

Onancock's Bayside Revitalization

Bayside is a small African-American community just outside the town of Onancock. This community, over the years, has been the home for 250+ residents along with entities to include several businesses, two churches and a schoolhouse. Throughout the years, the community has been plagued with unmaintained ditches that overflow; distorted and vacate homes in need of indoor plumbing, inadequate, unsafeguarded drinking water; and insufficient, failing septic systems. Many homes have been abandoned and left unattended due to the necessity of a costly, functional drinking water system as well as septic infrastructure which have prevented residents from remaining and investing in the community. It's beyond time to focus on Onancock's Bayside community to restore the hopes and dreams of the residents, many elderly as well as veterans.

The Onancock's Bayside Revitalization Team is led by Ms. Myra Riley-Taylor, born and reared in Onancock's Bayside community and has the vision for a revitalization of the community. Ms. Riley-Taylor is supported by Ms. Shirlene Shrieves and Ms. Elizabeth Bell. Ms. Shrieves was also reared in the Onancock's Bayside community. Ms. Bell is an Alabama native who transitioned to the Eastern Shore from New Jersey and is a member of one of Onancock's Bayside community church, Metropolitan United Methodist Church. Many of the Bayside residents and property owners are also engaged with the revitalization effort.

On Saturday, June 2, 2018, the Onancock's Bayside Revitalization Team held its first community meeting at Metropolitan United Methodist Church on Bayside Road to discuss the revitalization of the community. The session was attended by over 40 people which included Accomack County's Board of Supervisor Chairman, Mr. Robert Crockett who represents the Onancock area. Board of Supervisor member, Ms. Renita Major, also attended the community meeting. Ms. Ava Gabrielle Wise of Exmore's New Road Development Group, a hosted guest, provided an overview of the New Road development and discussed the challenges of what is now noted as a success story of a neighborhood revitalization. Ms. Wise also addressed questions from the audience and provided invaluable input. Afterwards, Ms. Riley-Taylor provided the group with reasons that led to her desire to revitalize Onancock's Bayside community. Ms. Riley-Taylor also thanked Ms. Wise and Dr. Brenda Holden for their guidance and insight that was instrumental for proceeding with the revitalization vision.

Onancock's Bayside Revitalization Team identified 10+ projects that will improve and enhance the quality of life in the community such as the installation of a community septic waste management system and the restoral of the old community schoolhouse. During the session, Ms. Riley-Taylor provided the session participants with a high level overview of Onancock's Bayside projects. Mr. Crockett and Ms. Major provided input and guidance from a county prospective as the projects were briefed.

Prior to closing the session, a door prize of the Onancock's Bayside t-shirt was given to the first person who arrived at the meeting, Gustava Pettit, who lives in Daugherty and is a former resident of Onancock's Bayside Road. Additionally, Marian Gunter, Gloria Reid and Dorothy White, residents of Onancock's Bayside Road, were also t-shirt winners based on the door prize drawing held at the end of the session. The t-shirts were designed by Ms. Riley-Taylor and her mother, Ms. Peggy Riley Corbin.

On June 23, the second community session, hosted by Onancock's Bayside Revitalization Team at the Metropolitan United Methodist Church on Bayside Road, for the project team members was well attended. A detailed overview of each project with suggested key activities was provided by Ms. Riley-Taylor. Thereafter, a comprehensive discussion of a couple of projects was facilitated that included the restoration of the community's historical schoolhouse which is one of the immediate priorities of the group. Project plans for its renovation include donations for the required building materials as well as volunteers to support the makeover of the building. The initial goal is to stabilize the building this fall and renovate the interior in the spring of 2019. The group also discussed potential sources of funding to support the various projects.

The Onancock's Bayside Revitalization Team, along with many of the community residents, attended the Accomack County Board of Supervisors meeting on July 18. With the Onancock's Bayside community presentation being provided by Ms. Riley-Taylor, the team sought and received unanimous approval from the Board for the community's projects to be supported by the Accomack Northampton Planning District Commission (ANPDC).

Onancock's Bayside community efforts support the county's endeavor to combat homelessness, tackle substandard housing, and restore as well as identify community points of interest that may serve as potential historical attractions.

To donate and support Onancock's Bayside initiatives, please email the Onancock's Bayside Revitalization Team at baysideofonancock@yahoo.com.