

August 5, 2014

Northampton County Planning Commission
Department of Planning and Zoning
P. O. Box 538
Eastville, VA 23347

Dear Planning Commission Members,

I would like to address the Commission members in an effort to clear the air and exchange accurate information regarding: **1).** Future uses of the “Harvey” property in Oyster, **2).** The “By Right” services that can be offered in a waterfront village according to our current zoning and **3).** Future water and sewage issues facing Northampton County. There has been a great deal of misinformation regarding these issues and I feel it would be in the best interest of all concerned parties to take the time to clear up any misconceptions surrounding each of these subjects. I would also like to speak briefly about our small towns and the reason we feel so strongly about investing in them.

For six years now, the speculation concerning the Oyster properties has run the gambit from the simple thought of saving the original structure from demolition by moving it across the street and preserving it for future use, to the extreme rumors that the Baldwin family wants to turn the old building into a hotel or condominiums. Let’s talk about the facts. We were fortunate enough to have the opportunity to save this old Oyster dwelling which was scheduled to be torn down by its owners, The Nature Conservancy. The structure was carefully moved across the road, beautifully renovated and it is now a real asset to the village of Oyster, even though to date it sits empty. If nothing else ever happens to turn this wonderful building, (which we call “Harvey”), into a great business location, at least we have saved an unsightly old structure and turned it into a beautiful addition to the Oyster harbor area. The story should not end there.

At this point in our Oyster project, it seems to make the most sense to turn the old, but beautifully restored building into a multi-use business that would serve the needs of the harbor area, attract tourist dollars and provide local jobs. Currently, part of the “Harvey” site is occupied by the Cherrystone Aqua Farm which operates a clam nursery facility. The clam operation has thrived at this location and all expectations for production have been exceeded. After a very successful 2013 growing season, Cherrystone expanded the number of clam tanks at the Oyster location in 2014. This successful pairing has already experienced growth in just one year. The Cherrystone Aqua Farm business on the waterfront of Oyster is a perfect addition to the harbor community.

Other ideas that seem to make sense for the "Harvey" site include a waterfront "Mom and Pop" general store where locals, boaters and traveling tourists can stop in to purchase gasoline, ice, drinks and snacks for their boat ride out on the seaside. With the county owned Oyster Boat Ramp located directly across the harbor, it seems a natural fit for this business to cater to the needs of the hundreds of boaters per month using the boat ramp daily during at least three seasons of the year. With that thought in mind, it would also make sense to sell products related to a day out on the water. These items would include not only gasoline, ice, drinks and snacks, but items such as life jackets, fishing poles, lures, sunglasses, sunscreen and a host of other boating related necessities. The store may also sell marine supplies such as portable gas tanks, boat plugs and small trailer parts. We would like to be able to rent out kayaks to folks who want to come to the area and explore our harbor, marshes and waterways. We have been asked to stock items made by local artists and food products made by local small businesses. These items may include paintings, photography or handmade jewelry by local artists as well as locally produced baked goods, preserved foods and wines. This great old building was originally built to be used as a general store.

It is extraordinary to think that gasoline cannot be purchased in the village of Oyster.

Along with the "Mom and Pop" general store concept, we would like to offer a raw bar or small snack bar for locals and travelers who are looking for a place on the waterfront to sit and eat seafood or a sandwich with family and friends. On our menu, we would like to be able to offer products grown and harvested on the Eastern Shore and prepared or produced by local talents. In addition to the prepared foods, we would like to sell local oysters and clams as well as fruits and vegetables by the dozen or by the bushel basket to our customers. This type of down home, waterfront business could be a wonderful addition to Oyster and Northampton County. It would benefit local growers and harvesters, increase local employment and again help boost the local economy.

Another idea for the "Harvey" building is the thought that we may be allowed to make a nightly rental unit over the downstairs business area. It would be a space for travelers to spend a few nights at this unique location. This would not be a long term rental space or a condo unit, but just a simple space where travelers can come and stay for a few days, spend their money in our county and leave. This would be a natural adjunct to the harbor.

We are very fortunate that the Nature Conservancy has protected the land that they have protected around this federal harbor. It does not mean that commerce has to end. Currently there is aquaculture, a research community and a recreational community functioning in Oyster, and there is nothing wrong with selling those folks gasoline, a bag of ice, a soda or boat paint from a harbor front business. Think about ecotourism and the simple restrictions that are put on this potentially wonderful project. Clean businesses like ecotourism would be a great fit for the "Harvey" building, but currently I am not allowed to rent out a kayak according to the current county zoning.

This brings me to the second topic mentioned above: The “By Right” services that can be offered in a waterfront village business according to our current zoning. The only problem with this beautiful building, at this wonderful location is the restrictions placed on it by county government. These restrictions do not allow us to realize the full potential of this great opportunity. The current restrictions make it cost prohibitive for us to continue to move forward. The current Northampton County zoning does not even allow us to rent out a kayak or rent a short-stay room from the harbor location.

I am asking the Northampton County governing bodies to work with us to make the “Harvey” building in Oyster a great example of what can happen when private money and local government work together to look towards the future. This is a prime example of how a little forward thinking by our governing bodies could help restore these small, once thriving communities. I am asking this Planning Commission to please work with us come up with a plan for “Harvey” that works for all parties. We are open to ideas, but we are also urging the Planning Commission to help ease the current restrictions that are preventing us from moving forward with a potentially great waterfront village business. I am here today to openly discuss the possibilities. I urge you to think to the future with regard to a project such as this one, which is funded with private money that will benefit not only the owner, but the village and the county. Projects like “Harvey” could be a model for restoring our small towns in Northampton County. We need to work together, move forward and make this business an asset to the village of Oyster, the County of Northampton and the entire Eastern Shore.

The third topic I would like to revisit with Northampton County is the subject of a regional water and wastewater system. We need to take a serious look into the future with regard to the water and sewage issues of Northampton County. How long can a peninsula such as ours, with a limited amount of natural resources, continue to support all of the wells and septic tanks currently in use, as well as future systems, before there are failures of massive proportions? We are all aware that there are water and sewage issues throughout the county. I would like the opportunity to talk openly with Northampton government officials about the possibility of a regional water and wastewater facility at the Webster site in Cheriton.

This topic was first introduced a few years ago, because of the issues with the Cape Charles water and sewage systems, surrounding areas with substandard water & sewage systems and the need for water & sewage systems for current businesses and future business growth. The problems with the Cape Charles water system have existed for many years. I would like to reference the water study presented by Elaine Meil of the Accomack-Northampton Planning District Commission of June 30, 2014, in which she notes that the water quality issues of Cape Charles are just as bad as they have ever been and getting worse. The wells in Cheriton, at the Webster site, are not affected by the water issues that plague Cape Charles. Studies have shown that the Webster site is sitting on top of the deepest part of the aquifer that runs under this county.

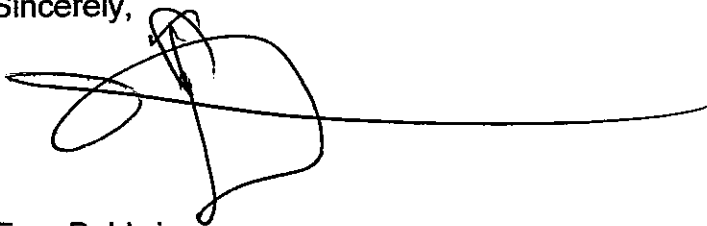
Another reason to explore the possibilities of a regional water and wastewater system is the future of the small towns in Northampton County. Our small towns are currently struggling to stay alive. These towns represent perfectly good subdivisions, so why do we want to go out and destroy a good crop producing field or forest to put in the infrastructure for growth? Why continue to ruin our fields and make land unproductive when we have towns that already have infrastructure in place and we are abandoning them.

Thinking ahead to the future of Northampton water and sewage needs, I urge the Planning Commission take a serious look at the possibility of a regional water and wastewater system at the Webster site in Cheriton. Here is an answer that solves the issues of Cape Charles and other towns in this county. For instance, in what the county calls the Southern Node, from Eastville to Cape Charles, the towns & hamlets could be serviced without promoting highway development. We are not opposed to any person, township, organization or Northampton County, helping us develop a regional and practical system that works for all individuals, towns, hamlets and businesses in Northampton County. We are open to ideas. I urge the decision makers of this county to revisit the installation of a regional water and waste water facility. The Webster site in Cheriton is the perfect place for such a facility as was pointed out in studies eight years ago. All of the information regarding this topic that was given to the county at that time, still holds true today.

Finally, I think it is very important to talk about the small towns in Northampton County. Our small towns need all of the help they can get just to survive. I think we would all like to see our towns not only survive but thrive. We must come up with new ideas to help our small towns to repair, renew and grow, so that they will continue to exist for future generations. These small towns are part of the fabric of who we are. We all need to concentrate on renewing and strengthening our main streets and responsibly managing business growth on Route 13 with the emphasis on saving these one to two hundred year old subdivisions.

In closing, I would like to thank you for your time. I look forward to working with you in order to realize some of these goals. How do we move forward together and arrive at a time when I can rent a kayak in a seaside waterfront village in Northampton County? Will you help me realize the full potential of this property in a timely and cost effective way? I want to invite you to come to "Harvey" in Oyster. Don't listen to the speculation, come see the facts and look at the effort for yourself.

Sincerely,

A handwritten signature in black ink, appearing to be 'Eyre Baldwin', with a long horizontal line extending to the right.

Eyre Baldwin