



# PLANNING COMMISSION MEETING

June 14, 2022 at 7:00 PM

*Council Chambers – Town Municipal Center*

## AGENDA

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**CALL TO ORDER**

**INVOCATION**

**PUBLIC PARTICIPATION**

**PUBLIC PARTICIPATION**

**AGENDA REVIEW/DISCLOSURES**

**APPROVAL OF MINUTES**

1. Approval of the Planning Commission Meeting Minutes of 05/10/22

**REVIEW CHAPTER 4 ECONOMIC COMPREHENSIVE PLAN**

2. Economic Development-Final

**SURVEY DEVELOPMENT**

**ANNOUNCEMENTS OR COMMENTS**

**ADJOURN**

**MINUTES OF THE  
PLANNING COMMISSION MEETING  
TOWN OF CHINCOTEAGUE, VIRGINIA  
MAY 10, 2022 - 7:00 P.M. – Council Chambers**

**Commission Members Present:**

Mr. Ray Rosenberger, Chairman  
Mr. William T. McComb, Jr. Councilman  
Mr. David Britton  
Mrs. Mollie Cherrix  
Mr. Michael Dendler  
Mr. Robert Shendock

**Commission Members Absent:**

Mr. Steve Katsetos

**Others Present:****Staff Present:**

Mr. Mark Bowden, Building and Zoning Administrator

**Call to Order**

Chairman Rosenberger called the meeting to order at 7:00 p.m.

**Invocation**

Chairman Rosenberger offered the invocation.

**Pledge of Allegiance**

Chairman Rosenberger led in the Pledge of Allegiance.

**Public Participation**

There was none.

**Agenda Review/Disclosures**

**Mr. Shendock motioned, seconded by Mr. Britton to approve the agenda as presented. All present were in favor and the motion was carried.**

**Approval of the March 8<sup>th</sup>, 2022, Regular Meeting Minutes**

**Councilman McComb motioned, seconded by Mr. Shendock to approve the minutes of the March 8<sup>th</sup>, 2022, meeting as presented. All present were in favor and the motion was carried.**

**Review Chapter 4 Economic Comprehensive Plan**

The Commission reviewed Chapter 4, Economic Comprehensive Plan. Chairman Rosenberger ask Mr. Shendock to give a brief overview of the Economic Comprehensive Plan. The Commission will review each section at the next meeting.

**Survey Development**

There was lengthy discussion and the Commission agreed to put this item back on the agenda for the June meeting.

**Commission Members Announcements or Comments**

Mr. Bowden ask the commission to think about the placement of food trucks and the need for more parking, restrooms, and outdoor seating restrictions.

Mr Britton suggested watching this over the summer and make recommendations at a later time.

**Adjourn**

**Mr. Shendock motioned, seconded by Councilman McComb to adjourn. All present were in favor and the motion was carried.**

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Chairman, Mr. Ray Rosenberger

## Chapter 4 Economic Development

Chincoteague owes its economic fortune to its serene and fertile coastal landscape. Windswept beaches, quiet village life, and thriving waterways have made it one of Virginia's premiere resort islands, world famous for its oyster beds and clam shoals. Its quaint setting has made it a favorite destination for two centuries of vacationing families. Today, it is the gateway to Assateague Island National Seashore and the Chincoteague Wildlife Refuge, welcoming over 1 million people a year to two national destinations.

Chincoteague shares the economic development goal of many other rural communities – to diversify and strengthen the local economy in a way that maintains our treasured local culture and increases year-round employment. New opportunities for economic development are now available to promote space tourism, Broadband access, and small businesses..

### Background



The famous "Chincoteague Oyster" is an important economic legacy of the Town.

The Island's earliest settlers subsisted mostly by farming and raising cattle and sheep. Land was used for crops and grazing. This was the case until the early 1800s when oysters, which had always been a popular seafood, became fashionable as a gourmet delicacy and were increasingly sought by the large populations of the East Coast's metropolitan areas. By the late-1800s seafood was the Island's main source of income. The Chincoteague oyster was famous up and down the Atlantic seaboard. By the early 1900s, watermen were also catching clams, crabs and fish, expanding the local industry and the Island's reputation as a seafood capital.

Decades of abundant oysters provided a steady economic base that enabled the Town to grow and prosper. The first efforts to restore depleted oyster beds by seeding them with young oysters began in 1922. While these efforts met with some success, oyster harvests continued to diminish through successive decades and Chincoteague's economic base began to change, moving away from seafood.

The most recent data available from the U.S. Census Bureau (see Reference R-01) provides a profile of Island commerce and resident employment. Data extracted from the Economic Census

of the United States conducted every 10 years (Table 4-1) shows the highest sales receipt industries.

Top Economic Segments Meaning of NAICS code	2002				2012			
	Number of businesses	Revenue (\$1,000)	Annual payroll (\$1,000)	Number of employees	Number of businesses	Revenue (\$1,000)	Annual payroll (\$1,000)	Number of employees
Accommodation and food services	46	24742	7336	511	49	31053	7819	469
Retail trade	36	25406	2592	147	31	33225	3122	141
Real estate and rental and leasing	8	3623	366	20	12	4181	507	25
Arts, entertainment, and recreation	8	725	253	22	5	D	D	D
Construction	N	N	N	N	N	N	N	N
Health care and social assistance	5	1496	587	35	8	2464	1096	35
Professional, scientific, and technical services	4	D	D	D	4	D	D	D
Administrative and support	4	D	D	D	3	D	D	D
Educational Services	N	N	N	N	N	N	N	N
Other services (except public administration)	7	1347	358	28	6	1509	349	19

D = Withheld, data considered proprietary

N = Not available or not comparable

Table 4-1: Highest Grossing Economic Segments - Chincoteague

Values indicate that economic activity was relatively stable through the ‘Great Recession’ of 2008. Other data suggest significant growth may be evident in the 2022 Economic Census.

Table 4-2 lists the most frequent occupation of town residents using data extracted from the 2013-2017 American Community Survey 5-Year Estimates.

Top Occupational Segments Meaning of NAICS code	ACS 2013 - 2017	
	# of residents employed	% of those employed
Accommodation and food services	262	19.8
Retail trade	236	17.9
Real estate and rental and leasing	5	0.4
Arts, entertainment, and recreation	13	1.0
Construction	88	6.6
Health care and social assistance	94	7.1
Professional, scientific, and technical services	142	10.7
Administrative and support	74	5.6
Educational Services	189	14.3
Other services (except public administration)	66	5.0

Table 4-2: Highest Occupational Segments - Chincoteague

The data above indicates that many residents live and work on the Island. Tourism-related businesses require seasonal employees while some residents commute off-Island to work, particularly in the health care, educational, and professional occupations. Additional detailed information is available under various reports available at Reference R-01.

The primary economic drivers for Chincoteague are:

- Tourism & Recreation,
- Local Full-Service Economy,
- Seafood & Aquaculture, and
- The Wallops Island Area

## Tourism & Recreation

When the causeway to Chincoteague Island opened in 1922 (around the same time the Town began to feel the economic effects of the declining oyster harvests), Chincoteague's major source of income began to shift from harvesting seafood to attracting visitors. The Island had long been popular for hunting, fishing, and vacationing but until 1922, access was only by boat. Steamers and passenger boats carried people to and from Chincoteague and Franklin City.

The new causeway gave travelers convenient automobile access to Chincoteague and city dwellers came in greater numbers from nearby urban centers to enjoy the beauty and charm of the small, island town. Ice cream parlors, hotels, boarding houses, beach cottages, and seafood restaurants dotted the Island, providing goods and service services to tourists and income to residents.

In 1924, the second of two major fires in four years spurred the Women's Auxiliary members of Chincoteague's fire department to create an annual summer event to raise money for improving the equipment and capabilities of the "all-volunteer" department. The fund-raising affair, a carnival during the annual pony penning, was held in 1925. It quickly became a nationally-recognized heritage event that drew thousands of people from across the country annually. By 1937, the Town was hosting an estimated 25,000 people for



The Chincoteague National Wildlife Refuge and the Assateague Island National Seashore are primary recreation destinations throughout the country. The Wildlife Refuge is one of the top 5 shorebird staging areas in the U.S.

"Chincoteague Pony Penning Day". In 1947, Marguerite Henry published "Misty of Chincoteague," and the annual pony round-up became internationally famous. The round-up is

still held in July during the Chincoteague Volunteer Firemen's Carnival and recent attendance estimates range from 35,000 to 50,000 people.

In 1943, the Chincoteague National Wildlife Refuge was created on Assateague Island. The Refuge is located primarily on the Virginia side of Assateague Island. It consists of more than 14,000 acres of beach, dunes, marsh, and maritime forest. The opening of a bridge linking Assateague and Chincoteague Islands in 1962 continued to fuel the growth in Chincoteague's tourism economy. The establishment of the Assateague Island National Seashore in 1965 increased the area's popularity as a destination for beach recreation.

Visitation over the decades has led to increased ownership of second and seasonal homes resulting in a significant vacation rental house industry. A story often heard is how enjoyable family vacations spent in campgrounds, cabins, or motels on the Island have resulted in home ownership and relocation here to work or retire. This economic activity has better supported a full-service year-round economy.

### **The Chincoteague National Wildlife Refuge**

The Chincoteague Wildlife Refuge is one of the top five shorebird migratory staging areas in the United States, east of the Rocky Mountains. The United States Department of the Interior has designated the area a National Natural Landmark in recognition of its outstanding natural values. Additionally, the Refuge has been designated a Globally Important Bird Area and is part of the Western Hemisphere Shorebird Reserve Network, which is designated as one of the top ten birding "Hotspots" by the National Audubon Society.

With approximately 1.2 million visits a year, Chincoteague National Wildlife Refuge is one of the most visited refuges in the nation. The Refuge's Herbert H. Bateman Educational and Administrative Center, a state-of-the-art "green architecture" facility opened in 2003, offers 5,000 square feet of exhibits, a 125 seat auditorium, and a classroom/wet lab. This is in addition to the many outdoor recreational opportunities available throughout the Refuge and Seashore.

### ***Refuge History***

The Town of Chincoteague's local economy and way of life rely on the assurance of Congressional Action/Public Law and recorded agreements with the Department of Interior. The National Refuge System is currently preparing new management plans for all refuges and Chincoteague NWR's Comprehensive Conservation Plans or CCPs (Reference R-11) was completed in 2015. The CCP planning process involved input from the public and the partners including the Town of Chincoteague in developing its management strategy. There have been a series of significant decision points over the years that have shaped the management of the Refuge and the National Seashore over time.

- **2004** - The assigned area for public beach recreation was approved as a 'Compatible Use' with a 10 year re-evaluation date of 2014. This action updated the 1979 Memorandum of Understanding and the 1990 Inter Agency Agreement between FWS and NPS.

- **2011** – Due to concerns with over-wash and eroding lands, the USFWS proposed to reassign the designated bathing beach areas to a new location within the refuge that would minimize human impacts to wildlife management areas.
- **2014/2015** – A draft CCP was presented to the public with recommended changes to the current management plan, which addressed many community concerns and will continue the planning process for relocation of the recreational beach over the next 3 to 8 years. The CCP was finalized in 2015 and a Record of Decision signed on November 6, 2015 (Reference R-11)
- **2018** – An Environmental Assessment that tiered off the CCP was completed and proposed a series of design and placement options needed to support relocation of the recreational beach. The Hybrid Alternative was selected for implementation and finalized in the decision document called the Finding of No New Significant Impacts dated December 11, 2018. The new recreational beach parking will consist of separate parking lots with larger lots along the northern end of the designated recreational beach. Three smaller lots will be constructed south of D-Dike along the accommodation zone boundary. North of D-dike, two larger lots, increasing in size as they move north, will be constructed. The new parking areas will have a clay-sand-clamshell surface, the same as what is currently found at the existing parking areas. Recreation amenities that are currently provided at the existing recreational beach will be provided at the new recreational beach. Amenities at the new recreational beach will include utilities (potable water, power, telephone), vault toilets, rinse-off showers, changing room cabanas, lifeguard stands, beach wheelchair storage and other facilities needed for a safe and appropriate beach recreational visit.

The CCP recommended Alternative B, which relocates the recreational beach area and maintains 961 parking spaces in a more stable area of Assateague Island that would be less susceptible to storm damage. As stated above, an Environmental Assessment tiered under the CCP evaluated a series of design options and sought public input into that decision. In December of 2018, the agencies selected the Hybrid Alternative. This design solution is currently being developed in conjunction with the Federal Highways Administration. It is anticipated that design specifications and plans will be drafted by the winter of 2020, but implementation is dependent on funds. Aspects of the plans may be phased over time based on funding availability. Because interim losses of parking from storms can have impacts to the Town, a post-storm access plan is also recommended to minimize the impact of any temporary loss of visitor parking at the beach. With the slow and careful implementation of proposed management changes, the CCP will minimize any potential negative impacts to the tourism based economy.

### ***Economic Impact***

Chincoteague's proximity to Assateague Island National Seashore and the Chincoteague National Wildlife Refuge continues to be its largest economic development opportunity.

At the community's request, the US Fish and Wildlife Service included in its Comprehensive Conservation Plan (CCP) for the Chincoteague National Wildlife Refuge an Economic Impact



Analysis (Reference R-12). The USFWS Division of Economics estimates a regional economic benefit of the seashore/refuge in Virginia at \$113.8 million per year, which supports approximately 1,794 jobs. The estimate for just the Town of Chincoteague is \$42.4 million and 593 jobs.

Visitors stimulate the economy through direct payments for food, lodging, transportation, equipment, and supplies. In turn, local merchants use a portion of the money spent to buy other local goods, resulting in a multiplier effect. While refuge specific expenditures are not available, estimates can be derived from averages taken from the 2007 National Survey of Fishing, Hunting, and Wildlife-Associated Recreation. The percentages of expenditures estimated are then apportioned among Accomack County, Worcester County, and outside the area. The expenditure percentages are assumed to be 45 percent for Accomack County, 45 percent for Worcester County, and 10 percent for outside the area, based on a study of expenditures resulting from the Wallops Flight Facility.

Total visitor recreation expenditures and associated economic output for Accomack and Worcester Counties in 2010 are summarized in Table 4-3 below. Table values are based on the percentages noted above and the assumption that Chincoteague brings in 85 percent of tourism revenue for Accomack County. It should be noted that values have increased significantly since 2010.

**Table 3-8. 2010 Visitor Recreation Expenditures and Associated Economic Output for Accomack and Worcester Counties (in millions)**

Economic Category	Residents	Non-Residents	Total
Retail Expenditures	\$2.9	\$110.9	\$113.8
Economic Output	\$3.8	\$146.5	\$150.3
Job Income	\$1.2	\$47.4	\$48.6
Tax Revenue	\$0.6	\$10.0	\$10.6
Total	\$8.50	\$314.80	\$323.30
Jobs	45	1,749	1,794
Source: Estimates compiled by the Division of Economics, USFWS.			

Table 4-3: Visitor Recreation Expenditures

In addition to the revenue coming from visitors, the refuge itself spends \$3.4 million in operations and maintenance each year, three-quarters of which goes to employees who live in the area,

### Visitation Profile

Since the opening of a public beach in the early 1960s, visitation steadily rose during the 1960s, 1970s, and most of 1980s. In 1987 visitation peaked at over 1.5 million visits, with over 800,000 occurring during the summer season, June through August. Since then, the number of annual visits to the refuge has leveled off to between 1.2 and 1.4 million visits. From 2005 to 2010, 57 percent of the visits occurred during the months of June, July, and August (Table 4-4). Recreational beach use tapers off quickly after early September and returns at the end of May.

Although not all summer visitation is associated with beach use, the parking patterns and anecdotal reports indicate that beach use is the primary use. The town of Chincoteague developed and distributed a “Beach Access Questionnaire” online and throughout the community in summer of 2010 that resulted in almost 3,000 responses. In the survey, 82 percent of respondents indicated that they primarily came to Chincoteague to go to the beach.

**Chincoteague National Wildlife Refuge: June - August and Annual Visitors,  
2005 – 2010**

Month	2005	2006	2007	2008	2009	2010
June	181,724	162,293	172,760	145,904	162,572	160,581
July	375,862	307,132	297,697	291,281	314,110	304,248
August	289,398	311,846	317,484	311,367	328,783	282,916
3 month total	846,984	781,271	787,941	748,552	805,465	747,745
Annual Total	1,454,371	1,401,862	1,386,842	1,296,285	1,400,254	1,359,553
June - August total as % of annual total	58.2 %	55.7 %	56.8 %	57.7 %	57.5 %	55.0 %
Source: USFWS 2011						

Table 4-4: Chincoteague NWR Peak and Annual Visitation

Spending associated with recreational use of the Refuge can generate a substantial amount of economic activity in both local and regional economies. Refuge visitors spend money on a wide variety of goods and services. Trip-related expenditures may include expenses for food, lodging and transportation. Anglers, hunters, boaters and wildlife watchers also buy equipment and supplies for their particular activity. Because this spending directly affects towns and communities where these purchases are made, recreational visitation can have a significant impact on local economies, especially in small towns and rural areas.

**Recreational Opportunities**

The refuge attracts visitors to the region for a number of reasons. Visitors come for the beach, the wildlife and Chincoteague ponies, surf fishing, off-road vehicle use, and waterfowl and big game hunting. In 2010, the refuge had almost 1.4 million visits, with over half of those visits occurring in the peak summer months. Table 4-5 illustrates the relative popularity of activities in 2010.

**Chincoteague NWR 2010 Visitation**

<b>Total number of visitors</b>		<b>1,359,553</b>
<b>Visits<sup>1</sup></b>	Special events on site	8,568
	Visitor Center or Contact Station	364,568
	Upland game hunt	0
	Big game hunt	2,097
	Total hunting	2,304
	Fishing	129,885
	Foot Trail/Pedestrian	1,019,664
	Auto Tour	1,359,553
	Boat Trail/Launches	0
	Bicycle	352,740
	Wildlife Observation	2,731,957
	Photography	815,731
	Environmental education programs.	8,948
	Interpretation participants in on- and off-site talks/programs	60,226
	Other recreation	2,719,106

1 The term "visits" represents the number of activities a visitor participated in during their visit to the refuge.  
Source: USFWS 2011

**Table 4-5: Chincoteague NWR 2010 Visitation**

Some recreational uses on Chincoteague NWR include walking, bicycling, horseback riding, OSV use, and boating. Commercial uses are regulated. All of these uses are limited to specific areas of land and/or times based on wildlife management and some have permits and fees. There are no campsites on Chincoteague NWR.

Since 2010, both Heritage and eco-tourism have become very popular in the United States.

**Special Events On-Site**

The refuge holds eight major special events with all but one occurring during the shoulder seasons:

- Great Backyard Bird Count - February,
- Junior Duck Stamp Contest - April,
- International Migratory Bird Day Celebration - May,

- Wild Pony Roundup – July,
- Sunrise Pony Walk during Pony Penning - July,
- Annual Beach Clean-up - September,
- National Public Lands Day - September,
- National Wildlife Refuge Week - October,
- Waterfowl Weekend - November.

### ***Beach Parking***

From 1982 to 2001, the refuge and Seashore kept records of the frequency and dates for when the beach parking lots reached capacity; the refuge began recording frequency again in 2007. A review of data from 2000 and 2001 indicates that closures last from 30 minutes to 4 hours and were always initiated between 11:00 a.m. and 2:00 p.m. There are no similar records for a more recent year, but refuge staff anecdotally reported that there are typically 4 to 6 closures a year, also occurring between the peak hours noted above, and lasting approximately 30 minutes to 2 hours. These closures are highly weather-dependent but usually occur on the 4th of July if it is a 3-day weekend, and on the first two Saturdays and Sundays in August. The capacity closure data do not include closures due to damage to the parking from storm events.

In terms of parking occupancy for non-summer months, the refuge conducted hourly manual parking counts (approximately 9 a.m. through 4 p.m.) for the weekends of April and May 2010 and September 2010 through February 2011. The data indicates that total parked vehicles did not surpass 200 between November and April, and did not surpass 480 from October through May except for Memorial Day weekend.

### ***Implementation Strategies of the Refuge***

**Carry out the intent of the CCP** - As part of the CCP development, the refuge solicited input on key concerns from the community and reviewed policy and initiatives that guide the FWS. These concerns included climate change/sea level rise, regional conservation, balance between public use and habitat and wildlife conservation, public access to the refuge, in particular to the recreational beach, and impact on visitor experience and the local economy and public safety and community resilience to storm damage and flooding. FWS received many comments requesting that the refuge maintain a balance between people and nature, or recreation and wildlife management. Statutory and policy framework of the Refuge System clearly defines that wildlife and wildlife conservation must come first on refuge lands and waters. Many of Refuge policies and goals aim to achieve this balance, through allowing for public uses that are deemed appropriate and compatible for each refuge. The CCP discusses in detail the approach the refuge will use to address these and other priorities and should be consulted for more information and specifics (Reference R-11).

**Beach Relocation** - Access to the refuge, in particular to the recreational beach, was the most commonly cited issue by the public. The Refuge is committed to preserving access to the refuge, including by personal vehicle, and to continuing to provide a recreational beach. The beach

relocation project's objective aims to solve three transportation issues at the Refuge/Park and in the Town of Chincoteague:

1. Resiliency of the parking lot at the recreational beach;
2. Safety and accessibility issues along Maddox Boulevard; and
3. Congestion at the entrance to the Refuge.

However, there are elements within these objectives that can continue to be enhanced by cooperative and coordinated improvements between the Town of Chincoteague and the Refuge. Exploration of additional multi-modal enhancements, such as improvements and extensions of bike and pedestrian trails (see Reference R-13), changes in fee collection mechanisms (electronic prepay systems) and improved communication of refuge/beach status (through electronic messaging or new technology) will likely further improve efficiency and the visitor experience.

**Improving Visitor Services** - As indicated in the beach relocation planning documents, the National Park Service will relocate their visitor services staff to the Bateman Center when the parking relocation is complete and collocate with the Refuge. Displays at the Bateman Center will be changed to address the shared mission and enhance messaging and educational programs.

**Secure Funds to Further Improve Shared Opportunities** - The Land and Water Conservation Fund (LWCF) Federal program supports the protection of federal public lands and waters – including national parks, forests, wildlife refuges, and recreation areas – and voluntary conservation on private land. LWCF investments secure public access, improve recreational opportunities, and preserve ecosystem benefits for local communities. The refuge would like to work with the Town of Chincoteague to pursue this and other funding opportunities to continue to improve the refuge and adjoining areas for the benefit of the community.

**Coastal Resilience and Regional Conservation** – The Refuge is committed to a landscape-level approach to conserve, manage, and restore refuge lands and waters, as well as to facilitate such conservation actions beyond our boundaries. The FWS recognizes the conservation importance of the southern Delmarva Peninsula and the regional challenges it faces, including those related to climate change and land use. Recent repeated coastal flooding and over wash caused by nor'easters and tropical hurricanes have resulted in damage to beach access and parking. Impacts on habitat and wildlife have been either beneficial or negative depending upon the timing and severity of the weather event. FWS is committed to working with partners to continue research and assessment of future climate change impacts on the Delmarva Peninsula. The refuge will work with the town of Chincoteague to explore potential impacts and identify protective methods to address hazard mitigation, in coordination with others, such as Accomack County, Commonwealth of Virginia, NPS, NASA, FEMA, and USACE. The refuge would also work with partners to explore how best to advance the study, information exchange, and project resources for adaptive management practices that sustain the resiliency of this unique barrier island system including but not limited to Assateague, Wallops, Assawoman, and Metompkin islands in the face of dynamic coastal processes and climate change.

## **Island Tourism**

Today the Island's economy is dependent upon tourism. Besides the recreational opportunities offered nearby, visitors are attracted to the Island by its fishing village atmosphere and wide range of amenities. Much effort and planning has been done to maintain the Town's family-friendly qualities while improving the quality, diversity, and completeness of amenities. Efforts by the Town, other government agencies, Chamber of Commerce, civic organizations local business community and property owners have all contributed to making the Island a tourist destination in itself by providing a pleasant environment, variety of year-round activities, and wide selection of amenities and services.

The Chincoteague Chamber of Commerce takes the lead in promotion and growth of Chincoteague Island for tourism while advocating for quality of life for local residents and business owners. The Executive Director of the Chamber is identified by the Commonwealth of Virginia as the designated tourism official for the Town. As part of its Action Plan (Reference R-14) the Chamber performed a SWOT (Strength Weakness Opportunity Threat) Analysis which has been considered in the preparation of this plan. The Chamber organizes festivals and special events, provides tourism information on a daily basis, works to promote the Chincoteague brand and destination marketing, and provides website services for its membership. As a result of hard work and the exceptional experiences that the area can offer, Chincoteague and Assateague Islands have received numerous accolades over the last several years.

Festivals and special events are held all year long to help promote the Island as a year-round tourist destination, including:

- Easter Decoy and Art Festival – Friday & Saturday before Easter,
- Annual World Migratory Bird Celebration – May,
- Seafood Festival – May,
- Chincoteague Volunteer Fireman's Carnival – June and July,
- Annual Blueberry Festival – July,
- Annual Pony Swim and Auction – July,
- Chincoteague Decoy Carvers Association Decoy Show – August or September,
- Motorcycle Poker Run – September,
- Chincoteague Oyster Festival – Saturday of Columbus Day weekend,
- Chili Chowder Cook Off- September,
- Assateague Island Waterfowl Week – November,
- Holly Day Market & Wildlife Art Gallery – November,
- Christmas Tree Lighting and Old Fashioned Christmas Parade – December, and
- New Year's Eve 'Horseshoe Drop' and Island Theatre Concert.

The Historic Main Street Merchants Association, a group of merchants located in the Main Street area, work to create unique experiences and enhance enjoyment of island life. Association sponsored weekend events held annually include:

- Death by Chocolate Scavenger Hunt – 2 days during President’s Day weekend,
- Search for the Shamrocks Scavenger Hunt – around St Patrick’s Day,
- Shop the Dock at Robert Reed Park – 3rd Sunday monthly, April to October,
- Trick or Treat Main Street - Halloween evening from 4:00-7:00pm, downtown

In addition, the Chincoteague Police Department, NASA Wallops Island Visitor Center, and non-profit organizations (such as the Museum of Chincoteague Island, Chincoteague Cultural Alliance, and Chincoteague Island Arts Organization) host regularly scheduled events year-round that attract residents and visitors of all ages. See Chapter 5 for lists of additional events and services. A calendar of local events is maintained by the Chincoteague Chamber of Commerce on its website. These events contribute to the quality of life for all attending and support the local year-round economy through dining, overnight stays, and other retail purchases.

### *Unique/Local Dining*

Located seaside and with a strong seafood & aquaculture industry, local dining establishments offer a wide variety of dining options. The number, total service capacity, and cuisine options of this industry has significantly increased over the past ten years, particularly the most recent five years. Dining had been provided by local full-service restaurants, specialty restaurants, and wayside vendors. More recent additions have included wayside vendors, delis, and seafood market carry-outs.

As of January, 2019, there were at least 21 traditional sit-down restaurants in operation on the Island with a total seating capacity in excess of 2,100. Most provide year-round service allowing for off-season maintenance periods. In addition, wayside vendors typically service the primary tourist season, some staying open well into the shoulder seasons. This segment provides carry-out service and limited outdoor seating capacity. In addition to providing fresh seafood/fish, several markets also provide shellfish cooked to order for carry-out. The range of cuisine is large, including, but not limited to, American, Seafood, Italian, Asian, Mexican, Caribbean, BBQ, Pizza, Deli, and Dessert. Wayside vendors allow for dynamic cuisine options.

To service those preparing in-home meals, there are at least five seafood markets, five food specialty shops, a seasonal farmers market, one grocery store, and two dollar stores.

**Accommodations**

Accommodations in Chincoteague provide for a wide range in visitor preference and price in each type category with many, if not most, units being waterside or water view. Table 4-6 below summarizes data compiled by the Chincoteague Chamber of Commerce in July of 2015 under a Maximum Capacity Study (Reference R-15). Most growth over the past two decades has occurred with addition of chain hotels, condos, and rental houses. Additional capacity has been added since 2015 with the opening of at least one hotel and a number of rental houses.



<b>Accommodations by Type</b>		
<b>Type</b>	<b>2015</b>	
	<b># Units</b>	<b>Capacity</b>
Hotels/Motels	925	3800
Bed & Breakfasts	34	79
Campgrounds	1150	5550
Cottages/Condos/Houses (Independent)	80	427
Cottages/Condos/Houses (Property Management Company)	496	3570
<b>Total</b>	<b>2685</b>	<b>13426</b>

Table 4-6: Accommodation Profile



### ***Town Centers***

The Old Town Commercial (downtown Main Street) and the Commercial Corridor (Maddox Boulevard) town centers offer shopping, cultural, amusement options in addition to culinary attractions and accommodations. Both contain essential commercial services and each center has a unique character. However, retail enterprises are found in the other commercial zones of the Town.

The downtown business district has preserved its historic character, continues to function as a center of commerce, and is a pedestrian-oriented commercial center. The Robert N. Reed Downtown Waterfront Park and fishing pier enhance downtown's waterfront access to Chincoteague Bay, promotes downtown visitation, and is a great place to view spectacular sunsets.

The Maddox Boulevard commercial district is the gateway to the wildlife refuge and national seashore. This area is more oriented towards the recreational visitor. Originally an auto-oriented district, on-going multi-modal enhancements are making this area more pedestrian/bicyclist-oriented.

### ***Shopping / Amusements***

Shopping opportunities include a number of specialty shops, art galleries, bookstores, florists, and more. Six or more businesses provide amusements, including miniature golf, go carts, and water activities.

### ***History & Heritage***

Experiences, structures, and sites that show Chincoteague, Virginia & U.S history and heritage are prevalent in Town. The Museum of Chincoteague Island is the lead in capturing, maintaining, and promoting local history and heritage. Besides the content of the Museum, it provides lectures and special presentations throughout the year. The Museum conducts guided tours during the primary tourist season in addition to land or water tours offered by commercial entities. While there has been some loss of historical structures, many fine examples are still in existence. Of particular note is the oldest house on the Island. Open to the public, the Captain Timothy Hill House is a registered Virginia Historic Landmark and listed with the National Register of Historic Places.

## ***Meetings / Conventions***

The past decade has seen a significant increase in the number and quality of meeting facilities in Town. Facilities range in capacity and services with the largest, the Chincoteague Center, having a maximum capacity of 800 to small meeting rooms for groups of 10 or less. Venues are located throughout the town and are provided by government, commercial, and non-governmental organizations. See Chapter 5 for additional details.

## **Outdoor Recreation**

Chincoteague benefits from its natural beauty, parklands, surrounding waters, bike paths, trails, and location alongside some of the most fertile sport-fishing grounds on the Mid-Atlantic coast. This provides for exceptional outdoor recreational opportunities including beaches, camping, bicycling, walking/hiking, local parks, observing native flora & fauna, boating, fishing, hunting, and shell-fishing. Outfitting and guides are available to maximize visitor enjoyment.



Sport-fishing is an important economic industry for Chincoteague.

Chincoteague's waters are on the Seaside Water Trail. The addition of kayak launches / floating docks at several of the Town's parks have resulted in the increase of kayakers. Several local businesses provide kayak rentals, instruction, and tours.

Significant efforts by the Town to improve multi-modal transportation has contributed to its use and growth of local businesses. There are at least 5 bicycle rental establishments, along with several scooter and street-licensed alternate vehicle rental businesses.

In the 1980s, the Town constructed Curtis Merritt Harbor of Refuge at the south end of the Island (see Chapter 5). In addition, public docking is available along downtown Main Street with public boat ramps at the Harbor, City Dock, and on Eastside Drive. Several commercial entities have boat slips, docking and launching available.

Charter boats, party (or "head") boats, tour boats, and scenic cruises are offered by dozens of locally-owned small companies for inshore and offshore fishing and fly fishing, as well as cruising and sightseeing. The fishing season starts in the spring with the arrival of flounder. Coastal fishing is possible almost year-round, as autumn brings large numbers of species such as bluefish, sea bass, tautog and rockfish (striped bass).

Chincoteague's off-shore fishing rivals the best in the Mid-Atlantic, with excellent catches of bluefin and yellowfin tuna, as well as dolphin, marlin, wahoo and king mackerel. Wreck fishing for sea bass is also very productive, with many large tautog being caught along with triggerfish, blues and spadefish. The in-shore fishing produces plentiful catches of flounder along with croaker, sea trout, and sea bass.

Scenic cruises are popular and offer the opportunity to explore the many fascinating areas around the channels, coves and marshes of the Chincoteague and Assateague waters. Eco-oriented cruises bring you close to nature, abundant birds and wildlife, historic and scenic places.

The economic impact of sport fishing is felt far beyond the charter boat companies. Fishermen (men and women) come with “money to be spent” on food, lodging, fuel, bait and tackle as well as hotels, motels, bed and breakfasts, restaurants, hardware stores, gas stations, and grocery stores, which all provide services to anglers from out of town. Weigh-ins, fishing tournaments, and the daily action in an active marina are tourist attractions in their own right, as well, and add to the array of sightseeing opportunities available on the Island.

In 2015 the American Sportfishing Association published the "Economic Contribution of Recreational Fishing: U.S Congressional Districts”, a report which showed that marine recreational fishing in Virginia’s 2<sup>nd</sup> District by over 84 thousand anglers contributed 1.1 thousand jobs to the district’s economy, generated \$92 million in retail sales output, \$137.6 million to the district’s gross domestic product, and \$39.9 million in salaries and wages.

Continual dredging of the Chincoteague Channel by the Army Corps of Engineers is required for easy access to both the harbor and the numerous docks surrounding the Island. Dredging occurs on an ongoing basis in order to keep the Island’s waterways navigable.

It should be noted that the indoor/outdoor facilities are available for tennis, pickleball, and basketball. See Chapter 5 for a more detailed discussion of recreational facilities.

### **Resiliency & Business Retention**

The Chincoteague Chamber of Commerce has established goals, strategies, and implementations to assist businesses with resiliency planning, wherein businesses are able to open quickly after a weather related event (Reference R-14).

Business Resiliency Planning is a continuous lifecycle, adapting to meet changing business needs, deliverables and customer commitments and to ensure that there are viable documented plans to respond to a wide range of significant risks and events that may adversely affect critical business activities.

The Chamber is hosting a series of Business Resiliency workshops to help businesses learn about and understand business resiliency and develop their business resiliency plan for such events. The first workshop discussed common sense measures business owners and managers can take to prepare for and rapidly recover from natural and man-made disasters. The main topics addressed include:

- Which disasters are most common locally
- Interaction between government disaster agencies interact
- Local emergency management planning, preparation, and communication with the community
- How businesses can Plan, Respond, Mitigate, and Recover
- Hazard Identification Risk Analysis and how to complete one
- Emergency Operations Plan for Your Business and how to develop one

Subsequent workshops focused on “after the storm mode”.

**Economic Impact**

Table 4-7 lists values for employment in Town by month for 2010. It shows the dominance of tourist related employment in Chincoteague during the prime season and a significant factor throughout the year. More recent meal tax receipts by month in which it is paid (Figure 4-1) suggest a broadening of the Fall tourist season with May and September being increasingly strong months. Note meal taxes are paid in the month following its collection at point of purchase.

**Chincoteague Town Tourist and Non-Tourist Employment by Month, 2010**

Month	Tourist-related Businesses	Non-Tourist related Businesses	Total
Jan	573	284	857
Feb	577	292	869
March	584	302	886
April	695	333	1,028
May	797	340	1,137
June	941	356	1,297
July	949	391	1,340
August	975	362	1,337
September	859	359	1,218
October	730	309	1,039
November	601	303	904
December	580	295	875
Annual range	573 - 975	284 - 391	857 - 1,340

Source: Virginia Employment Commission 2011

Table 4-7: 2010 Tourist and Non-Tourist Employment by Month

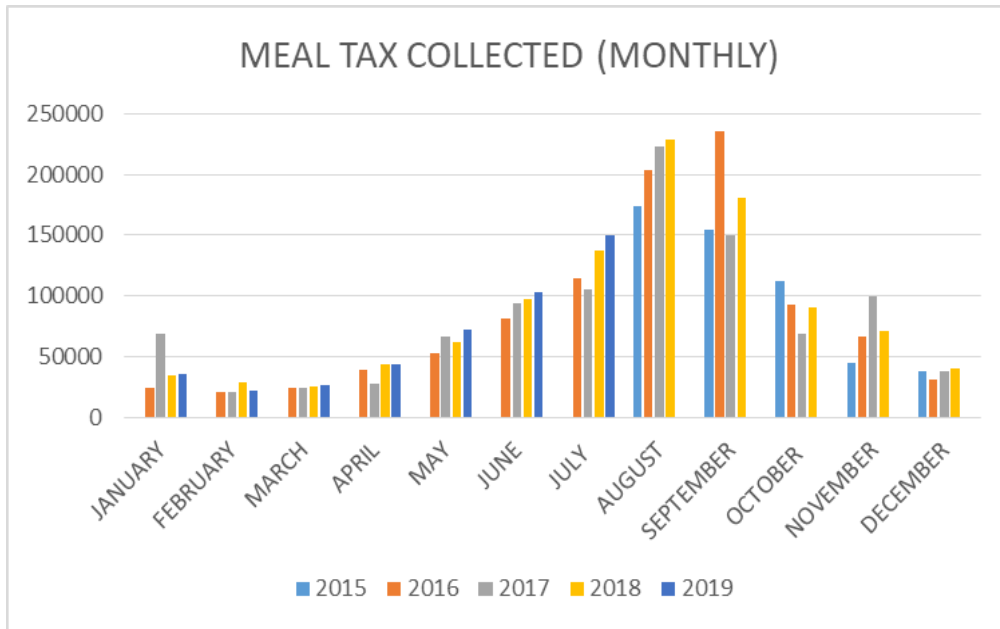


Figure 4-1: 2015-2019 Town Meal Tax Receipts

Approximately 91% of Accomack County’s tourist-related tax revenue is generated by the Town of Chincoteague. Chincoteague charges its own transient occupancy tax which increased from 3% to 4% in Fiscal Year 2013 (in addition to the 2% charged by the County) as well as a 5% meal tax. The meal tax was increased from 4% to 5% in Fiscal Year 2011. Figure 4-2 shows a strong and continued increase in tourism-generated tax receipts since 2010.

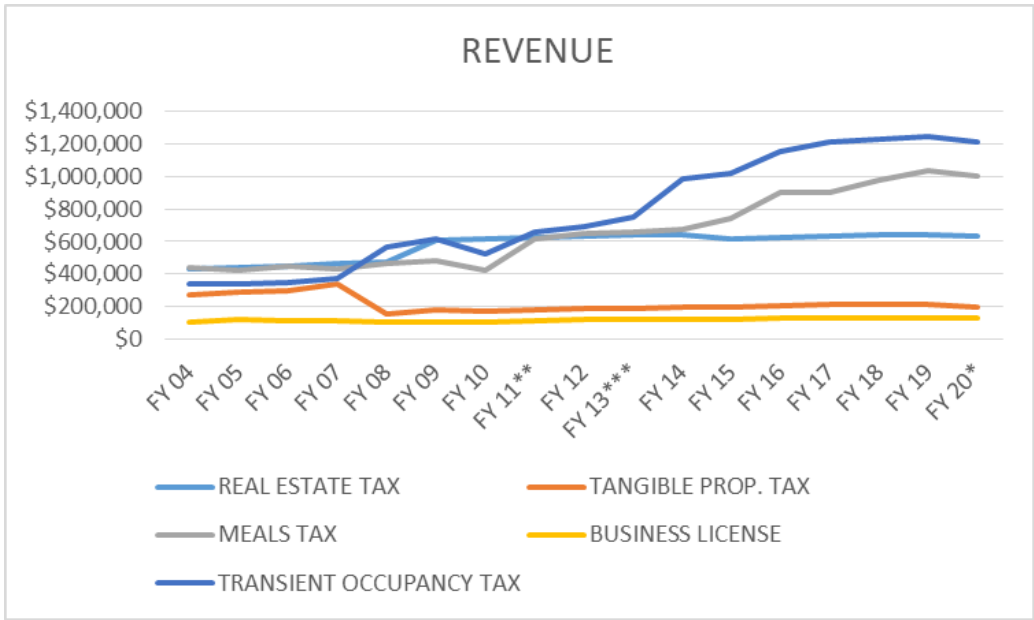


Figure 4-2: 2004-2020 Town Tax and Fee Receipts

### Seafood & Aquaculture

While the harvesting of seafood played a significant historical role in the economic development of Chincoteague, its gradual diminishment from a once-thriving industry continued through the mid-1900s.

Some watermen switched to clamming in an effort to maintain their livelihoods. Clam aqua farming had been in practice to a limited extent but in the 1990s, it began to increase. Since then, it has become increasingly important to the Island’s economy. Virginia has offered leases to watermen to plant and harvest shellfish on the bottom of bays and rivers since the 1800s. The practice was increased in the early 1900s to try to boost dwindling oyster harvests by cultivating and planting oyster ‘seeds’ or spat on depleted beds. By the end of the 1980s, as disease destroyed even the new oysters, watermen with leased oyster beds sought new sources of income from the once fertile beds. Clams were chosen because of their resistance to disease and their ability to thrive in the same high-salinity waters that once nurtured oysters.

The Virginia clam aqua farming industry has shown tremendous growth since the 1990s. Aqua farming produced close to \$38 million for Virginia clam farmers and \$18.5 million for oyster farmers. The 2002 Accomack-Northampton Planning District Commission’s Regional Housing Assessment cited that recent growth in aqua farming for clams has resulted in the creation of jobs that pay better than the poultry industry and other jobs in the area.

The Virginia Institute of Marine Science reported in 2017 that seed plantings for hard clams have stabilized over the last 5 years at around 500 million, while oysters show a significant increase up to 138 million planted in 2015.<sup>1</sup>

The Virginia Institute of Marine Science reports that growth in production of seed has accompanied the expansion of the industry, with an estimated 95% of seed produced being planted in Virginia. Aqua farms have expanded to accommodate the increase in demand, and report a stable employment forecast of full time with part time-personnel reducing slightly.<sup>2</sup>

Areas of the Chincoteague Bay, which has good soil and high salinity content, are currently being leased by aqua farmers, who have met with some success in growing clams. Based on the success of the aqua farming efforts in other areas of coastal Virginia, the State of Maryland, Ocean Trust and the National Oceanic and Atmospheric Administration Fisheries are working with local aqua farmers in the Chincoteague Bay and providing financial and technical assistance to help revive the region's once-thriving seafood industry.

There are four packing wharfs on the Island to support the industry. The Virginia Working Waterfront Master Plan (see Reference S-02) assessed the state of working waterfronts within the Accomack-Northampton Planning District and provided recommendations for their maintenance and resiliency.

Given its coastal location combined with its waterman culture, Chincoteague is a prime location for aqua-tourism, including oyster farms and clamming. Visitors may experience kayak clamming tours or oyster farms.

## **Wallops Island Area**

The Wallops Island Area is a major employment center for the region. More than 1,200 people work within the cluster of engineering, aerospace, and naval operations that include National Oceanic and Atmospheric Administration (NOAA), National Aeronautics and Space Administration (NASA), the United States Navy, and the Virginia Commercial Space Flight Authority (Virginia Space). The NASA Wallops Flight Facility and the Mid-Atlantic Regional Spaceport, both located on Wallops Island, provide the only licensed rocket launch facility on the Atlantic Coast other than Cape Canaveral.

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<sup>1</sup> Source: *Virginia Institute of Marine Science Results of Virginia Shellfish Aquaculture Crop Reporting Survey 2017*

<sup>2</sup> Source: *Ibid.*

NASA's Wallops Flight Facility provides agile, low-cost flight and launch range services to meet government and commercial sector needs for accessing flight regimes worldwide from the Earth's surface to the moon and beyond. Wallops' flight assets provide a full-range of capability while operational launch range and airfield capabilities meet ongoing and emerging needs in the science, aerospace, defense, and commercial industries. The NASA Wallops Flight Facility is operated by the Goddard Space Flight Center in Greenbelt, Maryland.

In addition, Wallops is a multi-user/multi-tenant facility in a geographic location ideal for supporting satellite tracking and commanding, military operations and training, scientific investigations, technology development and testing, as well as commercial aerospace. The facility's diverse mission sets and on-site partners, including the U.S. Navy, National Oceanic and Atmospheric Administration, the Federal Aviation Administration, Virginia Space and the Mid-Atlantic Regional Spaceport, is a model for leveraging and optimizing multi-organizational capabilities and support services. This environment provides for a wide range of employment opportunities in various fields, including engineering, technology, manufacturing, training and maintenance.

Chincoteague's service industries also benefit substantially from the proximity of the facility where more than 1000 people are employed. Many employees reside in or near the Town of Chincoteague. This creates a significant demand for services, including electrical, plumbing and automobile repair, cleaning, carpentry, and health and child care. In addition, employees traveling to the facilities lodge, eat, and recreate on Chincoteague. At least one commercial entity supporting the complex has located offices in town.

### **NASA Goddard Space Flight Center - Wallops**

The NASA Goddard Space Flight Center's Wallops Flight Facility operations add another tourism asset to the region and is a major employment center. Major programs range from research aircraft, unmanned aerial systems and high-altitude balloons to suborbital and orbital rockets. Within a short driving distance from Chincoteague, NASA employs 1000 full time civil servants and contractors.

### ***Wallops Flight Facility Visitor Center***

The Wallops Flight Facility Visitor Center has a variety of hands-on exhibits and hosts events and programs that are free and available to the public. The Visitor Center and grounds are open to the public during most launch events from Wallops Island. Visitor Center programs offer age-appropriate hands-on learning experiences in STEM to school and youth groups. Exhibits and



Wallops Island provides the only licensed rocket launch facility on the Atlantic Coast other than Cape Canaveral in Florida.



activities at the visitor center reflect the current activities conducted at the Wallops Flight Facility by NASA and its allied organizations. The Center estimates that they receive an average of 50,000-60,000 visitors per year.

### **Surface Combat Systems Center Wallops Island**

The Surface Combat Systems Center is a unique shore installation that provides the best maritime and littoral environment, operational team, high-fidelity combat systems and platform sensors, along with the ability to connect with ships, aircraft, and other land-based sites for Surface Navy testing, training, and support of deployed surface combat systems, advanced systems under development, warfare systems integration, interoperability, and at-sea testing and exercises.

The United States Navy Surface Combat Systems Center is comprised of over 400 military, civilian, and contractor personnel who provide engineering, training, and base operations support to the United States Fleet. Not only are there a relatively large number of jobs, they are also relatively high-skill and high-wage jobs. The SCSC employs 30 full-time resident employees along with contractor support.

### **NOAA Wallops Command and Data Acquisition Station**

The Wallops Command and Data Acquisition (CDA) Station is responsible for ensuring scheduled data flow from NOAA satellites to designated user subsystems. NOAA manages, operates, and maintains the station. The Station acquires, maintains, and distributes a continuous flow of meteorological satellite data. NOAA employs about 100 full-time resident employees.

### **Mid-Atlantic Regional Spaceport (MARS)**

The Mid-Atlantic Regional Spaceport is located at the NASA Wallops Flight Facility on Wallops Island. The center was expanded by the Virginia Commercial Space Flight Authority and operates in partnership with the National Aeronautics and Space Administration and private commercial space industry partners in the project to provide timely low-cost access to space. The launch pads have been constructed, in part with funding from the United States Economic Development Administration. The Center for Excellence, a consortium of industry, government, and academia, provide technical/vocational, secondary, and higher education opportunities relating to the technology and processes involved in aerospace activities. It is envisioned that the National Aeronautics and Space Administration Wallops Flight Facility and the MARS activities will provide a “hands-on” laboratory to support the learning process.

MARS provides space launch facilities and support services to commercial, government and scientific customers on a fee basis. It supports a full complement of launch-range services by NASA including safety monitoring, telemetry, radar tracking, command, control and communications, and data retrieval and processing. The addition of payload processing and integration facilities added offices, a lab, and test and evaluation areas to support operations. The spaceport can provide a wide array of additional services related to satellite design, assembly and launch.

MARS is licensed by the FAA Office of Commercial Space Transportation for launches to orbital trajectories. MARS is only one of four spaceports in the U.S. that is currently licensed to launch to orbit, and is only one of two on the east coast.

### ***MARS Unmanned Aircraft Systems (UAS) Airfield***

Additional capability is provided by the Mid-Atlantic Regional Spaceport's Unmanned Aircraft Systems (MARS UAS) Airfield. The MARS UAS Airfield is part of an array of autonomy-related assets designed to attract business. This investment, combined with programs from NASA at Wallops and Langley, the establishment of the Autonomous Systems Center of Excellence run by the Center for Innovative Technology, and designation of Virginia as one of six FAA test sites for unmanned aircraft systems, will help fulfill Virginia's mission of being one of the best autonomous hubs of industry in the nation.

A study, completed by the Association for Unmanned Vehicle Systems International (AUVSI), predicts the UAS industry will have a total economic impact in Virginia of approximately \$270M annually by the year 2020.

### **Wallops Research Park (WRP)**

The presence of an aerospace industry cluster on nearby Wallops Island provides Chincoteague with a major advantage over many rural Eastern Shore communities. The potential for skilled career opportunities and an above-average income level being the most prominent. The facilities on Wallops Island already offer careers for hundreds of engineers and technicians. The development of commercial rocket launches has the potential to attract hundreds of new jobs in the aerospace industry.

Companies that have shown an interest in the Space Flight Center all require a location in very close proximity to the Center to facilitate transporting finished rockets and pay-loads. The WRP facility was authorized under the Space Act Agreement of 2009 as follows: "Wallops Research Park (WRP): WRP is a research park including land, infrastructure, taxiway to connect with the Wallops runway and to create an overall attractive environment to support economic growth and the missions of NASA/GSFC/WFF and Chincoteague Bay Field Station (CBFS) through new commercial and educational institutions located within the park. WRP consists of Accomack County land, NASA/GSFC/WFF land leased by Accomack County and CBFS land."

In the same year, Virginia Code (15.2-2403, 15.2-2403.2) authorized WRP as a Service District and the establishment of the WRP Leadership Council (WRP LC).

In 2017, construction at the site, including infrastructure and taxiway was completed.

In 2019, ground was broken for the first commercial entity to locate in WRP. This commercial unit will provide small satellites the capability for frequent, reliable and affordable dedicated launch capabilities.

### **Virginia Commercial Space Flight Authority (VCSFA)**

The Virginia Commercial Space Flight Authority (VCSFA), also known as ‘Virginia Space,’ was created by the General Assembly of the Commonwealth of Virginia in 1995, with the legislated mission of promoting commercial space activity, economic development and aerospace research within the Commonwealth.

Virginia Space aims to provide safe, reliable, and responsive Space Access at competitive prices, and is proud to offer full-service launch facilities for commercial, government, scientific and academic users both foreign and domestic.

Virginia Space began its lease at Wallops Island in 1997 and continually expanded the Mid-Atlantic Regional Spaceport (MARS) facilities to its present day level of capabilities, with two launch facilities (one mid-class and one small-class launch facility), as well as access to support infrastructure facilities through agreements with NASA, such as vehicle and payload processing integration facilities, support instrumentation and emergency facilities.

### **Wallops Island Regional Alliance (WIRA)**

The Wallops Island Regional Alliance is a 501c 6 organization with by-laws and a diverse 13 member board. WIRA’s mission is to enhance and protect federal and state assets on the Eastern Shore. Three states, Virginia, Maryland, and Delaware are represented on the board. Membership includes private industry, academia, and government entities including federal, state, county and the Town of Chincoteague. As members, the Town and Chincoteague Chamber of Commerce participate in WIRA’s strategic planning process. Member organizations represent a broad range of occupational segments.

WIRA is focused on workforce development and achieving a sustainable workforce. WIRA can be an asset in promoting STEM outreach, particularly related to WIRA workforce applications. With its vast representation at Wallops Island, WIRA can also assist in developing space tourism and as a source for community feedback on local services required for continued growth. The Town may also benefit from coordination with WIRA in regard to support for upcoming opportunities and events such as space and military operations at Wallops Island.

### **Virginia Space Flight Academy (VSFA)**

The Virginia Space Flight Academy (VSFA) is a non-profit organization based at Wallops Island, Virginia. Its purpose is to educate middle school students (ages 11-15) about space flight and STEM concepts associated with space flight operations. Since its beginning in 1998, several thousand young people have been to one or more of its week-long, summer residential space camps. The program is interactive and “hands-on”.

Started as a pilot program with initial state funding, VSFA works in partnership with NASA, the Navy’s Surface Combat Systems Center, Virginia Space and the Mid-Atlantic Regional Spaceport (MARS), local schools and universities and area contractors to deliver its programs.

VSFA recognizes the critical importance of the local community by supporting local businesses, working to increase tourism to the region and helping promote the image of the region as a center for space-related, high tech activity. To reinforce that role, permanent Board seats are granted to the Chincoteague Chamber of Commerce and the Eastern Shore of Virginia Chamber.

VSFA ‘campers’ frequent dining and entertainment venues during their stay. Parents and family members frequent area hotels, rental homes, or visit family members on the island.

Through a partnership with the Accomack County School District students from Chincoteague Combined School have earned scholarships to attend Space Adventure Camp.

VSFA values its relationship to the island and stands ready to build more programs for area students while promoting Chincoteague as a wonderful vacation spot for families wishing to vacation before, during or after a child attends camp.

### **Wallops Island Resiliency**

NASA adaptation strategies underway and under consideration include beach re-nourishment to minimize sea level rise and storm surge impacts; building designs that reduce reliance on the remote power sources that may become less reliable during extreme events; and landscaping changes that reduce water use in dry regions and capture rain water to reduce flooding in wet regions.

To refine resiliency strategies specific to the Wallops Flight Facility and vicinity, a Seaside Special Area Management Plan (SAMP) is under development. The SAMP process has engaged many stakeholders to reduce use conflicts and enhance the productivity and resiliency of both natural systems and local water-based industries. The northern areas of the Seaside face a unique set of challenges related to established development and uses on the barrier islands of Wallops, Chincoteague, and Assateague that are not common to the remainder of the Seaside which is largely undeveloped and pristine. This process has produced the Wallops Assateague Chincoteague Inlet (WACI) Geologic and Coastal Management Summary Report (Reference S-19).

### **Economic Development Opportunities**

Chincoteague’s proximity to Assateague Island National Seashore and the Chincoteague National Wildlife Refuge continues to be its largest economic development opportunity. Over one million people a year come through the Town on their way to these two national destinations. The Town’s dining establishments and accommodations, including small seafood restaurants, pizza and sub shops, rustic campgrounds and cottages, and small motels, have adequately served the visitors who have traditionally come to the area for decades. However, tourist needs have changed and the Town’s tourism offerings may need to change with them. Both Heritage and eco-tourism have become very popular in the United States. The Town needs

to continue to expand activities for a variety of tourist opportunities and promote the Town as a destination for eco and heritage tourists.

Numerous possibilities exist to add arts and cultural venues to enhance Chincoteague's already appealing attributes. During its 2006 session, at the request of the Town, the Virginia Legislature granted Chincoteague the authority by Ordinance to establish a "Virginia Arts and Cultural District" within its boundaries. Chincoteague is one of only six municipalities in the state that have been recognized with this distinction.

The intent of an Arts and Cultural District is to provide incentives for the support and creation of arts and cultural organizations and businesses located within district boundaries. Chincoteague may grant tax incentives in the district, including reduction of permit fees, reduction of user fees; and reduction of any type of gross receipts tax. The Town may also provide incentives in the form of regulatory flexibility in the district, including special zoning, permit process reform, and exemption from ordinances. Any incentives adopted by the Town are binding for a period of up to 10 years.

The Chincoteague Island Arts Organization (CIAO) was incorporated in Virginia as a non-profit organization in December 2011 with the goal to establish a cultural arts center on Chincoteague Island to share film, performing arts, education programs, and other entertainment with our community and visitors. Through private investment, the Island Theater was fully restored and opened in 2014. CIAO has established partnerships with the Virginia Main Street Program, the Chincoteague Main Street Merchant Association, the Chincoteague Cultural Alliance, and other Island organizations. Chincoteague continues to take significant steps to revitalize its downtown and improve its streetscape, but more remains to be done.

### **Downtown Revitalization Program**

Chincoteague completed a Downtown Revitalization Master Plan in 2001. The initiatives and recommendations made in that document were well planned and prioritized on a comprehensive scale. These recommendations should continue to be implemented

In addition to conducting its own downtown revitalization study in 2001, Chincoteague is one of five towns who have joined together to support a regional downtown revitalization program staffed by the regional Planning District Commission. The regional program works with merchant associations in providing planning and implementation assistance to create and sustain successful revitalization programs.

The program follows the four points of the National Trust for Historic Preservation's Main Street program (promotion, design, economic restructuring and organization). Projects that have been undertaken as part of the program include Chincoteague's newly completed waterfront park and Exmore's installation of a downtown wastewater treatment system. Small revolving loan funds are in place in each town and have been used to help finance four new businesses. Merchants in each town organize to promote special events, design streetscape and building facade improvements, and existing businesses expand.

To date, Chincoteague and the town of Exmore have received funding from the Virginia Department of Community Development, the Department of Transportation, and United States Department of Agriculture Rural Development program for construction of streetscape improvements and the establishment of loan-pools for business expansion and facade improvements.<sup>3</sup>



### **Maddox Boulevard Multi-Modal Transportation Program**

In 2017, the USFWS awarded a grant to be used for the improvement of sidewalks and bike/pedestrian trails that connect the Chincoteague National Wildlife Refuge (CNWR) with the historic downtown section of the town. An engineering study (Reference R-13) was conducted, produced analysis with recommendations, and formed the basis for the ongoing efforts to enhance multi-modal transportation within the Maddox Boulevard district. Significant enhancements to date have resulted in the ever increasing pedestrian and bicycle traffic, providing easier access to the districts businesses while reducing traffic congestion. When completed, these enhancements will provide easy multi-modal access from Main Street to CNWR and all commercial establishments in between.

<sup>3</sup> Source: 2004 Eastern Shore of Virginia Comprehensive Economic Development Strategy (CEDS).

### **Hub and Spoke Itinerary Tourism**

Itinerary tourism attracts individuals and groups interested in specific local and/or regional trail themes. The concept is to offer an array of theme-related activities within easy driving distance from hub towns. Generally, itinerary tourism is active throughout the year. The Town is a hub and has one or more points of interest on several trails.

- Virginia Oyster Trail
- Virginia's Eastern Shore Artisan Trail
- Eastern Shore of Virginia Heritage Trail
- Virginia Water Trails – Eastern Shore
- Coastal Region Bird & Wildlife Trail

### **Year-Round Economic Activity**

As the 2010 Comprehensive Plan stated, a stable year-round economy will ensure the longevity of Chincoteague as a hometown and as a resort. With the planned expansion of facilities and employment on Wallops Island, as well as the likely increase in year-round housing units on Chincoteague Island in the event of installation of a sewer system, the mostly tourist and seasonal resident customer base of many Island businesses will likely expand to include a larger number of full-time year-round clientele. This bodes well for local businesses of all types, but particularly for service industries such as home improvement and repair, health and medical care, child care, and financial and investment services.

While state, national and regional trends indicate an increasingly larger proportion of senior citizens in future populations, Chincoteague and the areas around it could experience a fairly even increase in all age groups over the next five to ten years, given the prospective increase in employees coming to Wallops Island, most of whom will presumably be younger and have families.

It is unlikely that Chincoteague will experience a major surge in new businesses because there is only a limited amount of land on the Island available for commercial development. Rather, the economic opportunities will lie in the year-round growth in local business activity and the possible expansion of existing businesses to fulfill the needs of a growing population. New business development can be expected to some extent, as voids are discovered and filled, but the real promise will lie in the ability of seasonally-operated businesses to extend operations beyond summer months and capably support the local workforce year-round.

### **Regional Partners**

The Eastern Shore of Virginia Regional Partnership is a group of more than 30 local business, government, civic and educational leaders. The Partnership is pursuing seven economic development projects considered to be of great importance to the region.

The Accomack-Northampton Planning District Commission focuses on regional planning, housing, and community development issues, and provides staff for the Economic Development Commission. The Virginia Eastern Shore Economic Empowerment and Housing Corporation is the lead entity for the federally designated Enterprise Community. The Corporation operates a microenterprise revolving loan fund along with other community development programs.

The Accomack-Northampton Regional Housing Authority (A-NRHA), which is housed under the auspices of the A-NPDC works on housing issues on the Eastern Shore of Virginia. The A-NRHA primarily works to provide housing solutions for workforce families, low-income families and the elderly. The Housing Choice Voucher Program is the A-NRHA's largest.

### **Enterprise Zone Projects**

Part of the Town of Chincoteague is in a State-designated Enterprise Zone. Virginia Enterprise Zones provide grants for qualifying companies that create new full-time jobs or improve commercial real estate. Two substantial financial incentives are available to encourage business locations and expansions within the Zone:

***Real Property Improvement Grants:*** Commercial real estate construction or improvement projects that meet minimum thresholds are eligible for a grant of up to 30% of the total cost of qualified improvements (maximum amount not to exceed \$125,000 in a 5-year period). The grants are made after the project is complete. New construction projects must cost at least \$250,000. Rehabilitated or expanded real property requires a minimum investment of at least \$50,000. The purchase price of the real estate is not included in the investment calculation. Residential projects are not eligible. Mixed-use projects that are at least 30% business use can qualify for a grant.

***Job Grants:*** Businesses that create at least 4 new full-time jobs may be eligible to receive job creation grants, for a maximum of 350 eligible jobs per year. Jobs paying 200% of the federal minimum wage and providing health benefits will be eligible for a grant of \$800 per year for five years. Jobs paying less than 200% of minimum wage, but at least 175% (and providing health benefits) will be eligible for a grant of \$500 per year for five years. Jobs paying less than 175% of minimum wage will not be eligible for job grants. Job grants are not available to retail, local service or food/beverage service businesses.

### **Implementation Strategies**

#### **The Economic Development Goal:**

Provide a quality working/business environment that ensures a balanced mix of seasonal and



year-round commercial and employment uses to serve the day to day needs of residents and visitors. Encourage educational opportunities for all ages to promote higher salary jobs throughout town.

### ***The Chincoteague National Wildlife Refuge***

The CNWR CCP presents both opportunities and challenges for the local economy and town infrastructure. Implementation of the CCP objectives can be enhanced by cooperation and coordination with the Town.

- Continue to coordinate multi-modal enhancements.
- Improve communication of refuge/beach status.
- Coordinate with CNWR to pursue funding opportunities to improve the refuge and adjoining areas for the benefit of the community.
- Explore potential impacts and identify protective methods to address hazard mitigation.
- Work with CNWR, and other partners, to develop and utilize adaptive management practices that sustain the resiliency of these barrier islands.

### ***Main Street Revitalization***

The relocation of the bridge presents both opportunities and challenges for the economic development of the town center. The challenge is ensuring that the historic town shopping area continues to attract shoppers and businesses and continues to thrive. The Town believes that it is imperative to retain the existing cluster of businesses located in the Town Center and to encourage new business start-ups. The Town also believes that the best means of achieving this end is to retain the unique pedestrian scale oriented characteristics of the area and maintain its strong linkage to the waterfront. To this end, the following strategies are recommended:

- Ensure the public, property owners, and merchants are included in the development of overall plans and policies as key stakeholders.

- Seek out state funding from the Virginia Department of Transportation, Community Development Block Grants, and other programs to assist economic efforts.
- Apply for state grants from the Virginia Boating Infrastructure Program to repair or replace bulkheads and piers for overnight dockage, charter, and tour boats.
- Extend the boardwalk along the waterfront of Main Street and pedestrian walkways from the waterfront to Main Street.
- Determine placement for bike paths in this area and connect to other bike paths identified in the Town's bike plan.
- Lease transient boat slips to offset costs and upkeep.
- Obtain easements from adjoining property owners for a waterfront boardwalk.
- Create tax incentives, for example, a tax credit equal to a percentage of construction expenses for property owners to make appropriate façade improvements on buildings fronting on Main Street.
- Create low-interest loan pools for property owners to make appropriate façade improvements on buildings fronting on Main Street.
- Apply for state grants from the Virginia Department of Transportation to bury utility lines and install new lighting from Cropper Street to Maddox Boulevard with new sidewalks, lighting, landscaping, and a new gateway treatment to the island.
- Promote the establishment of residential over commercial.
- Actively seek alternative parking strategies downtown.

### ***Maddox Boulevard Commercial District***

- Establish guidelines for the district's enhancement and development.
- Encourage the development of enterprises that enhance and balance the district's current offerings and increase vibrancy.
- Continue to develop multi-modal transportation that allows for enhanced connectivity within and to the district.

- Provide public restrooms within the district.

### ***Balanced Year-Round Economy***

Increasing year-round economic activity is “good for business.” It also benefits the Town and its residents through increased local revenue and business opportunities. The following strategies are intended to help achieve this end:

- Promote more year-round economic activity that takes advantage of the unique historic and cultural character of the Town.
- Promote sound local economies by conserving the Island’s unique values and providing protections from developments that may cause irreversible damage. The Island’s natural attributes and its heritage are its most valuable economic resources.
- Encourage development that enhances the environmental, historic, and scenic qualities of the Island to promote a healthy coastal environment to foster economic vitality.
- Encourage efforts to diversify the Island economy consistent with the quality and character of the existing Chincoteague Island.
- Give top priority to year-round job opportunities for permanent Island residents and increase the Island’s self-sufficiency to diversify the economic base so that the Island will be less reliant on the tourist trade.
- Create jobs for the skills and working habits of the year-round labor force, in industries, which will prudently utilize the Island’s natural resources.
- Encourage the development of small-scale industries to enhance the year-round economy.
- Private initiatives will influence the future of the Island at least as much as government regulations. Encourage creative and environmentally sound economic initiatives, ensure that regulations affecting small businesses do not cause unnecessary burdens and review regulations that might discourage new small business start-ups.
- Where appropriate, encourage water-dependent maritime uses of coastal land.
- Promote necessary economic support for sport and commercial fishing.

- Promote and encourage enhanced relationships between the Town and the Wallops Island entities.

### ***Tourism, Real Estate, & Seasonal Businesses***

Chincoteague Island is a nature resort, where attraction is based on its environmental quality and natural beauty. Investment in these resources is essential to a healthy economy.

Both sport and commercial fishing are part of the essence of the tourist experience of Chincoteague Island and generate a substantial local economy, compatible with the protection of Island resources. Opportunities for direct participation in the Island's natural environment through activities such as fishing, boating, swimming, beachcombing, hiking, biking, horseback riding and shopping for local products make Chincoteague Island a unique place to visit.

The following strategies are intended to ensure that this component of the Island's economic engine continues:

- The island's qualities should be preserved for summer residents, visitors, and taxpayers as well as for those who live on Chincoteague Island year-round.
- Ensure history and heritage experiences are preserved, refreshed, and expanded.
- Develop, maintain, and expand parks, outdoor trails and water trails.
- Leverage the Town's waterfront areas.
- Ensure wayfinding signage and visitor information is visible, consistent in content & format, and available through multiple points (signage, printed materials, electronic media).
- Encourage an increase in affordable housing for short-term and/or seasonal employees.
- Foster a more welcoming attitude towards visitors by developing information and welcoming facilities both on- and off- Island.
- Recognize the importance of the summer economy as a base for the year-round economy and manage it through public and private actions including infrastructure and capital planning.

- Educate the public about the tourist economy on Chincoteague.

### ***Seafood & Aquaculture Industries***

- Promote policies on protecting the Island Seafood Industry. Seafood harvesting is an ancient determinant of the Island's character and land use. Ensure that it remains a visible part of the landscape.
- Protect the seafood industry from changes in attitudes and ensure sufficient land is zoned for this activity. Prevent conflicts with residential land uses.
- Encourage and foster the local seafood and aquaculture economies for the benefit of the whole island economy and character. The availability of local seafood, as well as the opportunity to "catch" local seafood, is essential features for the Island experience.
- Encourage economic activities, which are positive additions to the rural Island environment.
- Encourage boating and fishing activities for the well-being of the Island economy, particularly tourism. Recognize the importance of commercial and sport fisheries to the local economy.

### ***Wallops Island (WI) Area Economy***

- Promote, with Wallops Island entities, educational opportunities.
- Obtain recommendations from Wallops Island entities which could make the Town a more appealing location for their employees.
- Coordinate promotion of upcoming opportunities and events such as space and military operations at Wallops Island.
- Obtain Wallops Island entity workforce requirements and promote local development of qualified candidates.
- Encourage sponsorship of scholarships for Chincoteague middle school students to attend the Virginia Space Flight Academy.

- Encourage local government leaders to promote S.T.E.M. (science, technology, engineering and math) programs for area students in available venues. Wallops Island entities are eager to find local talent, particularly for jobs in the trades.

### ***Economic Impact Study***

- Encourage the commission of an economic impact study to include the following:
  1. Economic Baseline Study Update – Document levels of economic activity in Island business. Look for measures of growth such as sales tax figures, bank and insurance activity, employment and unemployment, commercial utilities accounts, licenses granted. Plot trends in economic activity annually and project future areas of growth. Find stable and sustainable levels of economic activity based on long-term trends rather than boom-and-bust cycles. Study the income generated by different Island industries and identify industries that recycle their income back into the Island economy.
  2. Year-Round Employment – Document year-round employment including numbers of jobs by industry.
  3. Alternative Trades – Research other examples of resort and rural communities for possible new industries and types of employment.
  4. Crafts Cooperatives – Encourage local outlets for Island crafts, especially where opportunities for Island artisans can be encouraged.
  5. Commercial Rents – Study the range of rents paid and develop measures to offset costs for year-round businesses.
  6. Local Investment – Encourage businesses to invest through local institutions to use local labor and materials and to patronize Island businesses. Identify purchasing and contracting that uses off-Island vendors and encourage the development of local sources for local vendors.
  7. Manage Resources With Economic Value – Natural, historical, cultural, scenic, and recreational resources are the prime Island “export.” Maximize the potential of a clean environment, restore and protect historic buildings and areas, and manage and expand recreational uses.
  8. Develop Education Programs to Strengthen Local Economy – Teach subjects that focus on Island heritage: history, environment, marine-biology, and link these programs with opportunities for hands-on experience and job awareness.

9. Monitor Consumer Prices – Survey Island prices for consumer goods at regular intervals and inform the public so that businesses can monitor themselves in terms of prices.
10. Waterfront Resources – Encourage the development of waterfront zoning bylaws that are protective of coastal environments and their traditional Island uses.
11. Local Management of Tourism – The Town should continue to take some responsibility for the ongoing planning of tourist facilities including restrooms and for educational programs to better manage tourism.
12. Cost Benefit Analysis of Tourist Economy – Study the impacts of each segment of the tourist economy and identify costs and benefits. Identify portions of the summer economy that should be encouraged.
13. Educate – Educate the public about the tourist economy through school programs community workshops and literature at arrival points.
14. Make the Island More User-Friendly – Design specific features to orient and educate visitors including brochures, historic plaques and markers, transportation symbols, guidebooks. The Town should encourage active website design and maintenance, for the Town itself and for businesses.
15. Marketing the Island to Specific Clientele – Pool resources to advertise with campaigns specifically designed to boost the desired parts of the economy (i.e. Birders/Nature Enthusiasts).
16. Higher Education as an Industry – Explore the potential for high school and college level research and credit programs to attract off-season economic activity.

### ***Planning for Commercial Growth***

- Keep existing business districts vital and workable.
- Restore and renovate historic buildings as an alternative to new construction, wherever possible.
- Support planned economic growth.
- Encourage commercial development to match the scale and density of Island neighborhoods. Limit overall square footage, massing of individual buildings, and expanses of paved areas to blend with the rural scale of the Island. Provide an appropriate rhythm of buildings along

streetscapes with view corridors to the coast, wherever possible. Prevent strong shadowing effects from buildings near public coastlines and parks.

- Town Centers – Maintain services and year-round uses in existing Town commercial centers for pedestrian access and community identity. Address parking and traffic issues and sewage and septic needs.
- Positive Incentives – Develop incentives to direct commercial growth to desired locations.
- Home Businesses – Continually update and develop standards for home businesses to avoid conflicts with residential uses.

### ***Education Partnerships/Workforce Development***

Chincoteague will encourage partnerships which seek to improve educational opportunities for all ages to obtain training needed to succeed in both high technology and natural resource industries. Strategies listed below will encourage a strong broad based economy for the future which balances private and public sector careers that provide both value and prosperity while re-investing tax revenues in the region.

- Support development of an Eastern Shore Community College campus at Wallops Research Park.
- Enroll students in career and technical education programs.
- Engage universities and colleges in regional economic development, e.g., through current activities at Wallops Island.
- Provide small business incubator space centrally located in the regional district that is easily accessible and satisfies workforce training and business development needs and programs.
- Continue a targeted marketing effort to determine how best to “brand” and “sell” the region to potential new businesses and entrepreneurs.
- Improve broadband access for e-commerce and tourism marketing.
- Support dual enrollment (whereby high school students take college-level classes for college credit) between high schools and higher education institutions.
- Encourage, expand, and pursue funding for internships, apprenticeships, and co-ops.
- Pursue education/training funds for middle-income population that does not qualify for other assistance.