

LAND, RIVER, CULTURE, COMMUNITY:
PEOPLE OF THE NANTICOKE UNITING FOR THE FUTURE
A Visioning Conference for the Nanticoke Region
March 26 – 27, 2010 – Vienna Elementary School

Conference Summary

Overview

The Nanticoke River, a major tributary of the Chesapeake Bay, is a relatively healthy biologically and culturally diverse watershed within southern Delaware and Lower Eastern Shore of Maryland. With potential growth and changes on the horizon, never has there been a better time to think about the future of the Nanticoke region and determine its direction over the next 10 or 20 years. Issues like population shifts, community growth, and economic development are primary focus points for many living and working in the area.

The visioning conference for the Nanticoke region was an opportunity for diverse stakeholders throughout the region to begin an in-depth investigation of a common ground vision for the future. Using the principles of the Future Search conference model, attendees investigated the past, reviewed the present, envisioned an ideal future, discovered common ground values, and identified action steps to move forward with what was desired by the conference attendees.

Visioning Highlights

The visioning event was attended by individuals representing nine different stakeholder clusters from two states (Maryland and Delaware) and three counties (Dorchester, Wicomico, and Sussex). The stakeholder groups included public service, tourism, civic groups, education, agriculture, environmental conservation, business & industry, historic & cultural preservation, and resource users.



The conference began on Friday evening and continued through Saturday. During the Friday night session the participants built three different timelines: one for personal milestones, one for important world events, and one for important events impacting the Nanticoke region. After an open discussion about people's observations about the timelines, the group moved on to begin to focus on the present.

The participants identified the trends that are impacting the future of the Nanticoke region and captured the ideas using a tool called a "mindmap". Each person then had four chances to vote on what they saw were the most important trends on the mindmap. After a tally, the top four trends were 1) Increase in population shifts, 2) increase in local/government control, 3) increase in land conversion, and 4) increase in traffic (roads, river, etc.). The attendees broke into stakeholder groups to discuss how these trends affect their particular group and after report outs by each group the conference closed for the night.



The second day started with an hour long full group discussion reviewing the events of the previous night. The participants were then asked to start thinking about a future vision of the Nanticoke region. In small groups participants worked together to identify an ideal future and present it to the whole group. This provided a sense of understanding of what it is the participants were aiming for as they prepared to determine a set of common ground values from which to work.

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The participants assembled into small groups one last time to figure out what big ideas and themes were heard through out the conference. These lists were then paired down to only the ideas that were agreed to by all in the small group and paired down again when they merged their list with another small group.

Finally, the remaining ideas were cut into strips and placed onto a “common ground wall” and clustered into groups of similar ideas. The group

works as a whole to determine what common ground values are emerging about the future of the Nanticoke region. After a long discussion and considering all views, the group was able to agree to focus on three areas of common ground: natural and cultural resource conservation, growth, and economic development. From those focus points the following statements were developed:



- *The Nanticoke region will mindfully and intentionally conserve natural and cultural resources in a way that enhances the unique social, economic, and environmental make up of the area with a particular focus on the passing on natural and cultural legacies and preserving continuity of land use in connection with cultural significance.*
- *The Nanticoke region will draw and retain youth and young families by providing quality jobs and job training within an economy that celebrates and preserves local identity, encourages innovation, reflects the true costs of doing business, and grows within the carrying capacity of both human and natural communities.*

Next Steps

Once the group was satisfied with the common values statements, they moved into action planning. Much emphasis was placed on the need for regional coordination as a way to better utilize the resources and information currently available in the region. The group agreed that the Nanticoke Watershed Alliance would be a natural fit to lead a coordination effort. In addition, many of the participants acknowledged that they had been able to network with others to work on projects and events that were currently in the works.

Finally, the Alliance’s Executive Director, EB James announced that the outcomes of the conference would be used to begin developing a “Green Infrastructure” management plan for the Nanticoke watershed, an approach to conserving the natural and cultural infrastructure of the region. He explained that there would be future opportunities for this group, as well as those not in attendance, to help put this plan together.

Closure

As a way to close the conference each participants were asked to provide two words that expressed their feelings about their experience attending this conference. Informative, educational, exciting, encouraging, connecting were frequently used but Chief Winter Hawk from the Nause-Waiwash Tribe of Indians was the last to contribute and offered what seemed to sum up the conference for most everyone: “Thank You”!