

What is Important to YOU? WATER!

What are the hot topics and what do we do with them?

For the past six months, in preparation for the Comprehensive Plan update, the Community Participation Team has been collecting your thoughts and ideas on the issues facing James City County. We have read all the input received, which is available for you to examine at www.jccplans.org, and have developed a list of hot topics that are on your minds. Hot topics were strongly related and many comments crossed categories, but generally included the impacts of growth, community character/quality of life, transportation, economic climate, environment, housing, population needs, and water. To help everyone have a better understanding of these hot topics, what they include, and the next steps of the process, we are going to highlight the topics on a regular basis leading up to the second round of Community Conversation meetings. Water will be discussed at the Community Conversation on Wednesday, August 13 from 6-9 at Lafayette High School, 4460 Longhill Road.

What do we mean by “water”?

The provision of safe and clean water in a quantity sufficient to support the region’s development was at the forefront of many of your minds during the first round of Community Conversations. Most comments were related to the speed of growth and included concerns that there would not be enough water to support the population on a long-term basis. This is strongly tied to the first hot topic, impacts of growth, in the recognition that increased growth puts additional demand on existing water resources. Additionally, the impacts of developments and land use decisions on the availability of water also need to be evaluated with each new proposal. With this came the recognition that our water supply need is an issue that has to be addressed regionally as groundwater aquifers and surface water sources do not stop at the County border. This makes it even more important to work together to manage this precious resource so that there is enough drinking water for future citizens of the region. Comments also called for increasing conservation measures and using native plants that don’t require as much irrigation. Threats to the water supply caused by man, nature, spills, contamination, etc. were also raised as a concern. Finally, people would like to see more information presented about potential alternative water sources that are being examined.

How does water availability affect my daily routine?

Water is necessary to support life and we don’t go a single day without consuming or using it. But it’s not just used for drinking water. Every time we turn on our faucets, flush the toilet, water the garden, or wash the car, we are tapping into this limited resource. Our groundwater aquifers are under increasing strain as our water needs increase due to new development. The rate at which the aquifers can be recharged is not increasing as fast as this increase in demand and JCC has had to look to other localities for provision of surface water to meet the demand. The quality of our water resources is every bit as important as the availability of the water we need. This ties into another hot topic, environmental concerns, as certain land use and development practices can have an impact on what ends up in our water supply.

How did we get here and how would the Comprehensive Plan address the issue?

Water has been a key issue throughout the last two Comprehensive Plan updates. In 2003, the James City County Citizen’s Survey conducted by Virginia Tech reported that 69% of citizen’s polled thought that it was very important for the County to invest substantial resources to increase the access and availability that citizens will have to water in the future. In the 2007 survey, that number increased to 76% showing increased concern for securing adequate water resources.

The James City Service Authority (JCSA), which provides the majority of public drinking water to County citizens, is the largest water system in Virginia that relies solely on groundwater. The primary component of the JCSA water system, the Central water system, met an average daily demand of approximately 5.0 million gallons of water in 2007. In comparison, in 2000, the Central water system met demands of 3.7 million gallons of water. About 65% is used to meet residential demand while 35% is used to meet the demands of businesses in the County. This demand fluctuates seasonally as well due to the use of irrigation systems. For example, while average winter demand in 2008 was about 3.8 million gallons of water per day (mgd), peaks in the summer months can reach 8 mgd. Water demand has clearly increased in the last seven years.

The JCSA is permitted to draw 8.9 mgd of groundwater. Water obtained under this permit from existing wells and the recently opened reverse osmosis treatment facility is projected to meet County needs until 2012. Newport News Water Works, who owns and operates three surface water reservoirs, also provides approximately 6.0 mgd to the Roberts District of the County. In March 2008, the JCSA entered into a contract to purchase 4.0 mgd of water from Newport News. This additional water, along with existing groundwater supplies, will meet the County's needs through 2040 based on current trends and land use projections.

This update of the Comprehensive Plan will continue to look at water-related issues as they are such an important aspect of our lives. Part of the sustainability concept is managing development so that current and future generations of citizens can be supported, and providing adequate future water supplies is an essential component of this effort. But what is the best way to plan for our water supply needs? Should we look for more ways that both residents and businesses/industries can conserve water on a daily basis? Should we limit growth or explore alternative water sources (such as reuse)? Or should we work to secure resources beyond those planned by JCSA and Newport News Water Works to accommodate expanded growth? It's up to you to come tell us at the August 13th Community Conversation!

Additionally, the environmental component will look at ways to continue to protect groundwater resources through monitoring and inventorying wells, enforcing standards to protect water from pollution during normal activities of land use, and encouraging related public education programs.

Where can I go for more information?

-2003 Comprehensive Plan: <http://www.jccegov.com/government/administration/comp-plan.html>

-James City Service Authority: <http://www.jccegov.com/jcsa/index.html>

-Let's Be Water Smart!: <http://www.bewatersmart.org/index.html>

-Virginia Cooperative Extension: <http://www.ext.vt.edu/>

-Hampton Roads Water Efficiency Team: <http://www.hrwet.org/>

-Hampton Roads Planning District Commission: <http://www.hrpdc.org/>

-Environmental Protection Agency Groundwater site: <http://www.epa.gov/safewater/>

-American Water and Energy Savers: <http://www.americanwater.com/>

-Virginia Water Resources Research Center: <http://www.vwrrc.vt.edu/>

-The Groundwater Foundation: <http://www.groundwater.org/>