches, inviting garden plots, and "rooms" off the walkways will be installed for the community's use throughout the year.

RLEP will be offering the rooms, benches, paving stones, and bricks as memorials or sponsorships at nominal costs. Organizations and individuals may also sponsor larger plants, which will have plaques with the donor's name or with a dedication specified by the donor. All proceeds are tax deductible and will be used to purchase the outdoor furniture and plants and to maintain the grounds. RLEP will keep the community updated on the project as it progresses.

Individuals and groups wanting to contribute time to the gardening activity should contact Marc Malik at 540-987-3155.





Conservation Programs

Conservation Program Updates

Farmland Preservation Program (FPP) and Conservation Easements: A capacity crowd gathered at the home of Judith Richards Hope on May 14 for the county's "First Annual Rappahannock Evening View." The event was held to honor last year's conservation-easement donors and to raise funds for the Farmland Preservation Program. Speaker Bob Lee, Executive Director of the Virginia Outdoors Foundation (which holds most conservation easements in the county), described to more than 220 participants how to keep the county rural and scenic, with abundant forests and open space. The event was sponsored by the Rappahannock County Conservation Alliance (RCCA). County residents showed their support for easements in general and FPP in particular by oversubscribing to the event. Several dozen people remained on the waiting list when space at the event ran out.

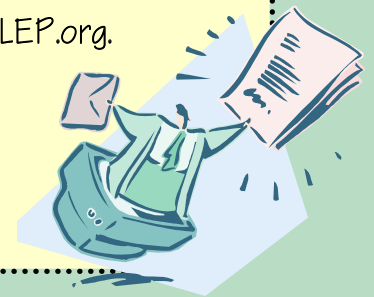
Krebsler Fund for Rappahannock County Conservation: The Krebsler Fund has successfully assisted two landowners in placing their property in conservation easements and currently is working with another family in getting their property protected. The fund, which protects Rappahannock land from development by placing it in easement, is making good progress on arrangements for its first annual fundraiser scheduled for September 13, 2005, at the Inn at Little Washington. The fundraiser will include an art show featuring work from local artists and a seven-course meal under the direction of the Inn's incomparable Patrick O'Connell. For more information, please contact Fran Krebsler at 540-635-0821 or Alan Zuschlag at 540-937-6124.

Small Watershed Protection Program: RappFLOW has received a small grant from the Virginia Department of Conservation and Recreation to develop its data-collection processes for its proposed water-protection project for the Thornton River: "People, Land, and Streams of the Upper Thornton River Watershed: A Model for Countywide Watershed Management Planning." For more information on the project, go on the Web to www.RappFLOW.org/upperthorntonwatershed/index.html. RappFLOW is still waiting for the response from the National Fish and Wildlife Foundation on its proposal for the project, which RappFLOW submitted in January.

Get on RLEP's E-mail List!

To keep up-to-date on RLEP Action Alerts, special events, and meetings, send your e-mail address to us:

mail@RLEP.org



Cyberspace Dreaming...



One advantage of Web site publishing is the lack of space constraints on article length common to newsletters, such as here in RLEP News. Often, interesting

articles in this newsletter must be truncated to fit the space allowed, and informative photos are omitted for the same reason.

Our Web site offers a solution: now we can publish the rest of the story on the Web—and add photography and other graphics as desired. One such example can be found in the story titled "Habitat fragmentation threatens wildlife," published in the Spring 2005 issue of this newsletter. The longer version is posted on www.RLEP.org under the "Living Green" tab.

Visits to our Web site continue to

increase, with nearly 3,000 page views per month. We expect this number to continue growing as we add new feature articles and photos. As we go to press, a new page with links to other sites is in development, and we are preparing to add a new portfolio to Richard Lykes' photo gallery.

Be sure to check the Web site often for new Action Alerts. The alerts are intended to notify RLEP members and friends of threats to our environment or, conversely, opportunities to make a positive impact.

—KATHY POUCH, WEBMASTER

I N S I D E R L E P

This space, which used to be “RLEP Currents,” is set aside for your president’s message, and we thought it was time for a new name for the column. We wanted something that suggests that you are getting the inside scoop on RLEP, on what’s going on with the board, and on what the organization’s leadership is thinking. So here goes...

RLEP has gone through a major turnover in leadership in recent months, which is nothing new. The RLEP Board of Directors is constantly morphing, as new directors come and old stalwarts depart. The important thing is that we have maintained an even keel and steady progress toward goals that shift gradually, if at all. At the board’s recent “off-site” conference, held in March, we reaffirmed our long-standing mission, goals, and objectives, and discussed a few new initiatives.

The biggest new initiative for RLEP is the Biodiversity Task Force, under the leadership of Pam Owen (see page 1). If you want to know more about the task force or volunteer to help, please contact Pam at 540-675-9989 or pam@flybynightbooks.com.

RLEP has recently added some new volunteer positions: Photographer, Richard Lykes; Public Relations Director, Bob Lander; and an Events Coordinator, Kaye Kohler. Thanks are in order to each of these volunteers; they generously serve without monetary compensation.

Which brings me to the issue of RLEP organizational development. Are we doing the best job we possibly can as an environmental nonprofit? You, our members, should expect no less. Your donations are keeping RLEP moving ahead in the defense of our environment and in voicing good counsel on the best management decisions and planning for Rappahannock County and its natural and cultural resources. We are working to keep the rural in Rappahannock, but how can we maximize our effectiveness as a nonprofit?

The answer, I think, is that we also have to continuously work to build a better RLEP. We need to pay particular attention to recruiting RLEP directors—especially individuals who have significant nonprofit experience,

including administration, planning, donor development, and grant writing. We also need writers, researchers, environmental scientists, engineers, educators, and lawyers, and volunteers with a host of other skills and the time to work on our objectives. If you think you might fit some or one of these descriptions, have ideas about other ways you could further our goals as an RLEP director or volunteer, and have the time to contribute, contact us at mail@RLEP.org. Elections for at least five new directors are just four months away.

You may or may not know that RLEP issues “Action Alerts” to its members and friends when breaking issues require Rappahannock citizens and landowners to register their views. This was a big help in passing the county’s lighting ordinance last year. Action Alerts helped again regarding a potentially precedent-setting decision of the Planning Commission concerning a request to install a controversial private sewage-treatment “package” plant. The plant would have been installed on a small, new-home site, where effluent would have washed directly onto neighboring properties. If you would like to receive our future e-mail Action Alerts, please e-mail us at mail@RLEP.org. You can also keep an eye out for RLEP Action Alerts by frequently visiting our Web site at www.RLEP.org.

Now that’s “Inside RLEP.” I hope it struck a chord.

—PAUL FARMER, PRESIDENT

Check Your Membership Expiration Date

Please check the mailing address block on this issue of *RLEP News*. The **EXP: Date** tells you when your RLEP membership expires. Please don’t let your membership lapse. You can also renew early—we’ll extend your membership for another full year, regardless of when you renew. And remember that your contribution is tax deductible.

THANKS FOR YOUR MEMBERSHIP CONTRIBUTION!

Send your donation to
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Issue Updates

Trash Trucks: After a legal settlement of \$8.53 million to CapitalSource Finance, Inc. (the creditor of the bankrupt private company of National Waste Services of Virginia), Page County has finally obtained the right to run its Battle Creek Landfill. The county is sinking a further \$4.5 million into bringing the landfill up to Virginia's Department of Environmental Quality standards in accordance with Virginia's Solid Waste Management Act. The county would like to open the landfill for business in July but needs to float a bond issue for \$13 million to cover the aforementioned and other start-up costs. If it comes up with the money, the county must then seek bids from private contractors for certain large-scale work to be done. When the landfill opens, it can take in only 250 tons of trash a day. Page County's residents and businesses generate about 80–100 tons per day. With increased gas prices, the county might have trouble finding trash close by beyond its borders to make the landfill profitable.

Town of Washington's Comprehensive Plan: When completed, the revision the Town of Washington's comprehensive plan will clarify diverse growth policies involving both the town and the county. The town wishes to have reasonable growth, as does the county, but the county also prefers that growth take place in the villages and not throughout the countryside. The town has retained the services of two consultants—Herd Planning & Design, Ltd, and Paradigm Design—and is also working with the Rappahannock County Planning Commission on these issues. The town currently has 88 occupied and 29 vacant homes. The options for growth range from a traditional low-density plan of 27 new units up to a maximum density of 87 new units if a cluster development plan is followed. The number of homes drives the size of the wastewater treatment system.

Town of Washington's Water System: A new reservoir is to be constructed of stressed concrete at a cost of \$300,000. Capable of retaining about 200,000 gallons, it will hold double the capacity of the old concrete reservoir. Bids for the construction work may be received early this summer.

Town of Washington's Wastewater System: A new wastewater system is needed, as current septic systems are failing. A consultant, WW & Associates, has made recommendations on the problem. The first part of the problem, dealing with collecting and conveying sewage from homes and businesses, fell into four options: grinder pumps and low-pressure discharge; a pump system for septic-tank effluent; a vacuum sewer and pump stations; and a gravity sewer and pump stations. The first option is the choice recommended by the consultant. The second part of the problem concerns the treatment of the wastewater after it has been collected and conveyed to some point. There are three options: building a new wastewater treatment plant with discharge to a subsurface, drip-drainage irrigation system; pumping the wastewater to an expanded Sperryville wastewater treatment plant for processing there and discharge into the Thornton River; and building a new wastewater treatment plant with discharge into the Rush River near the town.



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