

Virginia Marine Resources Commission

380 Fenwick Road, Fort Monroe, VA

Habitat Policy Oversight Committee

September 23, 2026, 10:00am – 12:00pm

DRAFT MEETING MINUTES

Committee Members in Attendance:

William Bransom, Assoc. Commissioner and
Chairperson
David Rudders (VIMS)
Richard Calvert (City of Portsmouth Wetlands
Board)
Neville Reynolds (VHB)
Mary-Carson Stiff (Wetlands Watch)
Lexy McCarty (Cherrystone Aquaculture)

Justin Shafer (City of Norfolk)
Ryan Green (CZM)
Kelsey Gray (VERA)
Ben McFarlane (HRPDC)
Christy Everett (CBF)
Meghan Mayfield, Deputy Commissioner (ex-
officio)
Randy Owen (ex-officio)

Public in Attendance:

Jill Sunderland, Hampton Roads PDC
Elise Frazier, DEQ

MRC Staff in Attendance:

Olivia Upton
Ben Foster

1. Introduction of New Members

The September Habitat Policy Oversight Committee (HPOC) meeting was convened at 10:00am by Committee Chair, Associate Commissioner William Bransom. No new committee members were introduced at this time.

2. Approval of Summary Minutes

The Committee approved the August 2026 meeting minutes as submitted with one abstention.

3. Draft Committee Manual Introduction

Committee Chair Bransom and Deputy Commissioner Meghan Mayfield introduced the virtual meeting policy detailed in the Draft Committee Manual. The policy allows for two virtual meetings a year and permits members to attend meetings remotely if unable to attend in-person. It was noted that the HPOC virtual meeting policy matches those of other established Virginia Marine Resource Commission (VMRC) Committees. Two new HPOC members have been requested from the Virginia Association of Towns and Counties and the Virginia Maritime Industry. The Committee briefly discussed member terms which Committee Chair Bransom noted will be finalized at a future time. Deputy Commissioner Meghan Mayfield described edits to the Draft Committee Manual including the addition of recording committee member attendance and annual adaption of the policy pursuant

to § 2.2-3708.3 of the Code of Virginia. The Committee voted on and unanimously approved the policy document.

4. Update on Potential Poplar Island, MD Visit

Deputy Commissioner Mayfield provided an update that the Committee is unable to hold a meeting at Poplar Island, MD due to FOIA regulations. However, a representative from the project may be able to attend a future meeting to present on thin layer placement and beneficial re-use.

5. Discussion of BUDM Draft Document to Review Contents and Recommendations

Deputy Commissioner Mayfield asked the Committee to provide feedback on the Beneficial Use of Dredge Material (BUDM) draft document keeping in mind that the goal is to create an integrative guidance document that is not redundant with the guidance provided by the Department of Environmental Quality (DEQ). The Committee discussed how to define and quantify recommendations for suitable material and providing recommendations for placement locations. Ryan Green (CZM) mentioned that DEQ is working with partners to develop guidance for upland placement of dredge material that will include contaminant criteria and beneficial use classes and offered to collaborate with HPOC to ensure that definitions and criteria are consistent across agency documents. It was suggested that the Committee invite DEQ's collaborators Dr. Lee Daniels (Virginia Tech) and Mindy Strevig (Carlexson Consulting) to present at a future meeting and to reference beneficial use regulatory guidelines from New Jersey and Maryland to inform Virginia's BUDM framework.

Several Committee members voiced concerns that beneficial use requirements may be prohibitive to smaller dredging projects and discussed developing iterative language for adaptive management employing sediment volume thresholds. The Committee also discussed enforcement mechanisms including potential pre- and post-monitoring requirements and long-term adaptive management triggers and building capacity for beneficial use. It was suggested that existing resources such as the Coastal Resilience Master Plan's project map and the Elizabeth River Project's Beneficial Use of Dredged Material tool could support the Commonwealth's effort to facilitate beneficial use projects. Committee Chair Bransom outlined next steps including sending an updated BUDM draft for the Committee to review prior to the next meeting.

6. Oyster Shell Bags vs Loose in Shoreline Enhancement Projects

Deputy Commissioner Mayfield asked the Committee to provide feedback and/or modifications to the Living Shoreline Group 2 General Permit. Randy Owen, Chief of the Habitat Management Division briefly presented on the background of living shoreline legislation and an overview of current living shoreline general permits. There is an increasing demand to include loose shell in living shoreline projects to better facilitate the construction of oyster castles. Mr. Owen described that loose shell provides an additional benefit of habitat creation; however, the current regulatory language requires that shell material be secured to prevent it from being dislodged by wave action. Mr. Owen is proposing three amendments: the definition of loose shell, parameters for placement of loose shell, and an increase of permit length from 2 years to 3 years. Mr. Owen stated that the Habitat Management Division does not have concerns about loose shell if it is limited in placement. The Committee discussed additional desired changes to the regulatory item including better guidance

on gap requirements for living shorelines. Committee Chair Bransom stated that draft language will be provided to the Committee to review and discuss at the next HPOC meeting.

7. VMRC Guidance Documents Needing Update and Review by Committee

This item was not discussed by the Committee.

8. Public Comment

Elise Frazier, DEQ Coastal Zone Management Program (CZM), informed the Committee that CZM is working with the Middle Peninsula Planning District Commission, Anchor QEA, and Mindy Strevig (Carlexson Consulting) to develop Submerged Aquatic Vegetation (SAV) mitigation framework for the Middle Peninsula. The framework is currently in draft format, and the project team is interested in presenting their work to HPOC at a future meeting. Developing the framework has raised questions of how to mitigate for new growth of SAV when encountered in shallow draft navigation projects.

9. Future Meeting Planning

The next HPOC meeting is scheduled for October 28, 2026, at 10:00am, located at VMRC Headquarters.

The meeting was adjourned at 11:58am.