



*Presentation to the Virginia Stakeholder Advisory Group, November 7, 2018 by Mary Gattis, Director of Local Government Programs/LGAC Coordinator, Alliance for the Chesapeake Bay*

### **Virginia Local Government Roundtables – Project Overview**

The Local Government Advisory Committee to the Chesapeake Executive Council (*via the Alliance for the Chesapeake Bay*) received funding from the Virginia Environmental Endowment (VEE) to hold a series of roundtables for local elected officials in Virginia’s Chesapeake Bay Watershed.

Through peer-to-peer dialogue, LGAC hoped to increase elected officials’ knowledge about watershed protection and restoration and increase local engagement in the development and implementation of Virginia’s Phase III Watershed Implementation Plan (WIP). The roundtables were modelled after work LGAC’s been doing in Pennsylvania since 2014.

Virginia Roundtables were hosted by LGAC’s Virginia delegation including:

- Richard Baugh, Vice-Mayor, City of Harrisonburg
- Ruby Brabo, Chair, Board of Supervisors, King George County
- Penny Gross, Supervisor, Mason District, Fairfax County
- Jasmine Gore, Vice-Mayor, City of Hopewell
- Chip Jones, Director, Northern Neck Soil and Water Conservation District

*\* Andrea McClellan, Councilmember, City of Norfolk is a member of the delegation but the roundtable planned for her region was cancelled due to insufficient registration.*

### **Summer 2018 Roundtables**

LGAC members hosted seven roundtables during the month of June 2018. Roundtables were held in:

- Harrisonburg
- Doswell (*held in conjunction with George Washington Regional Commission annual dinner*)
- Charlottesville
- Fairfax
- Culpeper (*had several last minute cancellations due to extreme weather*)
- Hopewell
- Tappahannock (*event conflicted with White House event for VA Board of Supervisors*)

We engaged approximately 73 people.

Participants were asked to rate their level of familiarity with watershed protection/restoration issues\*.

Just Learning: 15

Somewhat Familiar: 33

Fairly Knowledgeable: 7

*\*Note: These results are distorted by Doswell event. Excluding Doswell split is 12/14/6.*

The response to the roundtables was very positive.

- Elected officials appreciated the opportunity to share their efforts and hear from others.
- Elected officials want more opportunities for dialogue.

Discussion varied significantly by region. Detailed reports from each roundtable are available on LGAC's webpage under Projects and Resources (<http://www.chesapeakebay.net/who/group/lgac>).

#### Common Challenges

- Limited resources – money, staff and time
- Competing priorities
- Water quality/quantity
- Impact of stormwater regulations on agriculture and economic development

#### Opportunities

- Need to maximize co-benefits. Address local priorities, e.g. flooding, drinking water protection, regulatory compliance, economic development while protecting/restoring water resources.
- Collaboration can save resources and affect greater change. In Harrisonburg, participants shared an example of intergovernmental cooperation between Staunton and Augusta County.

Attendees were asked to identify the issues most important in their community. Thirty-one (31) people responded as follows: Healthy watersheds (24), stream health (22), protected lands (19), tree canopy (17), forest buffers (17), wetlands (16), public access (15), climate resiliency (14), fish habitat (10), underwater grasses (11), toxic contaminants (14), and brook trout (2).

#### ***Final Thoughts***

There is a need to increase local officials' knowledge around water resources protection/restoration.

Attracting local officials is always a challenge but those who attend find the roundtables very helpful.

Group size should be limited to 20 or under to allow for meaningful discussion.

Hold the line on keeping attendance only to elected officials if the goal is to increase the number of elected officials who act as leaders in watershed protection.

Limit involvement of state agency representatives to one or two key individuals. Ann Jennings, Deputy Secretary of Natural Resources attendance was extremely beneficial. Elected officials appreciated her commitment to hearing their comments. Ann was a terrific listener and took extensive notes. She told attendees she would be sharing their concerns and ideas with the Matt Strickler, Secretary of Natural Resources and Governor Northam.

Avoid presentations. Instead choose one or two topics and pose questions to stimulate discussion. A copy of the Facilitators Guide used by LGAC members is available upon request.

Use multiple avenues to invite elected officials. Direct emails, mailed letters, emailed invitations from trusted sources like VACo, VML and the regional PDC are all effective. Follow up phone calls are also be helpful. A comprehensive contact list for local elected officials is needed.