

“Use Conflict: an emergent conundrum for land-use and water-use management in Virginia”

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This presentation offered a local government perspective regarding use conflicts; specifically, within the York River basin. Mr. Lawrence asked, “How did it get so complicated?”

He then described the transition going on in land uses within the York watershed, noting that conflicts at the shoreline are becoming increasingly common. He brought up the idea of “rights” versus “privileges” to the Commonwealth’s water resources.

His slides revealed the many-sided perceptions among people viewing and/or accessing the same public resource, asking rhetorically, “Why can’t we get along?” One answer: what one person finds visually appealing another finds visually appalling.

Taking that a step further, then, what we consider “good” public policy or “bad” public policy is really the same question. At the local level, governments try to answer the questions, “Are these good uses or bad,” and, “Who allocates space?”

In Virginia, it is very complicated and many regulatory layers exist for the oversight of land/water use. We need a better mouse trap for regulatory oversight!

Mr. Lawrence described a new, 3-D model built with Google software that focuses on the Virginia portion of the Chesapeake Bay watershed. Seventeen agencies have jurisdiction; the model shows their purview, as well as their authority as established by state code.

In the York River basin, a committee has been established to look at historical uses; to consider who is arguing and why; to consider how to mitigate damages; and to make recommendations to resolve use conflicts. The core problem they are grappling with: Who gets to manage use and allocate space?

He concluded with a prediction about the future, asking “Where are we headed?” And answered, use conflicts that are not resolved at the local level will eventually end up in the court system. When those issues get enough press and exposure, they will make their way to the General Assembly to decide.