

# SMITH ISLAND UNITED

## MEMBERSHIP MEETING

July 27, 2024

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**JULY 27, 2024**



### AGENDA

- ▶ Vision Plan Review
- ▶ Verizon
- ▶ Q&A/Open Discussion

# SMITH ISLAND UNITED



## Smith Island Vision Plan

A Vision for how Smith Island will look, feel, and thrive in the coming decades.



The nine-month process for creating a vision for Smith Island had five key elements:

- Community Survey
  - Steering Committee
  - Community Meetings
  - Information from Experts
  - Vision Plan Development
- 
- Grant: \$90,000

# GOAL # 1

**GOAL 1**

## Achieving the Vision

**Goal#1:** Sustain and grow the watermen's livelihood as the foundation of the economy, tourism, and a traditional way of life.



### Challenges to Sustaining the Watermen's Way of Life

Becoming a waterman requires a significant financial investment in a securing a license, a boat, fishing gear, dock space and the services needed to get the crabs and oysters to market, such as picking co-ops or shedding "shorties." Crabbing is seasonal, limited to the months between April and September, and then many watermen use their boats to harvest oysters during winter months. Days are long, management regulations restrict the volume of harvests, and sales revenues fluctuate with market prices. In addition, environmental impacts in the Bay—reduced oxygen levels, high nitrogen from run-off, depleted underwater grasses and loss of wetlands—have caused declining crab population and lost revenue for Smith Island watermen.

Smith Island's economy has been anchored in the harvest of crabs, oysters, and fish from the Chesapeake Bay since the 1800s. The island's location has historically provided watermen with easy access to these fisheries. In fact, Smith Island has been at the center of the Chesapeake Bay soft-shell crab industry for nearly 100 years. In the past several decades, however, the number of watermen living and working on the island has been declining because of better paying jobs on the mainland, and fluctuating fish, shellfish, and crab stocks. Authors of *Turning the Tide: Saving the Chesapeake Bay*, Tom Horton and William Eichbaum, estimated that working watermen in the Bay fell from 14,000 in 1993 to 10,000 by 2003.

The declining watermen economy has ripple effects on the rest of Smith Island. Some businesses have closed or reduced operating hours. Soft shell crab operations are decreasing, and more and more Smith Island family members are taking jobs on the mainland.

The watermen's history and way of life is one of the things that sets Smith Island apart. Finding ways to strengthen and build on the watermen economy and culture will be critical to building a sustainable future for Smith Island.

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Sustain and grow the watermen's livelihood as the foundation of the economy, tourism, and a traditional way of life.

**Dredging Study: \$25,000**

**Thoroughfare Dredging Project Grant: \$3,800,000.**

**Tylerton Boat Ramp: \$125,000**

**Ewell Dock Repairs: \$130,000**

**RP Dock Replacement: \$562,000**



# GOAL #2

## Build a more diverse local economy for Smith Island that leverages the Island's tourism potential.



## GOAL 2

### Achieving the Vision

**Goal#2:** Build a more diverse local economy for Smith Island that leverages the Island's tourism potential.

Since transitioning from a largely agricultural economy based on raising cattle in the 1800s, the watermen industry has been Smith Island's economic mainstay. In recent decades the number of people who are making a full-time living on the water is declining in the Chesapeake Bay region. As part of this regional trend, more people have been leaving Smith Island to pursue other employment opportunities. Strengthening the Island's overall local economy will require diversifying seasonal and year-round job opportunities and creating businesses that can generate revenue that stays on the island.

that make Smith Island unique – a quiet, safe, church-centered community. Smith Islanders want to attract tourists and provide the services and amenities that will encourage them to spend money on the Island, while maintaining Smith Island's current "working watermen" culture. It is also important to create year-round job opportunities that are not dependent on tourism and provide families with more steady income. This idea is explored under Goal #5 – Grow the year-round population of the Smith Island villages.

Increasing visitors to the Island and providing more services and attractions to increase the length of their stays seems like an obvious answer. Many natural, historical and cultural aspects of the island draw visitors during the warmer months, for the day or the week, for getting away or for hunting and fishing. Various businesses have emerged over time as part of the tourism economy such as restaurants, short-term house rentals, and the Smith Island Bakery. However, Smith Islanders have made it clear that they are concerned about becoming a tourism-centered island where outsiders have a negative impact on the values and culture

#### The Challenge of an Island Economy

A robust economy is critical to Smith Island's survival. Without it, residents – especially younger ones – will leave for places offering more promising opportunities. Catalyzing economic growth on Smith Island will require creativity, persistence, and a vision that grows the economy without jeopardizing the things that make Smith Island unique.



Photo courtesy of The Chesapeake Bay Foundation

- Cultural Center Remodel: \$150,000
- Branding Smith Island: \$15,000
- Forever Maryland Clean Up Grants \$ 7000
- Smith Island Park Improvements: \$5000
- Community Park and Overlook: \$170,000



# GOAL #3

Develop and maintain infrastructure that is resilient, supports the local economy, and increases the quality of life ..



**Achieving the Vision**

**Goal#3:** Develop and maintain infrastructure that is resilient, supports the local economy, and increases the quality of life.

The term "infrastructure" here refers to the engineered systems used to provide the most basic services to a community. Traditionally, these include roads, storm drainage, water supply systems, and wastewater systems, which are typically developed and maintained with public funds (see sidebar). In addition to these traditional systems, communications infrastructure like towers, dishes and cables, and energy infrastructure are part of this discussion. Another infrastructure element addressed under this Goal, one that is unique to waterfront communities, is shoreline and flood protection.

The condition of each of these infrastructure elements on Smith Island is described briefly below.

**The Challenge of Infrastructure**

Hard infrastructure is critical to the safety, success, and quality of life on Smith Island. Perhaps more than any other issue in this Vision Plan, infrastructure requires significant levels of funding and cooperation between local residents and all levels of government.

**Snapshot of Smith Island Infrastructure**

- Water is supplied from wells maintained by local cooperatives in each village.
- Electricity is provided by A&N Electric Cooperative based in Virginia through underwater and above-water transmission lines, with emergency diesel generators on the island serving as backup.
- The County maintains two sewage treatment plants – one in Tylerton and one on the road between Ewell and Rhodes Point.
- Verizon provides Internet and cell service. Internet is limited to a certain number of households because of limited broadband capacity with the existing equipment.

**1. Shoreline Protection**

The configuration of smaller islands that make up Smith Island creates a network of channels and currents that have shaped how residents connect with the water. Crab shanties, piers, docks, moorings and other marine features were all established based on where watermen could find shelter, safely dock, and handle their catch. These channels and work areas are part of a larger system of shorelines, points, and barriers that experience erosion either slowly over time or quickly during large storms. Even small changes to this network can alter conditions in traditional watermen work areas to the point where they would no longer be viable. Increased erosion also leads to loss of valuable and protective marshland, loss of crab

habits, and increased flooding of roads and inundation of other public and private property. In discussions with the Steering Committee and members of the community, shoreline protection consistently rose to the highest priority level for infrastructure investment.

To date, Tylerton has taken the most aggressive steps toward shoreline protection through a combination of bulkhead installation and shoreline hardening with riprap. Ewell and Rhodes Point also have similar installations, but not nearly at the same scale. Moving forward, the next major shoreline protection project involves the Martin National Wildlife Refuge, located northeast of the inhabited portion of the island. The Hurricane Sandy Resiliency project will use a combination of headland control

GOAL 3

Smith Island Vision Plan 14

- RP Shoreline Stabilization: \$4,472,000
- Drainage Study/Improvements: \$400,000
- RP Jetty: \$10,690,000
- Martin Wildlife Shoreline: \$8,400,000
- Elevate Roadways 12 inches: \$1,871,000
- Sewer Plant Improvements: \$12,200,000

# GOAL #4

Develop and maintain a reliable and sustainable transportation system that meets the needs of residents and increases tourist opportunities



**GOAL 4**

### Achieving the Vision

**Goal#4:** Develop and maintain a reliable and sustainable transportation system that meets the needs of residents and increases tourist opportunities.

Developing and maintaining robust transportation to and from Smith Island, and between the island's three communities, is critical for the wellbeing of Smith Island's residents and for the island's economic health, in terms of supporting the tourism industry.

Going back and forth between Smith Island and the mainland is critical for residents' quality of life and the success of local businesses. For the residents, access to groceries, household supplies, healthcare, and other services depend on water transport, whether goods and services come to the island or they travel to the mainland to purchase them. Reliable and affordable transportation back and forth from the mainland is also critical for tourists. Most tourists that visit the island do not use their own boats and rely on ferry or charter transport to provide access to all that there is to see on the island.

Once on the island, transportation is generally adequate for residents. Visitors to the island can easily navigate within each community on Smith Island, but it can be challenging for them to move from one village to another. Business owners rely on frequent boat transportation to bring needed supplies to support their custom and visitors require boat transportation to get their fish and shellfish to markets beyond Smith Island.

#### The Challenge of Transportation

Because it is 12 miles from the Eastern Shore, Smith Island requires boat connections to the mainland as well as ways to move around the island day to day. The small scale of these systems, the limitations related to weather, and the logistics of coordinating repairs all create challenges for supporting this unique transportation system.

#### Connections between the Mainland and Smith Island

Three passenger ferries provide shuttle services and, between the three boats, a ferry is scheduled to perform two round-trip excursions. The current schedule during the tourist season is advertised on the website [www.visitsmithisland.com](http://www.visitsmithisland.com) as leaving Crisfield at 12:30 and 5:00 pm, returning from Tylerton at 7:00 am and 3:30 pm and returning from Ewell at 4:00 and 5:00 pm. The evening schedule tends to vary depending on the number of passengers seeking transport. During the Fall, Winter and early Spring months, the schedule is more limited. A roundtrip boat trip costs approximately \$60 in fuel. With other operating costs, boat captains need about six passengers (at \$20/one-way trip) to make the trip profitable. It was noted that the boat crews also earn additional revenue by charging for baggage, kayaks, bikes and other equipment.

Another source of transportation is the school boat providing regular service to the mainland. This service is provided exclusively for school age children and the service does have permission to transport island residents if necessary. Tourists are not allowed to use the school boat for passage.

During summer months, there are additional cruise boats that leave from Crisfield and from the western shore for daily or overnight trips.



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- Two Captains License Courses: \$12,000
- Transportation Study 2017: \$50,000
- Transportation Study 2024: \$50,000
- Tylerton Boat Ramp: \$125,000
- Ewell Dock Repairs: \$130,000
- RP Dock Replacement: \$562,000

# GOAL #5

**GOAL 5**

## Achieving the Vision

**Goal#5:** Grow the population of Smith Island's villages with a focus on year-round residents.

**The Challenge of Growing the Population**

While the addition of only a few families makes a big difference to Smith Island population numbers, convincing people who might want to live on Smith Island with job and housing opportunities can be a challenge.

The population of Smith Island has decreased significantly over the past several decades. Data varies on the exact population numbers, but reasonable estimates show a decline from close to 500 people (1990 Census) to just under 300 people today. The population numbers have dropped to a point where planning for basic services and infrastructure is challenging. For example, the number of children in the schools has dropped to the point where there soon may not be enough to keep the existing elementary school open. Another example of where population levels are important is with the current wastewater planning efforts. The number of residents that is anticipated for sewer service is a critical piece of the planning and design effort for any future system upgrades. From an economic perspective, the declining number of residents makes it more difficult for local businesses (e.g., stores, restaurants) to remain viable. Residential population, therefore,

is inextricably woven into all of the planning, economic, and cultural aspects of this Vision Plan.

Residents and business owners are committed to working proactively to increase the population of Smith Island to previous high levels. But even a few new families could make a significant difference in the next five years. While the importance of seasonal residents to the island economy and community is well-recognized, the hope is to increase the year-round population as much as possible and to attract younger individuals and families. Strategies related to watermain viability, infrastructure, and diversifying the economy will all contribute to increasing population. Other strategies presented under this goal focus on improving first impressions of the island and fostering a more intimate experience between current residents and people who may be interested in buying a home.



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Grow the population of Smith Island's villages with a focus on year-round residents

**All of the grants collectively:  
future investment, growth and overall  
improvement of the island=  
Increase in home buyers/residents**

**Dental Clinic: \$100,500**

**Rural Housing Preservation Grant \$50,000**

**Facade Improvement Grant: \$75,000**

**Community Center Renovations: \$120,000**





# AND THE GRAND TOTAL SO FAR....



## Projects Since Vision Plan Adoption (2015-2024) \$43,569,500.00

- Smith Island Vision Plan \$90,000
- Dredging Study \$25,000
- Rhodes Point Shoreline Stabilization \$4,472,000
- Drainage Improvements \$350,000
- Rhodes Point Dock Replacement \$562,000
- Façade Improvement Programs \$75,000
- Community Park Overlook & Canopy \$170,000
- Community Center Renovations \$120,000
- Rhodes Point jetty project \$10,690,000
- Thoroughfare Dredging \$3,800,000
- Martin Wildlife Shoreline \$8,400,000
- Elevate roadways 12 inches \$1,871,000
- Smith Island Drainage Study \$50,000
- Tylerton Breakwater \$100,000
- Tylerton Boat Ramp \$125,000
- Ewell Dock emergency repairs \$130,000
- Forever Maryland Cleanup Grants \$7,000
- Smith Island Park Improvements \$5,000
- Two Captains License Courses \$12,000
- Dental Clinic \$100,500
- Cultural Center Remodel \$150,000
- Sewer Plant Improvements \$12,200,000
- Rural Housing Preservation Grant \$50,000
- Branding Smith Island \$15,000





# BUT WE'RE NOT DONE YET....

- ▶ Verizon Grant
- ▶ Façade Grants
- ▶ Tourism and Economic Grant
- ▶ Ferry Transportation Grant
- ▶ Goal 2 Committee: Social Media/Toursim Development



# VERIZON

## Plan & savings details

5G Home	5G Home Plus
2-year price guarantee 	3-year price guarantee 
Starts at \$35/month when combined with select Verizon 5G mobile plans <sup>2</sup> and Auto Pay <sup>3</sup>	Starts at \$45/month when combined with select Verizon 5G mobile plans <sup>2</sup> and Auto Pay <sup>3</sup>
Starts at \$45/month when combined with other mobile plans and Auto Pay <sup>3</sup>	Starts at \$55/month when combined with other mobile plans and Auto Pay <sup>3</sup>
\$50/month with Auto Pay only	\$70/month with Auto pay only

- Existing customers: can get service for \$35/month.
- Verizon Forward Program: can be as little as \$20/month and new customers can get it free for the first 6 months. Verizon Forward is eligible if you were on ACP, Lifeline, SNAP/WIC benefits, or received a Pell Grant.

Want to learn more about 5G and network connectivity? Check out

<https://improveyourwireless.com/baltimore/>

# OPEN DISCUSSION

- ▶ Q&A
- ▶ General Comments
- ▶ Closing Remarks
  - ▶ Website/Social Media- Be careful what you post
  - ▶ Issues/Ideas: See your SI Representative
  - ▶ Next Meeting

