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VIRGINIA COASTAL ZONE MANAGEMENT REPORT

A survey of the nine Virginia Planning District Commissions (P.D.C.'s) involved in Virginia's Coastal Zone Management Plan has revealed that, while first-year efforts among the P.D.C.'s in developing the plan have varied in intensity, all P.D.C.'s share certain views as to its future.

One point of universal agreement is that some working determination must soon be made as to what constitutes the "coastal zone." The problem appears to be twofold. First, upriver P.D.C.'s such as Northern Virginia, Fredericksburg, and Richmond still question their part in the program. Second, even those clearly included districts have been hindered through not knowing whether they should concentrate on aspects affecting the quality of coastal waters, or whether their concern should encompass a general reworking of all land use planning within their jurisdictions. Though this problem is one that goes back to the federal Coastal Zone Management Act itself, it appears that the State Planning Commission must take the initiative in making the definition, so that the federal act's deficiencies will not continue to permeate and vitiate lower level initiative.

There is likewise a uniform fear expressed that a Virginia Coastal Zone Management Act would serve merely to create another layer of government with still another licensing procedure to burden developers of property. This, coupled with a kindred fear that coastal zone management opens the local tent to the nose of the State camel, has more than anything else accounted for the desire on the part of some planning district members and some local officials to ignore the whole program in hopes that it will go away. These are notably the Northern Virginia, Fredericksburg, and Lower Peninsula P.D.C.'s.

Others, such as the Middle Peninsula, Southeastern, and Eastern Shore P.D.C.'s, have put considerable effort into the matter and have solid proposals. These proposals favor limiting State involvement to a funding and review capacity, and place responsibility for general management of any coastal zone management program with local boards, as is done in the Virginia Wetlands Act.

There is a consensus that the Coastal Zone Management Plan may prove to be a valuable means for consolidating licensing procedures into a single-application process. Applications related to development are now made separately to the agencies that are concerned with zoning, subdivision, site plans, water withdrawal, water discharge, wetlands, and sanitation. These might all be consolidated so that a single application to a local coastal zone management commission could be forwarded through the applicable channels for comment. This plan would bear some resemblance to the federal Environmental Impact Statement procedure.

As envisioned by one proposed plan, the local decision would be binding as to all State, regional, or local permits relating to the proposed activity. A delay of some period, perhaps thirty

days, would occur before action of the local board would become effective. Appeal to the State board could be made by State or regional agencies, and also by neighboring jurisdictions and aggrieved parties. The right of appeal for neighboring jurisdictions is an attempt of this plan to face the boundary problems certain to arise; but the language here and throughout this portion of the proposed plan is still unclear as to the possible right of individuals who might be affected but not parties, either in original or neighboring jurisdictions, to take part in the initial decision process or to appeal to the State board.

Planning districts have varied in their attempts to include representative local interests in first-year planning. Efforts range from simply designating existing planning commission committees as Regional Advisory Committees, to that of the Southeastern Planning District in establishing a Citizens' Advisory Committee of twenty to twenty-five members, including representatives from environmental, business, agricultural, minority, and civic groups. No P.D.C. has reported any attempts to hold informational meetings for interested but non-member citizens, however.

Planning districts that have dodged responsibilities during the first year of Virginia's Coastal Zone Management Plan have pleaded problems of tight funds and personnel shortages, and have criticized State officials who expected the P.D.C.'s to carry on such work with no extra funding. They have also found fault with the loose instructions, dearth of guidelines, and what is characterized as generally poor communications between the State Planning Commission and the P.D.C.'s during the past year.

While there is undoubted validity at least to some of these objections, it must be noted that while some P.D.C.'s have complained, others have produced. Still, it seems certain that if any effective plan is to emerge from second-year efforts, some quick policy decisions must be made as to the location of the "coastal zone," what "management" entails, and how this new plan is to interact with the existing bureaucracy.

Persons interested in obtaining more information about the coastal zone management program or desiring to offer comments can contact the following persons:

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William Ishmael	Richmond P.D.C.	804 644-9586
Herbert Hamrick	Northern Neck P.D.C.	804 529-7400
Dale Burton	Middle Peninsula P.D.C.	804 758-2312
Hank Cochran	Peninsula P.D.C.	804 838-4238
John Carlock	Southeastern P.D.C.	804 461-3200
Albert Vicziam	Eastern Shore P.D.C.	804 787-2936

Information may also be requested from the Marshall-Wythe Environmental Law Group, in care of this newsletter.