

## **Virginia Beach Bond Referendum**

Flooding affects every resident in Hampton Roads. Increased rainfall, more frequent storms, and sea level rise predictions of three to five feet have us all alarmed.

In Virginia Beach water comes from all four directions. Water from the Chesapeake Bay to the north, the Elizabeth River to the west, the Atlantic Ocean to the east, and the Albemarle-Pamlico Sound to the south make the challenges and the solutions complex.

On Election Day, November 2, Virginia Beach voters can take a critical step to enable the city to deal with many current flooding issues, and also help prepare for sea level rise and increased rainfall predicted for the future.

The last item on the Virginia Beach ballot is a referendum to allow the City of Virginia to issue general revenue bonds totaling \$567.5 million for twenty-one specific flood control projects throughout the city.

These projects are designed to keep water out of people's homes. They will not end all the flooding or the need for future work, but they are essential now to protect Virginia Beach neighborhoods from flooding.

The twenty-one projects are located in all areas of the city. Wherever you live or work, your business, home, and the roads you travel will be improved by these projects.

In a storm, water runs off all the developed properties in the city. Our stormwater system was not designed to deal with the size of our city today much less the increased rainfall. Critically important upgrades need to be made.

Accomplishing this will not be painless. Paying back these bonds will take twenty years and necessitate a 4.3 cent increase in the property tax rate. But not doing this work will cost us even more. The \$26 million in economic damages that we experience annually from flooding today will increase to \$77 million annually by 2040 and \$329 million annually by the 2070s.

The good news, according to an analysis by Old Dominion University, is that every dollar we invest now in flood protection, will produce \$19 - \$20 in economic benefits.

There is no question that this is a big financial investment for Virginia Beach citizens. To ensure that the funds are spent properly, city council resolved to establish a citizen oversight board and a lockbox to restrict the funds to the twenty-one projects on the list. And most importantly, future development in the city will not be allowed to exceed the capacity of the improved stormwater system.

I am happy to say that several of the referendum projects contain nature-based strategies for dealing with flooding. The Bow Creek Golf Course will be turned into a park and water storage

area providing recreational space and flooding protection for some of the neighborhoods that were severely damaged during Hurricane Matthew in 2016.

In Back Bay, the restoration of marsh islands that have eroded over time, will slow the flow of water north from the Albemarle-Pamlico system protecting properties in the North Bay that are experiencing flooding on a regular basis.

Lynnhaven River NOW already is using nature-based strategies to help reduce the impacts of neighborhood flooding by building living shorelines and oyster reefs, planting trees, and working to reduce stormwater runoff with rain barrels, infiltration trenches and rain gardens.

These nature-based solutions working with structural approaches help protect water quality and vital habitat while also giving us greater flood protection.

The water is not going away. These twenty-one projects are a necessary and important step to keep flood water out of residents' homes in Virginia Beach.

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