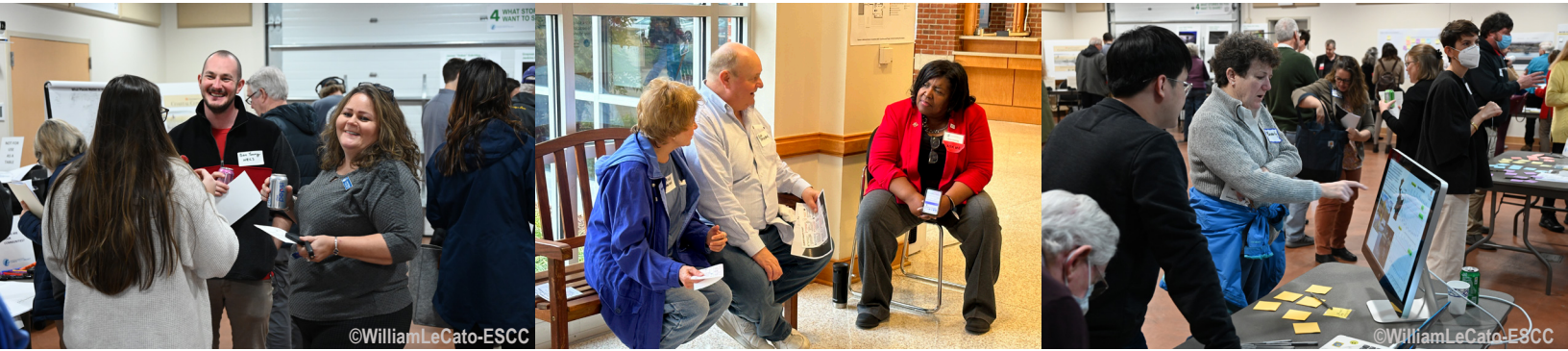


# HIGHLIGHTS OF THE EASTERN SHORE OF VIRGINIA CLIMATE EQUITY WORKSHOP



Eastern Shore of Virginia (ESVA) Climate Equity Project, a five year partnership between University of Virginia and ESVA community, aims to co-create decision tools that will enable the ESVA community to advance its long-term climate equity. In its first outreach to the broader community, the project invited over 300 residents representing a broad range of interests to attend the first community workshop on January 30, 2023. A summary of community participation, key findings, and the project's next steps are listed as follows:



## PARTICIPANTS

Over 70 participants joined the workshop! The workshop was a great success as participants enjoyed different interactive stations where they learned more about current and future climate challenges on the Shore and shared their ideas of what would be helpful to support the Shore through these changes. **Non-profits and Regional and Local Government** were the most represented stakeholders. Going forward, a goal is to engage with the **Black community, the Hispanic community, and watermen and farmers**. From the attendees that participated, there was equal representation from both **Accomack and Northampton** counties. Some of the most represented communities were **Oyster, Locustville, Belle Haven, Eastville, Cape Charles, and Chincoteague**.



## WHAT IS YOUR HISTORY OF THE EASTERN SHORE?

At this station many participants traced their family's history on the Shore back to the 1600s and enjoyed recounting the changing landscape of the Shore, particularly during the 20th century with the rise and fall of the railroad and the building of the Chesapeake Bay Bridge Tunnel. Participants had many **social and cultural memories**, particularly moments of **personal** history; as well as **economy and transportation** memories around projects such as the construction of **Route 13**; and **storm events and flooding** such as the past of **hurricanes**.



## WATER CHALLENGES

**Too much? Too Little? Too Salty? How does water affect your community?**

There were concerns of both "too much" and "too little" water. The "too much" water concerns were centered on groundwater level interactions with septic system performance, in addition to stormwater flooding from developed areas, coastal surge inundation, salt water intrusions and ghost forests. The "too little" water concerns often came up in the form of **withdrawing water from deeper aquifers** to ensure availability.



## WHAT ARE YOUR CONCERNS?

At this station, participants provided not only their concerns, but also their trusted sources of information and solutions they would like to see in their community. Many concerns were shared, but the biggest concerns were related to **employment and economic development opportunities, housing availability and affordability, and limitations of current land use policies and zoning**. Sources that participants got their information from were wide-reaching, but the most common were **social media** and the **Eastern Shore Post**. The solutions shared were plentiful, with the biggest proposed solution being more climate and environment-relevant education for youth.



## WHAT STORIES DO YOU WANT TO SHARE?

At this station, participants wrote on postcards about five topics: taste, visit, hear, smell, and feel. For taste, **oysters and clams** were popular items on which to dine, alongside **local and fresh produce**. Unsurprisingly, participants love to visit the **beach**, particularly **Assateague**. The **marshes** were also popular, as well as sites along **Route 13**, and particularly events like the **Wachapreague Carnival** and **First Wednesdays at the Clam Shack**. **Bird sounds** were by far the most popular of the topics, with **geese, seagulls, Blue Herons, ospreys**, and others mentioned. The smells of the **marsh** and the **salt air** were also commonly mentioned. Finally, participants recalled so many feelings: from the **wind off the water to a cool breeze on the porch**, to more ephemeral feelings of being **calm and at peace**, surrounded by **hugs and laughter**.



## WHAT DO YOU WANT YOUR FUTURE TO SOUND LIKE?

This station offered short pieces of sound art with accompanying prompts that invited participants to give expression to the values, feelings, and thoughts that shape their imagination of possible futures. Some key patterns of response:

- Invited to name representative sounds of the ES, many mentioned birds, waves, boat motors, and **community conversations at gathering places**.
- Prompted to reflect on how the ES soundscape has changed, many mentioned increased traffic sounds and decreased bird song, and some noted that noise increased yet many buildings remain empty even while people need housing and jobs.
- In reflection on sonification of tidal data, many noted feelings of fear of foreboding, including of the **loss of generational land, including farm land**.
- Asked to name what they hope future generations will hear, many named birdsong, some named benthic creatures like salt clams and fiddler crabs at low tide, a few named the sounds of sharing life, and several that they simply hope future generations will be able to hear **all that we hear now**.



## WHERE ARE YOUR COMMUNITIES?

Participants identified their communities across the Eastern Shore on a map, with the most common communities of interest being **Cape Charles, Oyster, Chincoteague, and Wachapreague**. These places were often identified as the locations of homes, jobs, key roadways, beloved natural areas, and locations of recurrent flooding. Several **Hispanic churches** were also identified across the Eastern Shore, as well as major agricultural employers like Perdue. Residents cited warnings about loss of farmland and issues with septic tanks.



## WHAT RESOURCES ARE ALREADY HERE?

Resources shared at this station were relevant master plans and resiliency work. Additional resources provided included the **DCR Community Outreach & Engagement Plan** and **Community of Oyster Coastal Adaptation + Resilience Plan**. The **Resilience Adaptation Feasibility Tool (RAFT)** findings were presented, and some existing resiliency tools shared were the Coastal Resilience Web Explorer by DCR and RAFT Scorecard for Northampton. Additional tools mentioned by the workshop attendees were the **Social Vulnerability Index (SVI)** and **NOAA Digital Coast**. Existing working groups such as CAWG and small municipal committees were shared. Additions to this section were the **CBES, The Tree Advisory Committee (Cape Charles), The Regional Navigable Waterways Committee, and Eastern Shore Chapter VA Master Naturalists**.



## WHAT ARE YOUR PRIORITIES?

*In December 2022, the project's Community Advisory Committee identified 15 priorities that they would like the project to consider. During the workshop, the participants voted for the following top 5 priorities.*

- How will **sea level rise affect ESVA communities and populations differently**, including Tangier Island?
- How will **septic systems, salinization of soils and groundwater** be affected by climate change?
- What can our community do to **mitigate and adapt** to the effects of climate change?
- How can we create **affordable retrofitting** for homes and structures to withstand the increase of powerful storms and hurricanes?
- Can we identify a practice that **encourages and ensures input and collaboration from residents of underserved communities crucial to the planning process**, and from local government officials vital to the implementation process?



## NEXT STEPS

Insights collected from the community will inform the Eastern Shore Climate Equity Project over the next three years. Here are ways you can reach out and engage:

- Learn more about the project at info booths during upcoming community events
- Participate in focus group discussions and one-on-one interviews regarding topics important to you
- Contribute your experiences at thematic sessions and crowdsourcing displays
- Record your oral history about how climate change has impacted you and your community

If you would like to participate, please reach out to: [ESVAClimateEquity@virginia.edu](mailto:ESVAClimateEquity@virginia.edu)  
Or follow our next steps on our [Facebook page](#)

