

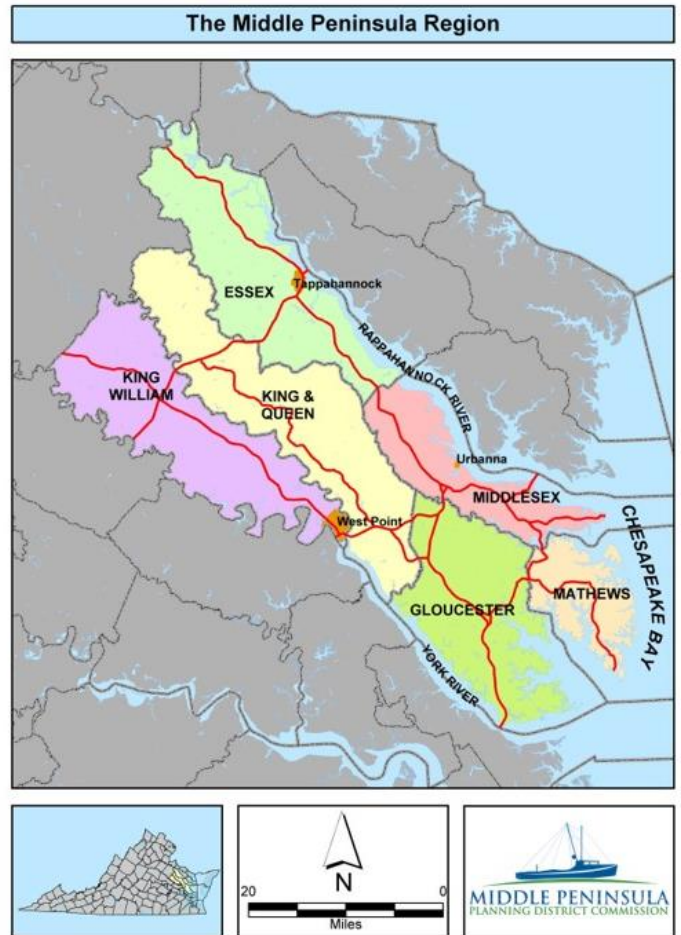
# *Designing Multimodal Working Waterfronts to Meet the 21<sup>st</sup> Century Needs of Rural Coastal Seafood and Marine Industries*

## **2021 USDOT RAISE PROPOSAL SUMMARY**

### **Middle Peninsula Planning District Commission**

#### **I. Project Description**

The rural communities of Virginia’s Middle Peninsula have a long history anchored in harvesting the natural resources of the region’s surrounding Chesapeake Bay waters and transporting them by land to markets located both near and afar. The region’s public harbors and wharves have served as multimodal transportation hubs for marine commerce and activity since the communities were first established during the 17<sup>th</sup> and 18<sup>th</sup> Centuries. For much of the region’s history, these facilities, the seafood and other marine industries, and the rural communities experienced higher levels of prosperity. However, the coastal communities of the Middle Peninsula have experienced similar levels of decline and poverty as much of rural America over the past century and as the tax base of the communities and the level of investment from Virginia shrank through the years, so did the overall condition of the regional network of public wharves and harbors. These facilities continue to serve as critical infrastructure for the region’s marine economies, yet many have been neglected in recent years or failed to evolve in a manner that meets the needs of the ever-evolving seafood industry. Currently with advancements in seafood production (aquaculture) and water quality improvements in the Chesapeake Bay, the poor and unsafe conditions of these wharves and harbors are greatly prohibiting the seafood industry to reach its market potential and help turn the tide on the region’s economic woes, hindering the public safety and enforcement agencies’ ability to do their job, and putting the general public in harm’s way. Virginia’s seafood industry is top in the nation in hard clam production, top five in the nation in oyster aquaculture, and lands most of the national blue crab harvest. The industry continues to grow but the infrastructure it relies upon has not evolved to meet the 21<sup>st</sup> Century needs.



**Regional Map of Virginia’s Middle Peninsula**

**To address known deficiencies in its rural transportation infrastructure, the Middle Peninsula Planning District Commission (MPPDC) is proposing to conduct a region-wide planning project that will result in a suite of shovel-ready, high-priority multi-modal transportation infrastructure improvements intended to address critical needs related to the region’s publicly-owned rural working waterfronts.** Specifically, the project will involve the following three tasks explained in the figures and paragraphs below:

## Overview of Proposed Planning Grant Activities & Outcomes



### 1. Task 1 – State-of-Good-Repair Condition Assessments

**Background:** Public access to the Chesapeake Bay and its tributaries is vital to the economy and quality of life in the Middle Peninsula. Less than one percent of the region’s tidal shorelines are publicly owned. There are nearly 60 publicly owned wharves, landings, and harbors in the region. These are owned by the Commonwealth of Virginia, Middle Peninsula Chesapeake Bay Public Access Authority (MPCBPAA), and the Middle Peninsula’s six counties, three incorporated towns, and three Federally recognized tribes.

Unfortunately, the condition of the infrastructure at these facilities has been neglected to the point where much of the infrastructure at these facilities needs immediate repair or replacement. There are multiple reasons for why these facilities have been neglected. The Commonwealth of Virginia’s facilities in the region are owned by the Virginia Department of Transportation (VDOT) or Virginia Department of Game and Inland Fisheries (VDGIF). Over the past several decades, VDOT’s funding for maintaining its rural wharves has diminished greatly to the point that several facilities have fallen into disrepair to the point which the limited maintenance funding cannot support. VDGIF policies do not prioritize commercial uses and typically host minimal infrastructure. It is also for this reason why VDGIF facilities will not be considered in the proposed planning project. The local governments and tribes of the Middle Peninsula have each experienced an erosion of their tax base as their populations have dwindled, small businesses have struggled to remain viable, and larger operations have not located in the area. As result the Middle Peninsula’s localities have been forced into fiscal situations which have required limiting or eliminating budgets of essential public services like wharves, landings and harbors in favor of attempting to maintain the core essential government services such as schools and jails.



Furthermore, local governments and tribes lack the staffing capacity to provide basic monitoring of public wharves, landings and harbors or development of cost estimates for state-of-good-repair maintenance.

**Task Description:** Public and stakeholder feedback will be solicited for each of the 44 public wharves and harbors owned by VDOT, VIMS, MPCBPAA, the 12 Middle Peninsula localities and tribes to identify existing infrastructure deemed unsafe for its current intended use. The citizens in the region will be encouraged to participate in a public meeting designed to solicit feedback at a local level. Specifically, the meeting will be scheduled with blocks of time dedicated to each locality throughout the day to ensure participation from the greatest number of people possible. A digital survey will also be developed and distributed through multiple online media outlets managed by the MPPDC and its partners. A local



commercial seafood liaison, Mr. Bill Pruitt will be contracted to work individually with commercial seafood business owners to solicit their specific input regarding safety conditions at the facilities they utilize most. Mr. Pruitt, a resident of the Middle Peninsula, retired as the Commissioner of the Virginia Marine Resources Commission after over 20 years of service in 2006 and is well respected by the commercial watermen and public safety and enforcement officers alike. The MPPDC has contracted Mr. Pruitt for previous initiatives involving watermen (e.g. Working Waterfronts Plan Development) and is confident this approach will prove successful once again.

For all identified safety needs a certified professional engineer will assess the situation, make a recommendation for fixing the issue, and provide a cost estimate for completing the work. All information will be compiled into one document and provided to the MPPDC and the Middle Peninsula local government administrators and will be utilized in the decision-making process for Tasks 2 and 3.

## **2. Task 2 – Multimodal Working Waterfront Needs Assessment & Improvement Strategies**

**Background:** The MPPDC and its member jurisdictions have completed a significant amount of work to assess public wharves, landings and harbors for needs related to recreation and general public access to the water in the Middle Peninsula. MPPDC will use the RAISE planning grant to fill a critical need of assessing these facilities for commercial seafood industry needs. The commercial seafood industry and other marine industry stakeholders in the region will be engaged to solicit existing issues and needs related to infrastructure, safety, and access to upland commerce opportunities.

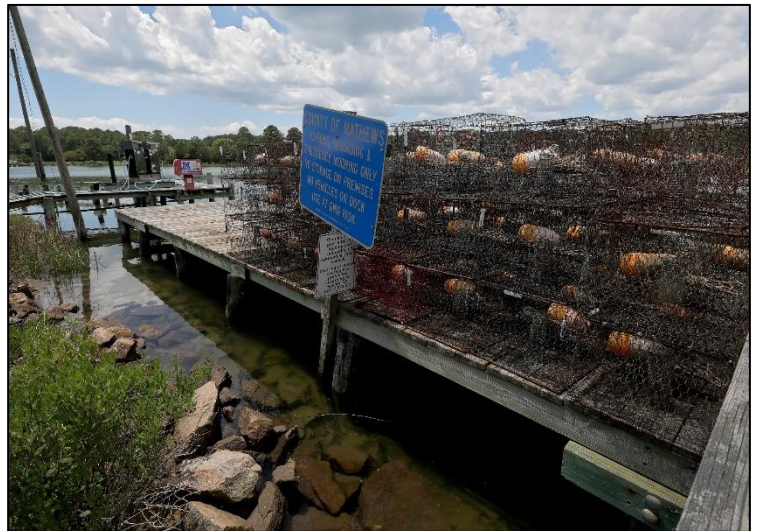
**Task Description:** Task 2 will involve two specific subtasks:

- **Subtask 2-A – Commercial Seafood and Marine Industry Infrastructure Needs Assessment**  
During the meetings and surveys described in Task 1, stakeholders will also be asked to identify the following with a primary focus on needs for commercial seafood and marine industry and secondary focus on recreational users:
  - ❖ Public facilities that currently do not adequately serve the needs. This will involve both public transportation infrastructure (boat ramps, parking, and access roads) and commercial seafood infrastructure (docks, unloading facilities, on-site processing facilities, boat maintenance facilities (lifts, rails, etc.));
  - ❖ Antiquated public facilities that do not support modern technological or equipment advances in the seafood industry,
  - ❖ What facilities deemed critical for operations are non-existent;
  - ❖ Where are new access sites needed or enhanced transportation alternatives needed for reducing transportation costs to existing markets and commerce opportunities.

This stakeholder feedback will be compiled then compared against existing plans and designs for specific public sites in the region. All previous plans and designs for certain sites will be assessed for the potential for modifications to designs which can incorporate improvements intended to directly benefit commercial seafood and marine industry stakeholders.

○ **Subtask 2-B – Multimodal Harbor Improvement Strategy Development**

The owners of the public wharves will meet individually with planning staff to review all needs information gathered through the public processes held during Task 1 and Subtask 2-A as basis for developing specific improvement strategies that could provide enhanced multimodal transportation at the facilities. The owners of the public wharves and harbors VDOT, Middle Peninsula Chesapeake Bay Public Access Authority (MPCBPAA), Counties/Towns, and Tribes) will direct an engineer to develop designs and cost estimates for specific public facilities. There will be at least one site selected per locality but the number of sites to be targeted for improvements may be greater depending on the scale and complexity of the desired improvements. It is expected that the meeting schedule will be as follows:



- ❖ Individual meetings with VDOT (as many as needed – approximately 1-5)
- ❖ Monthly meetings with MPPDC Local Government Administrators
- ❖ Quarterly meetings with MPCBPAA (as many as needed – approximately 1-4)

These meetings will involve:

- ❖ *Reviewing existing plans for public wharves and harbors to determine how assessed commercial seafood and marine industry infrastructure needs could be incorporated into existing plans, visions, and designs.* Existing plans for several public wharves exist but have not yet been implemented. This presents an opportunity for reviewing the plans to identify ways the commercial seafood and marine industries’ needs identified during the stakeholder assessments may be incorporated into existing plans.
- ❖ *Prioritizing and selecting public facilities to be targeted for multimodal improvement designs.* Concepts will be developed where deemed feasible for these facilities and presented to the public facility owners for consideration during the subsequent step.

### **3. Task 3 – Multimodal Working Waterfront Implementation Plan Development**

**Background:** Task 3 will build upon the outcomes of Tasks 1 and 2 resulting in a suite of shovel-ready infrastructure improvement projects and a customized strategy for various funding mechanisms for each project. The most important and immediate outcome will be completion of an application for 2022 RAISE funding for the completion of at least 6 improvement projects. The two subtasks for Task 3 are explained in the following sections.

○ **Subtask 3-A: 2022 RAISE Application for Construction**

MPPDC staff will work with the owners of the public wharves, landings and harbors to prioritize a suite of designed shovel-ready projects to be included in an application for RAISE funding. Site selection for the application will be crafted in a manner that strives to meet the criteria set forth in the 2022 program design. Assuming the 2022 program design does not change drastically, it is anticipated that the proposal will include

anywhere between 6 sites (equivalent to one per county) and 20 sites. The ultimate decision about which sites are included in the proposal will be based upon which projects serve the greatest needs and which will result in the greatest benefit to the commercial seafood and marine industries.

○ **Subtask 3-B: Alternative Funding Strategy Development**

Priority improvements at public wharves, landings and harbors not included in the 2022 RAISE proposal will be completed where feasible and desired following the process described in Tasks 1 and 2. Designs and cost estimates for sites will be completed and planning staff will match the designs with available sources of funding. It is anticipated that these funding sources will include State sources (SmartScale, Transportation Alternatives Program, Virginia Waterway Maintenance Program, Port of Virginia Economic and Infrastructure Development Grant Program), Federal sources (HUD Community Development Block Grant, Economic Development Administration Grants, NOAA Coastal Zone Management Program Grants, National Fish and Wildlife Foundation Grants), and other sources.

The proposed project represents the culmination of several planning and development initiatives undertaken over the past decade by the member jurisdictions (6 counties, 3 incorporated towns) of the MPPDC including 1) Public Access, 2) Working Waterfront Preservation and Enhancement, 3) Channel Dredging and Beneficial Reuse of Dredged Material, 4) Coastal Resilience and Management, and 5) Rural Economic Development Related to the Seafood Industry and Outdoor Water-Based Recreation. The shovel-ready project designs will position the region to pursue implementation via numerous routes but most importantly through the completion of an FY22 RAISE Proposal for implementation.

**Anticipated Benefits of 2021 RAISE Planning Grant**

	Safety	State of Good Repair	Economic Competitiveness	Environmental Sustainability	Quality of Life	Innovation	Partnership
TASK 1 - STATE OF GOOD REPAIR CONDITION ASSESSMENTS							
TASK 2 - MULTIMODAL WORKING WATERFRONT NEEDS ASSESSMENT & IMPROVEMENT STRATEGIES							
TASK 3 - MULTIMODAL WORKING WATERFRONT IMPLEMENTATION PLAN DEVELOPMENT							

**MPPDC Public Programs Complementing the 2021 RAISE Planning Grant Proposal**

