

P.O. Box 157
Centreville, MD 21617
qaca@atlanticbb.net

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Saving Kent Island



***This Big Island
Is Our
Crown Jewel—***

***But Are We
Protecting It?***

Look Inside...

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September 2005



Saving Kent Island for Those Who Live There

The mission of Queen Anne's Conservation Association is to promote stewardship of our natural resources. We recognize that an informed citizenry is the most important resource of all.

Dear Queen Anne's County Citizen:

Kent Island, gateway to the Eastern Shore, is at the tipping point:—paralyzing traffic congestion;—increasing noise and light pollution; —decreasing air and water quality;—growing social ills like drugs and crime.

These are potentially lethal threats, and they are all coming from the same source—over-development of a beautiful but fragile place.

Soon we will elect County Commissioners, as well as members of the Republican and Democratic Central Committees. Will the candidates for these positions understand and support the measures necessary to keep development from destroying Kent Island?

Will the candidates, once in office, stand up for what the people of Kent Island want—against pressure from the developers and their allies among the County's planners and zoners?

We're running out of time to choose leaders whom we can trust to do the people's will and save Kent Island's quality of life.

Let's get clear on what needs to be done, so that next year we can be clear about which candidates have the vision and fortitude to get it done.

Here are some of the most important issues facing Kent Island.

Sincerely,

Queen Anne's Conservation Association

Saving Kent Island for Those Who Live There



Saving Kent Island means saving its “Island Character”. What is that? A citizens’ report put it this way:

“Island Character” is Kent Island’s “fragile natural environment, extensive open spaces, geographic and historic uniqueness, undeveloped reaches of shoreline on the Chesapeake Bay and its tributaries, forests, farmland, scenic views and rural character”.

Extensive open spaces... undeveloped reaches of shoreline...rural character—yes, all that is still there. It’s still a beautiful island with a wonderful quality of life. The “Island Character” may be largely invisible to those who live elsewhere and experience Kent Island only as a traffic jam—but it’s there.

The people who live on Kent Island cherish its character. They know the value of what is being steadily taken away from them. And all of us, everywhere in this County, should support them in their efforts to preserve their island home from destruction—just as we ask for their support when lakes and farms and towns in the rest of the County are threatened with rubble-fills, rural sprawl, or massive annexations.

Here’s a short list of four actions that will be supported by any voter, and any candidate for County Commissioner, who genuinely wants to save Kent Island:

Questions? Further Information?
Contact us at gaca@atlanticbb.net.

1 Respect and implement the recommendations for preserving Kent Island made by the residents of Kent Island themselves.

In October 2004, against developer opposition and planning bureaucracy obstruction, a determined, knowledgeable group of Kent Island residents—many of them long-time fighters in the battle to save Kent Island—told it like it is. In a comprehensive report, they said clearly and specifically what must be done to preserve quality of life for the more than 40% of Queen Anne’s County citizens who live on Kent Island.

The key recommendations of this **Report of the Chester/Stevensville Citizens Advisory Committee (CAC)** include:—reducing the size of the over-large Stevensville and Chester “growth areas”;—limiting residential growth elsewhere to low-density lots of five to twenty acres;—protecting the Critical Area against density increases (so-called “growth allocation”) or reductions of

the 300-foot shoreline buffer. (The full “Chester/Stevensville Community Plan”, and especially the “Vision Statement” in Chapter 5, can be consulted on the County website, www.qac.org.)

The citizens’ recommendations are now being delayed and dismembered by a developer-controlled planning bureaucracy that does not share the values of Kent Island residents or the County’s citizens generally. That should stop, and the next County Commissioners should commit themselves to respecting and implementing the CAC’s recommendations.



2

Ensure that the expanded sewer plant on Kent Island does not lead to further large-scale residential development.

A majority of the current County Commissioners, faced with the Kent Island sewer plant putting too much nitrogen into the Bay, decided not merely to upgrade its treatment capabilities but instead to build an entirely new, larger plant. Soon a million more gallons of sewage treatment capacity will be available—enough for as many as 5000 new residential units.

No one says they want the new capacity to trigger another building boom on Kent Island, but somehow the safeguards against that happening never seem to get put in place. A series of capacity reservations (so-called “lock-boxes”) has been proposed, which would reserve the new capacity only for appropriate

needs such as existing homes with failing septic systems, desirable commercial development, and growth in Grasonville and other off-Island areas.

But the capacity reservations now exist only in non-binding resolutions of the County Commissioners, and they are not secure. Too much of the new capacity is either outside the lock-boxes or subject to being put outside by a simple majority vote of any future Board of Commissioners. This creates just the kind of situation developers are so adept at exploiting. Kent Island deserves **Secure Lock-Boxes for the New Sewer Plant Capacity.**

3

Protect the citizens of southern Kent Island from the special threat that the new sewer plant capacity poses for them.

A major rationale for expanding sewer capacity was the apparent need to serve almost 2000 existing homes with failing, groundwater-polluting septic systems in Romancoke, Kent Island Estates, and elsewhere. The problem is that there are also more than 1000 vacant lots in these same areas that have long been unbuildable on septic but will become buildable if and when sewer arrives down Route 8. The developers and speculators are circling.

The existing residents of southern Kent Island, nearly suffocated by traffic congestion, deserve to have their interests considered and protected.

A ***Route 8 Citizens Task Force*** should be established to make sure that: (1) development on the vacant lots is minimized consistent with legal

requirements to provide service, (2) sewer and water construction is carefully meshed with roadway upgrades as the pipe comes south, and (3) schools and other infrastructure improvements and community amenities are planned to serve the expanded population.

We are asking these residents to be good stewards of the Bay and replace their septic systems with public sewer. We should not be asking them to accept unnecessary development in their stable neighborhoods, an even worse traffic situation on their one route out, or inadequate public services. Let's seek recommendations from a Route 8 Task Force made up of residents, not developers, and then treat those recommendations with real respect.

4

Protect public safety by halting further large-scale residential development on Kent Island.

Bridge-crossing traffic on Route 50/301 is projected to increase by 40% over the next twenty years. Yet the County Commissioners have given the go-ahead (through sewer allocations and developer agreements) to big residential developments on Kent Island that would not be allowed under the CAC's recommendations. These projects, which will add thousands more cars to the slender local road network, are now moving through our County's developer-friendly subdivision approval process, while implementation of the CAC's recommendations is being deliberately delayed.

Instead of giving the green light to 2000 more residential units, the Commissioners should have adopted a **Moratorium on Development in the Kent Island Growth Areas** until the CAC's recommendations are approved and enacted into County law. This should be at the top of the list for the next Commissioners. Besides the slow-motion traffic strangulation that is killing Kent Island, such a moratorium is justified, indeed demanded, by considerations of public safety.

The threat of disasters, both natural (e.g. hurricane flooding) and man-made (e.g. dirty-bomb terrorism), makes rapid evacuation of Kent Island a fundamental public safety requirement. Why do we think that can be accomplished, even now? Can't we see how reckless it is to add thousands more vehicles to Kent Island's existing road system—a system lacking alternate routes, having only two exit points, and frequently choked to a stand-still under non-emergency conditions?

One can hope that the world will be kind and no evacuation crisis will ever arrive. But someday others may look back sadly on our leaders' folly when they created the conditions that allowed so many people in so many cars to be trapped on an island as disaster approached. ◆

In our next letter, we'll look at the runaway residential development now going on in our rural areas—how the zoning laws have been twisted so that developers and land speculators can turn a farming county into a sprawling suburb.