

Town of Wachapreague, Virginia

Comprehensive Plan

2025



ADOPTION RECORD

**Town of Wachapreague, Virginia
Comprehensive Plan**

Adopted December 11, 2025

Pursuant to § 15.2-2223 through § 15.2-2226 of the Code of Virginia, the Comprehensive Plan for the Town of Wachapreague, Virginia, was reviewed, certified, and recommended by the Planning and Zoning Commission and subsequently adopted by the Town Council as follows:

Planning Commission Action

The Wachapreague Planning and Zoning Commission, following public notice and hearing in accordance with § 15.2-2204 of the Code of Virginia, voted on October 07, 2025, to certify and recommend the Comprehensive Plan to the Town Council by adoption of Resolution No. PC-2501.

Town Council Action

The Town Council of the Town of Wachapreague, Virginia, after public notice and hearing in accordance with § 15.2-2204 of the Code of Virginia, voted on December 11, 2025, to adopt the Comprehensive Plan by adoption of Resolution No. TC-25-01,

Signatures


James Bell, Chair
Planning and Zoning Commission
Town of Wachapreague, Virginia
Date: 12/24/25


Charles Elliott, Mayor
Town of Wachapreague, Virginia
Date: 12/24/25


Susan Springer, Clerk
Town of Wachapreague, Virginia
Date: 12/24/25

Vote of the Town Council

| Council Member | Yea | Nay |
|-----------------------|------------|------------|
| Sandie Puchalski | x | |
| Craig Baker | x | |
| Robert Bilicki | x | |
| Robert Hipple | x | |
| Aileen Joeckel | x | |
| Glenn Schagelin | x | |

Virginia Code Section § 15.2-2223: The local planning commission shall prepare and recommend a comprehensive plan for the physical development of the territory within its jurisdiction and every governing body shall adopt a comprehensive plan for the territory under its jurisdiction.

In the preparation of a comprehensive plan, the commission shall make careful and comprehensive surveys and studies of the existing conditions and trends of growth, and of the probable future requirements of its territory and inhabitants. The comprehensive plan shall be made with the purpose of guiding and accomplishing a coordinated, adjusted, and harmonious development of the territory which will, in accordance with present and probable future needs and resources, best promote the health, safety, morals, order, convenience, prosperity and general welfare of the inhabitants, including the elderly and persons with disabilities.

The comprehensive plan shall be general in nature, in that it shall designate the general or approximate location, character, and extent of each feature, including any road improvement and any transportation improvement, shown on the plan and shall indicate where existing lands or facilities are proposed to be extended, widened, removed, relocated, vacated, narrowed, abandoned, or changed in use.

In compliance with this statute, this 2025 Comprehensive Plan for the Town of Wachapreague, Accomack County, Virginia, is prepared by the Town of Wachapreague Planning and Zoning Commission and adopted by the Town Council of the Town of Wachapreague.

Table of Contents

| Section | Content | Page |
|----------------|--|-------------|
| I | Vision Statement | 5 |
| II | Introduction | 6 |
| III | Location and Geography | 7 |
| IV | Population and Economic Status | 9 |
| IV.1 | Population | 9 |
| IV.2 | Economic Status | 11 |
| IV.3 | Housing | 12 |
| IV.4 | Business Environment | 13 |
| V | Environmental Conditions | 14 |
| V.I | Flood Plain Management & Hazard Mitigation | 14 |
| V.II | Coastal Erosion & Sea Level Rise | 16 |
| VI | Goals & Strategies | 17 |
| VI.1 | Tourism Development | 18 |
| VI.2 | Economic Diversification | 20 |
| VI.3 | Environmental Sustainability | 21 |
| VI.4 | Community Engagement | 22 |
| VI.5 | Infrastructure | 24 |
| VII | Summary | 26 |
| VIII | List of Figures | 27 |

Section 1: Vision Statement

Over the next five years, our small coastal town envisions itself transforming into a thriving tourism destination that celebrates its natural beauty, preserves its cultural heritage, fosters sustainable economic growth, and offers visitors unforgettable experiences while maintaining a high quality of life for our community members.



Photograph Courtesy of Dave Groshong

Section II: Introduction

Long ago the indigenous peoples on the Shore named this area Wachapreague meaning “Little City by the Sea” for good reason.

The shoreline extends the entire width of the town offering opportunities for commercial, recreational, environmental, and educational endeavors access to the cleanest waters on the east coast.



To the East of Atlantic Avenue, the marsh extends several miles to the barrier islands. These marshes attract many varieties of waterfowl and shorebirds. Environmental and nature enthusiasts leave from our docks to view and study the abundance that lives there.

The barrier islands are nature preserves. Having been protected for decades they have returned to their natural states. The shorelines on the Atlantic side of these islands offer beachcombers some of the best shell finds on the east coast. For nature lovers they are undeveloped platforms from which to witness all the raw creatures and plant life that can thrive here.

Wachapreague has always been a part of the commercial fisheries and has many opportunities for those who desire to make their living on the sea.

The Virginia Institute of Marine Science (VIMS) has their campus here. They helped to launch the aqua-farming industry including raising oysters, clams and now scallops.

With easy access to the main highway, medical care and retail shopping residents enjoy a peaceful community without the clutter of fast-food chains and commercial traffic.

Section III: Location and Geography

Wachapreague is situated in Accomack County, Virginia, on the Eastern Shore—a peninsula that lies between the Chesapeake Bay and the Atlantic Ocean.

- **Coordinates and Location:** Wachapreague is located at approximately 37.67° N latitude and 75.73° W longitude. It's about 40 miles north of the larger town of Cape Charles and approximately 60 miles south of the Maryland-Virginia state line.
- **Finney Creek:** The town is positioned along the Finney Creek, which along with Bradford Bay, provides direct access to the Atlantic Ocean. This creek is a significant feature, facilitating both commercial and recreational boating and is a tidal waterway that connects to a network of other waterways and salt marshes.
- **Geography and Landscape:** The landscape around Wachapreague is characterized by low-lying terrain typical of the Eastern Shore. The area is predominantly flat with elevations generally ranging from sea level to a few feet above. The surrounding environment includes salt marshes, tidal creeks, and sandy shores. These marshes and creeks are crucial for local biodiversity, serving as habitats for various species of fish, birds, and other wildlife.
- **Barrier Islands:** To the east of Wachapreague are several barrier islands that play a key role in protecting the mainland from ocean storms and high tides. These islands, including Parramore Island and parts of Assateague Island are known for their natural beauty and ecological importance.
- **Climate:** Wachapreague experiences a temperate climate with four distinct seasons. Summers are generally warm and humid, with temperatures often reaching into the 80s and 90s Fahrenheit (27-35°C). Winters are cooler but not extreme, with temperatures ranging from the 30s to 50s Fahrenheit (0-10°C). The area is also prone to occasional hurricanes and tropical storms due to its coastal location.
- **Natural Resources:** The waters around Wachapreague are rich in marine life, making it a hub for fishing—both commercial and recreational. Species like blue crabs, oysters, and various types of fish are commonly found here. The surrounding marshes also provide vital ecological functions, such as water filtration, flood, and storm surge protection.

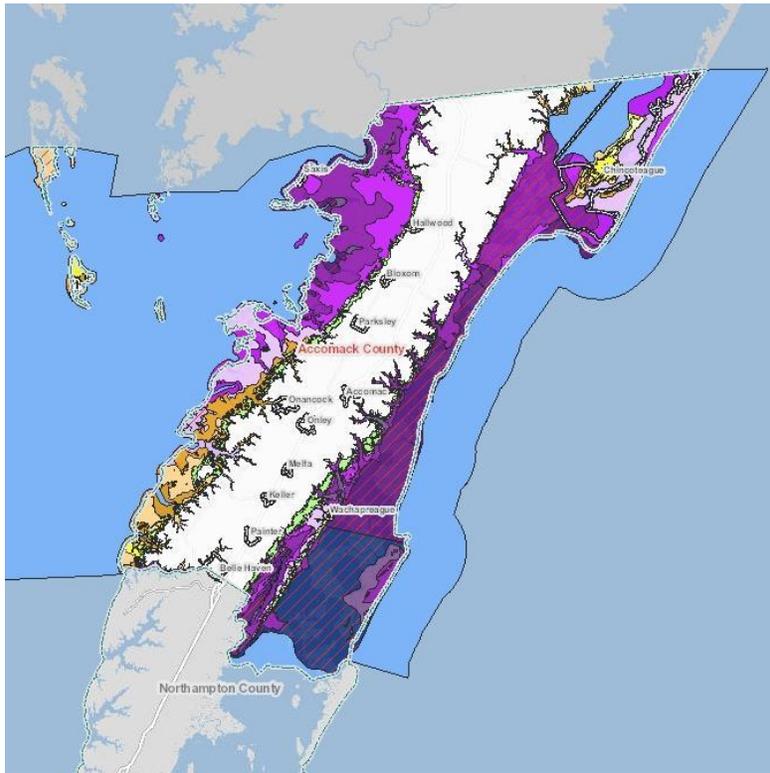


Figure 1 - Accomack County

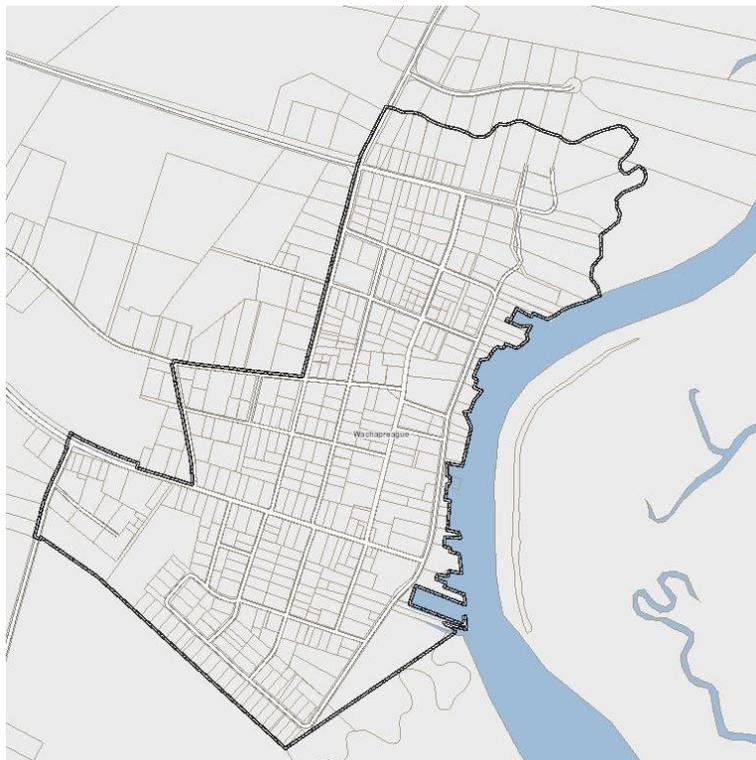
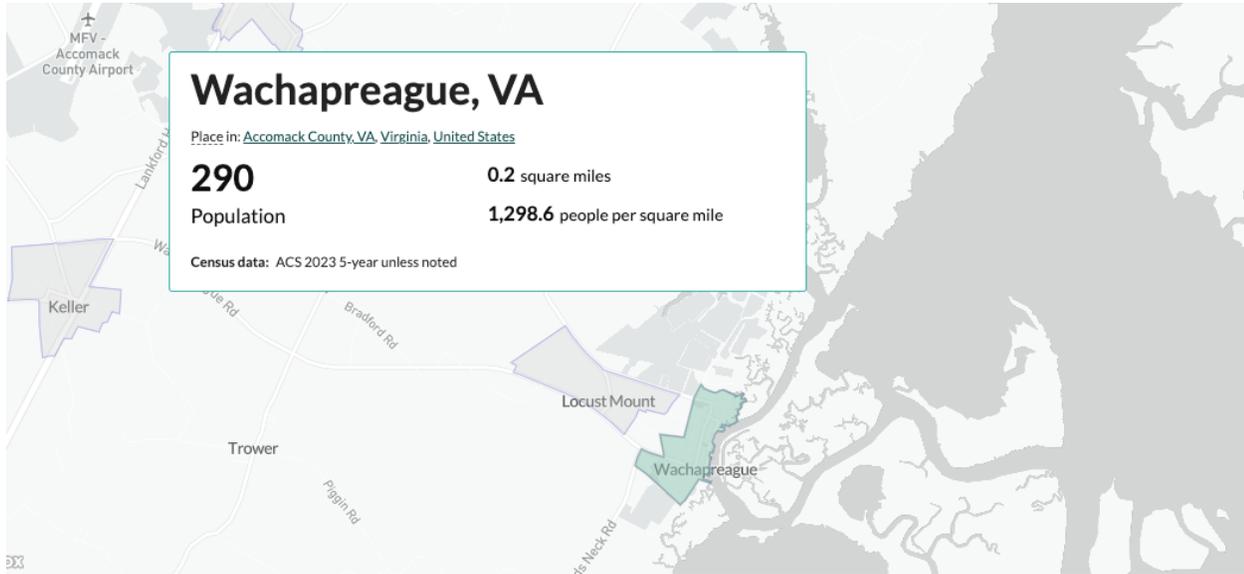


Figure 2 - Wachapreague, Virginia

Section IV: Population and Economic Status



IV.1: Population

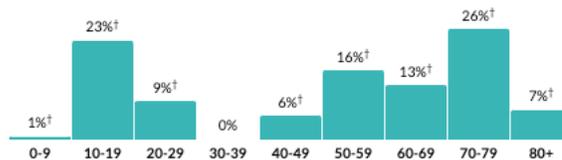
Age

58.1

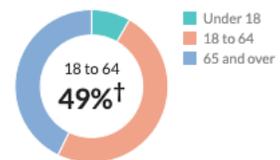
Median age

about 25 percent higher than the figure in Accomack County: 47.5
 about 1.5 times the figure in Virginia: 38.8

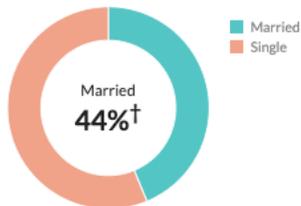
Population by age range



Population by age category

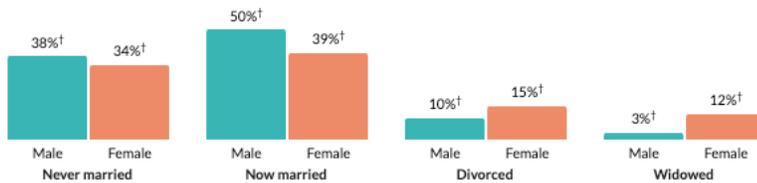


Marital status

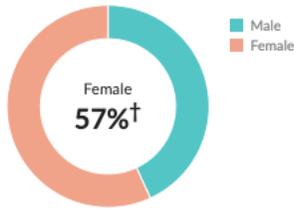


* Universe: Population 15 years and over

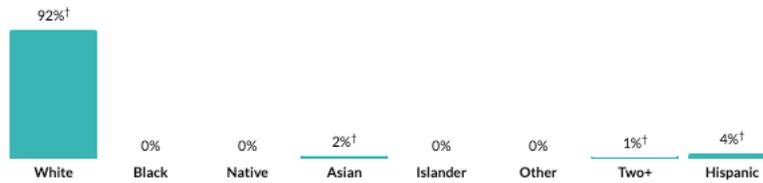
Marital status, by sex



Sex



Race & Ethnicity



* Hispanic includes respondents of any race. Other categories are non-Hispanic.

Households

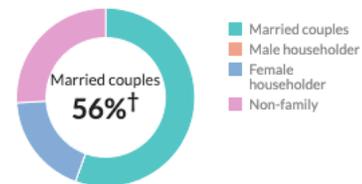
139
Number of households

Accomack County: 14,302
Virginia: 3,326,260

1.8
Persons per household

about 80 percent of the figure in Accomack County: 2.2
about three-quarters of the figure in Virginia: 2.5

Population by household type



Data Source: <https://censusreporter.org/profiles/16000US5182320-wachapreague-va/>

Educational attainment

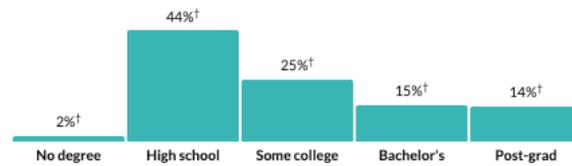
97.6%
High school grad or higher

about 20 percent higher than the rate in Accomack County: 82.8%
about 10 percent higher than the rate in Virginia: 91.3%

28.6%
Bachelor's degree or higher

about 1.3 times the rate in Accomack County: 21.8%
about two-thirds of the rate in Virginia: 41.5%

Population by highest level of education



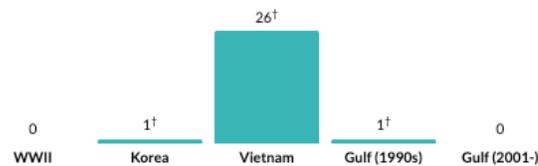
* Universe: Population 25 years and over

Veteran status

12.4%
Population with veteran status

about 1.3 times the rate in Accomack County: 9.3%
about 1.3 times the rate in Virginia: 9.6%

Veterans by wartime service



* Civilian veterans who served during wartime only

33 Total veterans
33 Male
N/A Female

Data Source: <https://censusreporter.org/profiles/16000US5182320-wachapreague-va/>

IV.2: Economic Status

Income

\$33,479

Per capita income

about the same as the amount in Accomack County: \$33,213

about two-thirds of the amount in Virginia: \$49,217

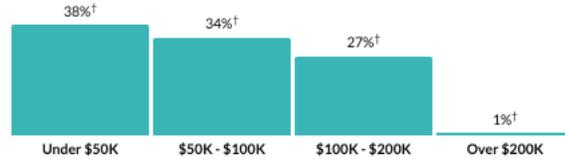
\$56,917

Median household income

about the same as the amount in Accomack County: \$57,500 †

about three-fifths of the amount in Virginia: \$90,974

Household income



Poverty

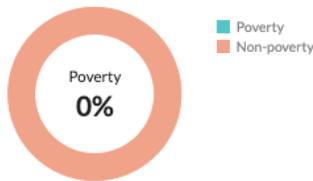
2.8%

Persons below poverty line

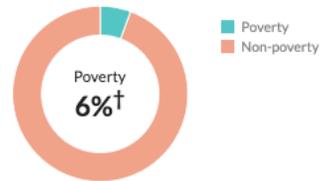
about one-fifth of the rate in Accomack County: 14.9% †

about one-quarter of the rate in Virginia: 9.9%

Children (Under 18)



Seniors (65 and over)



Data Source: <https://censusreporter.org/profiles/16000US5182320-wachapreague-va/>

IV.3: Housing

Value

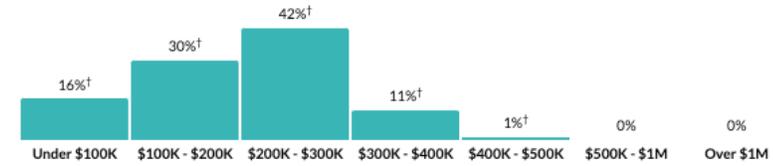
\$206,300

Median value of owner-occupied housing units

about 10 percent higher than the amount in Accomack County: \$193,100

about three-fifths of the amount in Virginia: \$360,700

Value of owner-occupied housing units



Units & Occupancy

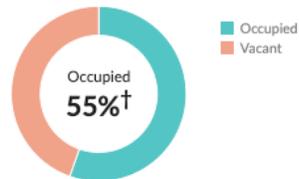
251

Number of housing units

Accomack County: 21,897

Virginia: 3,654,784

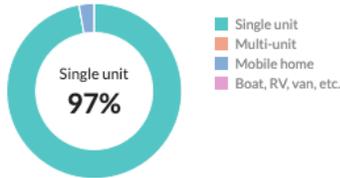
Occupied vs. Vacant



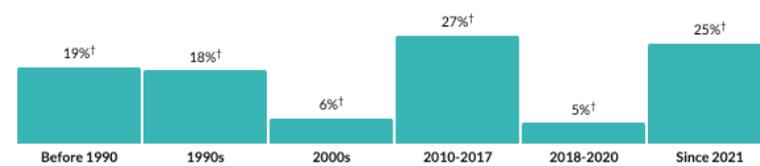
Ownership of occupied units



Types of structure



Year moved in, by percentage of population



Data Source: <https://censusreporter.org/profiles/16000US5182320-wachapreague-va/>

IV.4: Business Environment

Lodging

- Archies Flounder House
- Fisherman’s Lodge, Marina & Campground
- JDAR Holdings, LLC Art Studio Apartment
- Several Bed and Breakfast Locations
- Teasers Fisherman’s Lodge
- Wachapreague Hotel Inc

Retail

- Current Reflections Fine Arts Gallery
- Island House Gift Shop
- Trident Tackle
- Wachapreague General Store
- Wachapreague Hotel, Inc. Gifts

Dining

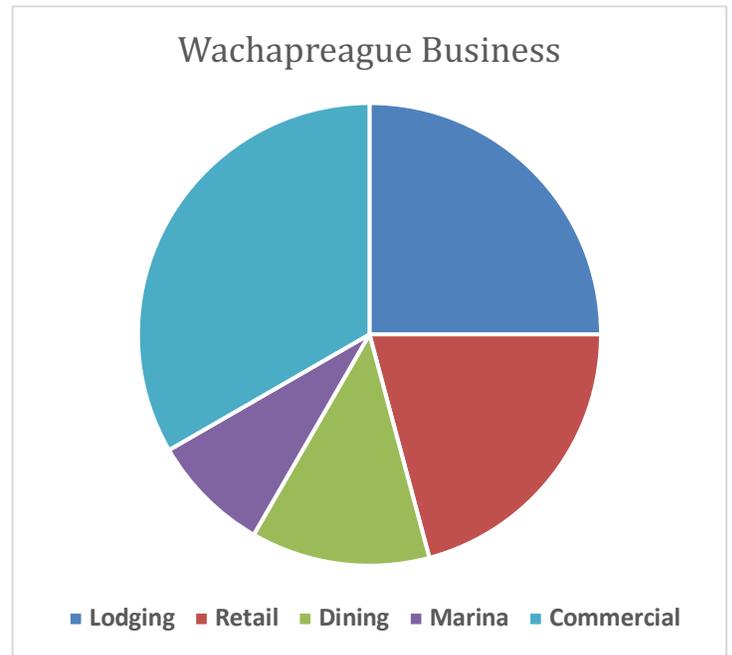
- Island House Restaurant
- Lilliston Seafood
- Wachapreague General Store

Marina

- Island House Marina
- Wachapreague Town Marina

Commercial

- Daytripper Tours
- Lilliston Seafood
- Paul’s Electric & Plumbing
- R.P. Marine Service
- Seaside Ecotours
- Teasers Sportfishing LLC
- Wachapreague Outfitters Kayak Rentals
- Wardius Contracting, Inc.



Section V: Environmental Conditions

V.1: Floodplain Management and Hazard Mitigation

Wachapreague lies within the geological region known as the Coastal Plain which is a low-lying region composed of sands, silts, and clay deposited by glacial melt water. The town is separated from the Atlantic Ocean by barrier islands and salt marsh.

Most of the town lies in the 100-year floodplain with the remainder lying in the 500-year floodplain. Within the Coastal High Hazard Areas (CHHA) Wachapreague has two A Zones where the Base Flood Elevations range from base flood elevation of 7 to 8 feet.

The town participates in the Hazard Mitigation Planning process. The town's primary risk is associated with coastal flooding. Wachapreague also participates in the voluntary Community Rating System (CRS), which encourages the community to establish sound programs to recognize and encourage floodplain management activities that exceed the minimum National Flood Insurance Program (NFIP) requirements.

The town is divided into three drainage sheds which lead to local creeks. Many of the ditches within the town are capture ditches due to the relatively flat nature of the town. Storm water often stands in areas of the town until it evaporates.

National Flood Hazard Layer FIRMette



75°41'43"W 37°36'34"N



Legend

SEE FIS REPORT FOR DETAILED LEGEND AND INDEX MAP FOR FIRM PANEL LAYOUT

SPECIAL FLOOD HAZARD AREAS

- Without Base Flood Elevation (BFE) Zone A, X, AP
- With BFE or Depth Zone AE, AO, AH, VE, AP
- Regulatory Floodway

OTHER AREAS OF FLOOD HAZARD

- 0.2% Annual Chance Flood Hazard, Areas of 1% annual chance flood with average depth less than one foot or with drainage areas of less than one square mile Zone X
- Future Conditions 1% Annual Chance Flood Hazard Zone X
- Area with Reduced Flood Risk due to Levee. See Notes. Zone X
- Area with Flood Risk due to Levee Zone D

OTHER AREAS

- No SCREEN Area of Minimal Flood Hazard Zone X
- Effective LOMRs
- Area of Undetermined Flood Hazard Zone D

GENERAL STRUCTURES

- Channel, Culvert, or Storm Sewer
- Levee, Dike, or Floodwall

CROSS SECTIONS

- 26.2 Cross Sections with 1% Annual Chance
- 17.4 Water Surface Elevation
- Coastal Tract
- Base Flood Elevation Line (BFE)
- Limit of Study
- Jurisdiction Boundary
- Coastal Tract Baseline
- Profile Baseline
- Hydrographic Feature

OTHER FEATURES

- Digital Data Available
- No Digital Data Available
- Unmapped

MAP PANELS

- The pin displayed on the map is an approximate point selected by the user and does not represent an authoritative property location.

This map complies with FEMA's standards for the use of digital flood maps if it is not void as described below. The basemap shown complies with FEMA's basemap accuracy standards.

The flood hazard information is derived directly from the authoritative NFHL web services provided by FEMA. This map was exported on 7/1/2025 at 5:16 PM and does not reflect changes or amendments subsequent to this date and time. The NFHL and effective information may change or become superseded by new data over time.

This map image is void if the one or more of the following map elements do not appear: basemap imagery, flood zone labels, legend, scale bar, map creation date, community identifiers, FIRM panel number, and FIRM effective date. Map images for unmapped and unmodernized areas cannot be used for regulatory purposes.

0 250 500 1,000 1,500 2,000 Feet 1:6,000
 Basemap Imagery Source: USGS National Map 2023

Figure 3 - National Flood Hazard Chart

V.II: Coastal Erosion and Sea Level Rise

The constantly shifting barrier islands and extensive marshes have historically protected the town from the wave energies of the Atlantic Ocean. For Wachapreague, the erosion of Cedar Island is a major concern, as this island provides the primary protection from Atlantic storms. The marsh is also vulnerable to damages and erosion from increased storm surge exposure. The Flood Insurance Study (FIS) for Wachapreague identifies that the greatest threat of flood inundation comes from nor'easters and hurricanes.

Damage from the wave action of floodwaters further inland is particularly of concern as the berm or break water opposite the channel from the waterfront has been settling and does not provide the same protection as it did years ago.

Additionally, the southern end of Cedar Island has eroded significantly in the last several years, vastly increasing the size of Wachapreague Inlet, therefore increasing the vulnerability of the interior marsh system and the town to incoming wave action from the Atlantic during a wind or storm event.

Sea-level rise threatens both seaside and bayside marshes, which afford the mainland with protection from both floods and erosion. As sea-level rises, barrier islands respond by migrating landward. Because the Eastern Shore barrier islands are largely in their natural states and without erosion control mechanisms, sections of the barrier islands are changing rapidly, with segments of islands disappearing and moving into the back barrier channels and marshes.

With only two feet of sea level rise (SLR), it is estimated that Atlantic Avenue, the main waterfront commercial street, will be at least partially inundated with water.

Fortunately for the town, the majority of the residential area roads will not likely experience flooding unless storm surge or SLR reaches six feet.

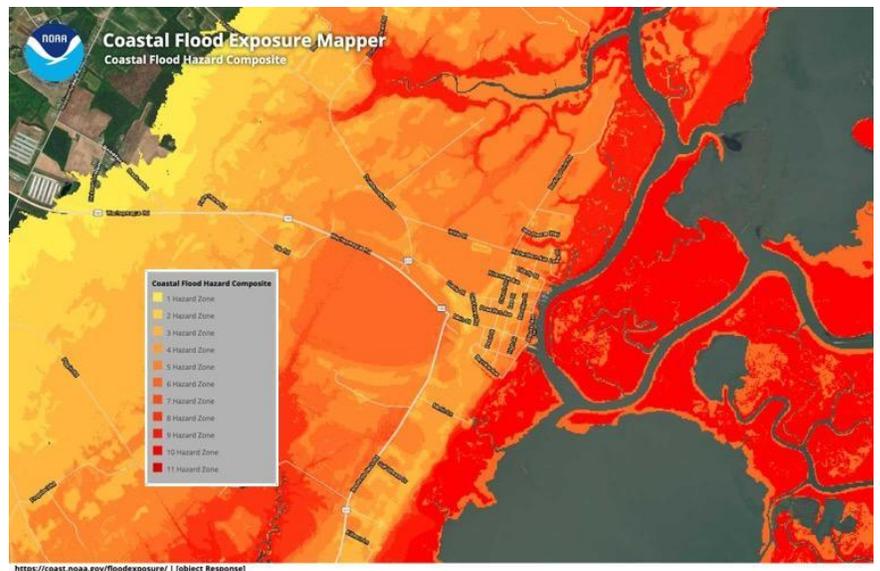


Figure 4 - Coastal Flood Exposure

Section VI: Goals and Strategies

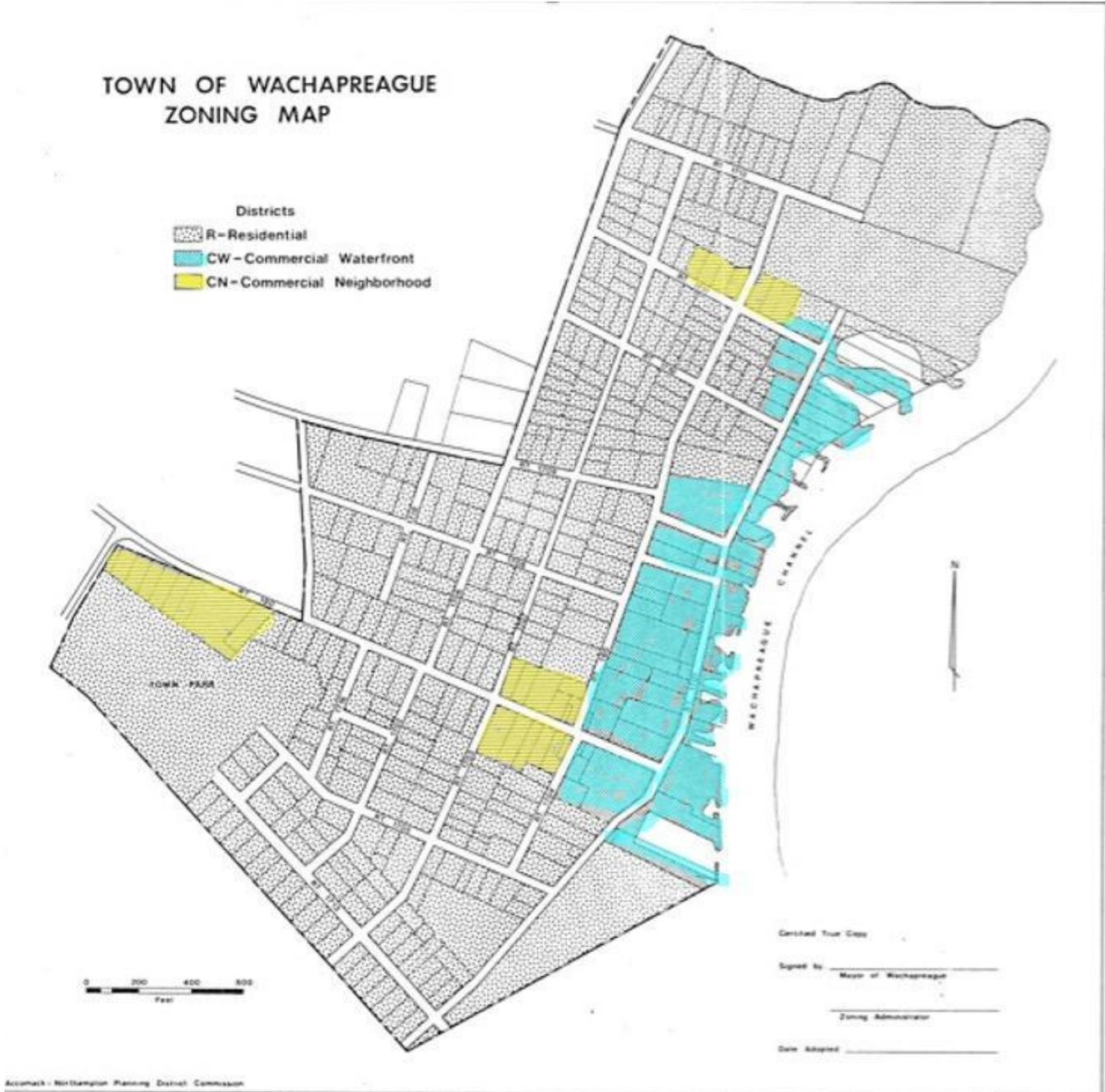


Figure 5 - Town of Wachapreague Zoning Map

VI.1: Goal 1 - Tourism Development

Tourism is a significant aspect of Wachapreague's economy and identity. It is important to embrace the significant historic architecture, the role of waterfront and maritime industries, and the abundance of fishing and seafood, commercial and recreational, in shaping Wachapreague's development.

Strategies

- **Recreational waterfront**
 - **Create Opportunities including fishing, crabbing and other eco-friendly activities.**
 - Study and recommend an upgraded launch site for kayaks and stand-up paddleboards.
 - Work with Entrepreneurs to offer kayak and paddleboard instruction.
 - Study and recommend plan to develop a public Crabbing and/or fishing pier.
 - **Establish a Birdwatching Education Center**
 - Locate near the waterfront, equip with informational displays on local bird species, their habitats, and migration patterns.
 - Create and Schedule workshops focusing on bird identification techniques, ecological importance, and conservation efforts.
 - Develop and offer guided birdwatching tours through key observation areas led by experienced naturalists. These tours can include the seasonal highlights of migratory bird activity and provide binoculars or spotting scopes for participants.
 - Plan and develop a seasonal birdwatching festival can be planned, featuring guest lectures, art exhibits inspired by birdlife, and community activities that celebrate the rich biodiversity of Wachapreague's surroundings.

- **Promotion**
 - **Update/Replace** the town's tourism website.
 - **Develop** a comprehensive and cohesive social media strategy alongside a detailed marketing plan.
 - **Design, develop, and install** directional wayfinding signage to enhance navigation.
- **Year-round events**
 - **Research and organize** festivals, farmers market, art fairs and town park recreational opportunities.
 - **Evaluate and design** an annual Music Festival or Event.
- **Historic Preservation**
 - **Town Museum**
 - To preserve the written, oral, and physical objects that showcase and highlight the unique natural and historical significance of the area.
 - Research viability and make recommendations.
 - **Historic District**
 - Apply for registration on state and national registries.
 - Create a walking tour and develop an app.
 - Seek grants and other funding opportunities for preservation and restoration where appropriate.

VI.2: Goal 2 - Economic Diversification

Wachapreague's economy is based on the water: people work the water, sell harvests from the water, do research about the water, give tours, etc. The water is a draw for tourists, bird watchers, artists, and researchers. Having other supportive businesses are important for those who come here or live here.

Strategies

- **Expand retail businesses and Dining Opportunities**
 - Partner with Entrepreneurs to seek grants for purchasing and/or developing existing vacant or unused properties in the commercial and commercial waterfront zone.
- **Seaside Park**
 - Promote and market the park for events such as weddings and reunions.
 - Study feasibility of building small bandshell/covered stage for music, outdoor drama and other activities.
- **Powell Park**
 - Explore use for sporting events and tournaments.
- **Promote the Artisan Community**
 - Study feasibility of artesian studio tour.

VI.3: Environmental Sustainability

Wachapreague exists in an environment subject to extremes – flat land, marsh, changing tides, water encroachment. The surrounding area is home to birds, shellfish, fish, wild animals. The area needs good management of the natural resources to support the needs of the present without compromising the future.

Strategies

- **Provide safe environment for wildlife**
 - Determine areas of habitat risk and develop a plan of action where appropriate.
 - Install Duck Crossing signage where appropriate.
- **Update and maintain an effective drainage system**
 - To protect home and business establishments from rainstorm flooding and minimizes problems created by standing water.
 - Develop and implement a ditch maintenance plan and schedule.
- **Encourage community clean-up**
 - To give a feeling of ownership of the environment.
 - Develop spring and fall community cleanup walk.
 - Encourage residents to maintain property free from abandoned vehicles, trash and brush piles, etc. to minimize environmental pollution and wildlife habitat disruption.
- **Create a community garden**
 - To provide a place where anyone can participate, learn from others, and provide fresh produce for those in need.
 - Study and evaluate feasibility, need, location.
 - Develop a plan and implement.

VI.4: Community Engagement

Community engagement is the ability to connect meaningfully with nearly every resident and is imperative for good relations between the governing body and the community. This should include sharing information, consulting, planning, and acting together for the good of everyone in the community.

Strategies

- **Create resident-driven committees to make recommendations to Town Council for projects and initiatives.**
 - Develop a recommendation for a new town hall.
 - Develop recommendation for a visitor center.
 - Research possibility to apply for Dark Skies certification, develop plan if feasible.

- **Direct Outreach & Face-to-Face Communication**
 - Household Visits or Front Porch Conversations:
 - Organize volunteers or planning staff to visit each household to collect ideas.
 - Reach out to surrounding neighbors (outside city limits) to promote inclusivity and encourage participation in community activities and events.

 - One-on-One Interviews:
 - Meet with long-time residents, business owners, civic leaders to gather insights and build relationships.

 - Neighborhood Walkabouts:
 - Tour neighborhoods with residents to talk about strengths, challenges, and needs.

- Create Partnership with William and Mary College and VIMS
 - Investigate pilot programs for citizen engagement and education.
 - Investigate self-directed visitor center to showcase the work of VIMS and the importance to the community and region.
 - Determine feasibility of more than one open house throughout the year that would draw visitors to the community.

VI.5: Infrastructure

infrastructure refers to the basic physical systems and facilities required to sustain and enhance a community's function, economy, and well-being. This includes a wide range of "hard" components like roads, bridges, utilities (water, sewer, electricity), and telecommunications, as well as "soft" or social infrastructure such as museums, libraries, and parks that support social services and quality of life. Comprehensive plans assess current infrastructure, anticipate future needs for growth, and guide future development by **ensuring adequate and sustainable infrastructure is in place to support the community's vision.**

A working waterfront is an essential infrastructure which is used to offload fish and shellfish, disburse seed clam and oyster spat, meet clients of recreational fishing or ecotour vessels, buy and process seafood, and serve as home ports for commercial fishermen and aquaculture businesses.

Strategies

- **Town-wide public sewer**
 - Continue to seek funding for connectivity of all residents and businesses helping to ensure drinking water from wells is safe and the environment protected.
- **Communication infrastructure**
 - Provide reliable cell phone and internet services.
 - Provide free (limited) wi-fi throughout the town for visitors.
- **Visitor Parking**
 - Study and recommend possible areas in the proximity of Main Street and Atlantic Avenue.
- **Protect town equipment and records**
 - Study and recommend investing in a town maintenance building.

- **Public Restrooms**

- Study and recommend additional availability along the waterfront, town parks and facilities.
- Upgrade existing facilities

- **Pedestrian and Bicycle Plan**

- Identify need and location for Pedestrian Walkways
- Apply for funding and grants to expand the sidewalks on streets other than Main Street
- Identify and Develop cycling trails within the town and surround areas.

- **Working Waterfront**

- Develop and maintain a plan for keeping the waterways navigable to maintain the working capacity of the waterfront.
- Research and evaluate investments for enhancing and preserving the public harbors.

- **Land Use**

- Review designated zones to ensure compatibility with future infrastructure needs.
- Review and plan for future gifted or acquired land(s).
- Review and update the current zoning map as required.
- Review and update applicable ordinances as required.

VII: Summary

In Summary, the five-year vision for our small coastal town is one of prosperity, sustainability, and inclusion. Through responsible tourism practices, environment stewardship, community empowerment, and cultural enrichment, we aspire to create a destination that captivates the hearts and minds of all who visit, while preserving the essence of what makes our town truly special.

VIII: List of Figures

| List of Figures | | |
|------------------------|---------------------------------|-------------|
| Figure | Title | Page |
| 1 | Map of Accomack County Virginia | 8 |
| 2 | Map of town of Wachapreague | 8 |
| 3 | Flood Hazard Chart | 15 |
| 4 | Coastal Flood Exposure | 16 |
| 5 | Town of Wachapreague Zoning Map | 17 |