

THE CHESAPEAKE DELIVERY PLAN 2.0

A Governing Blueprint for Chesapeake's Next Chapter

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LIVE. WORK. FARM. PLAY.

TABLE OF CONTENTS

Foreword - From Ideas to Governing

Executive Summary

I. Where Chesapeake Stands

II. Protect the Taxpayer - Grow the Base, Not the Rate

III. Revive Dead Corners - Every Commercial Property Has a Shelf Life

IV. The Chesapeake Permit Promise - 120 Days or It's Free

V. Grow Where the Infrastructure Can Support It

VI. Data Centers - Evidence Before Enthusiasm

VII. Destination Chesapeake

VIII. Public Safety

IX. The Chesapeake Business Concierge

X. Redevelopment Finance

XI. Housing

XII. How This Plan Gets Done - Five Votes Matter

XIII. The First 180 Days

XIV. How to Measure Eric Wray on City Council

Conclusion - Chesapeake's Next Chapter

Source Notes

FOREWORD

From Ideas to Governing

Chesapeake does not need to reinvent itself.

It needs to understand what it already does well, protect what makes this city different, and be deliberate about what comes next.

That matters because Chesapeake is changing.

The Chesapeake 2045 Comprehensive Plan projects a population of roughly 299,600 residents by 2045, an increase of more than 46,000 people from the 2024 estimate. The Plan itself says that growth is manageable - but only when it is accompanied by sound decisions about infrastructure, density, and development patterns.

That is where City Council matters.

Council is not nine individual executives. No member can unilaterally order a department to change a permit process, build a road, recruit a business, change zoning, or spend taxpayer money.

Council sets policy. Council adopts the budget. Council makes land-use decisions. Council directs priorities. And ultimately, meaningful action requires the votes to get it done.

Chesapeake 2045 makes that relationship clear: City Council uses the Comprehensive Plan to guide its decisions and may direct staff to review areas that need to be addressed or reconsidered.

So this document is not a list of promises pretending one council member can run City Hall.

It is my governing blueprint: what I will propose, what I will work to build consensus around, what principles will guide my votes, and what results Chesapeake residents should expect me to pursue.

Chesapeake should be economically strong, environmentally responsible, connected, protective of its rural areas, and home to thriving residential, commercial and industrial centers.

I agree.

But a Comprehensive Plan is only the map.

Governing is deciding how we get there.

That is what The Chesapeake Delivery Plan 2.0 is about.

Source: Chesapeake 2045 Comprehensive Plan, Introduction and Executive Summary.

EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

My governing philosophy can be stated simply:

Grow Chesapeake's commercial economy. Revitalize what we already have. Put growth where the infrastructure can support it. Protect taxpayers. Preserve the character of Southern Chesapeake. Fully fund the core responsibilities of city government. And make Chesapeake an even better place to Live, Work, Farm & Play.

1. Protect the Taxpayer - Grow the Base, Not the Rate

Use disciplined budgeting and commercial economic growth to reduce pressure on homeowners rather than treating higher tax rates as government's first answer.

2. Revive Dead Corners

Recognize that commercial properties have a shelf life. Create redevelopment tools that encourage private investment in aging commercial centers while evaluating infrastructure, traffic, schools, surrounding neighborhoods and fiscal impact.

3. The Chesapeake Permit Promise - 120 Days or It's Free

Propose a Council-approved service standard for qualifying commercial permits: when an applicant has submitted a complete application and fulfilled their responsibilities, Chesapeake should complete the defined City review within 120 days. If the City fails to meet that standard for reasons attributable to the City, applicable City review fees would be refunded.

4. Growth Where Infrastructure Can Support It

Development decisions should account for roads, schools, utilities, public safety and the cost ultimately borne by taxpayers. Protect agricultural and environmentally sensitive portions of Southern Chesapeake while directing development toward areas capable of supporting it.

5. Destination Chesapeake

Move Chesapeake beyond being primarily a place people travel through. Use waterfront assets, history, recreation, destination retail, entertainment, hospitality, medical innovation and thoughtful redevelopment to create reasons for visitors - and their dollars - to stay here.

6. Public Safety Is a Core Responsibility

Police, fire and emergency services should not depend upon speculative future revenues. Public safety belongs among the first responsibilities funded in the City budget.

7. A Chesapeake Business Concierge

Make City Hall easier to navigate for entrepreneurs and businesses by coordinating existing resources and connecting businesses with permitting, economic development, workforce and outside partners.

8. Redevelop Strategically

Use tools such as tax increment financing and targeted public investment where they can catalyze private redevelopment and produce measurable long-term public benefit.

These aren't eight disconnected campaign promises.

They are parts of one strategy.

A stronger commercial economy creates jobs and revenue. Better permitting makes Chesapeake easier to invest in. Redevelopment puts underperforming land back to work. Infrastructure discipline protects taxpayers. Destination development creates economic activity. And responsible budgeting allows Chesapeake to fund public safety, schools and essential services without automatically reaching deeper into homeowners' pockets.

I. WHERE CHESAPEAKE STANDS

Chesapeake enters its next chapter from a position of considerable strength.

The City's FY2026 preliminary year-end results show \$846.8 million in General Fund revenues against an \$812.7 million budget, or 104.2% of budget. These numbers are unaudited and remain subject to adjustment before the annual audit is completed.

Even more revealing is the overall budget result.

The City budgeted for a \$57.2 million use of fund balance during FY2026. Preliminary results instead showed an \$11.8 million increase, producing a \$69 million positive variance from the budgeted result.

That doesn't mean every dollar is recurring revenue. It doesn't mean Chesapeake suddenly has unlimited money. And it certainly doesn't mean responsible budgeting should end.

It means Chesapeake should continue doing something financially mature: budget conservatively, distinguish recurring revenue from one-time revenue, protect reserves, fund core responsibilities and ask whether taxpayers need to surrender another dollar before government asks them for one.

At the same time, the demands on City government are increasing.

FY2026 public-safety expenditures were approximately \$143.1 million, up \$10.1 million - or 7.6% - from FY2025. Payments to Chesapeake Public Schools reached approximately \$325.6 million, an increase of \$22.3 million.

Those numbers illustrate the challenge. Maintaining Chesapeake's quality of life costs money. The question is how we pay for it.

My answer is not anti-growth. It is better growth.

Source: City of Chesapeake, Fiscal Year 2026 Year-End Operating Results (Unaudited), Aug. 26, 2026.

II. PROTECT THE TAXPAYER

Grow the Base, Not the Rate

The easiest way for local government to generate additional revenue is to increase a tax rate.

The harder work is growing the underlying economy.

I prefer the harder work.

Chesapeake's FY2026 preliminary results show general property-tax revenue of approximately \$496.7 million, while local sales-and-use taxes generated approximately \$62.9 million.

That is why economic development isn't separate from tax policy.

Economic development is tax policy.

Every productive commercial property, successful business, visitor purchase, hotel stay and new employer can contribute revenue without putting the entire burden of municipal growth on a homeowner's front porch.

My fiscal approach will therefore follow five principles:

1. Protect the homeowner. When assessment growth produces substantially greater revenue, Council should seriously evaluate whether the real-estate tax rate can be reduced while still responsibly funding City needs.
2. Grow commercial revenue. Recruitment and redevelopment should emphasize projects that strengthen Chesapeake's fiscal position, employment base and quality of life.
3. Separate recurring from one-time money. A temporary revenue windfall should not automatically create a permanent operating obligation.
4. Fund necessities before luxuries. Public safety, infrastructure, schools and essential City services must remain at the center of budget decisions.
5. Measure the return. Economic-development incentives and major public investments should have defined public purposes and measurable results.

This is not about starving Chesapeake of the resources necessary to function. It is about remembering where those resources come from.

Taxpayer money should be treated like taxpayer money.

Source: City of Chesapeake, FY2026 Year-End Operating Results (Unaudited), Schedule M-1.

III. REVIVE DEAD CORNERS

Every Commercial Property Has a Shelf Life

A shopping center does not remain economically productive forever simply because somebody built it forty years ago.

Retail changes. Consumer habits change. Neighborhoods change. Buildings age. Anchor tenants leave. Parking lots built for another era sit half empty.

But the land underneath those properties can still be extraordinarily valuable.

Chesapeake 2045 recognizes mixed land uses, targeted development and redevelopment as parts of smart growth. It specifically notes that directing development toward appropriate target areas can help protect other areas - including rural Chesapeake - from unwanted development pressure.

That creates an opportunity.

Instead of constantly asking, "Where can Chesapeake build next?" Council should also ask: "What can Chesapeake rebuild?"

The proposal

I will work with Council, Planning Commission, City staff, property owners and surrounding communities to develop a Revive Dead Corners redevelopment framework for aging and underperforming commercial properties.

Unlike the first Delivery Plan, I am not proposing an automatic citywide formula that converts qualifying commercial properties to residential development by right.

That approach is too broad for a city as geographically diverse as Chesapeake.

The Comprehensive Plan itself says Chesapeake's different planning areas have distinct development patterns, histories and needs and therefore should not all receive the same solution.

Redevelopment should therefore consider:

- existing road capacity
- school capacity
- water and sewer capacity
- surrounding land uses
- public-safety impacts
- stormwater and environmental conditions
- economic and fiscal impact
- neighborhood compatibility
- appropriate commercial, residential or mixed-use opportunities

The goal isn't density for density's sake. The goal is productive land.

An aging shopping center might become a modern mixed-use district. Another may remain commercial but need reinvestment and new tenants. Another might accommodate medical, office, entertainment or hospitality uses. Another might not be appropriate for substantial redevelopment at all.

One city. Different neighborhoods. Different solutions.

That's not inconsistency. That's planning.

Source: Chesapeake 2045 Comprehensive Plan, Smart Growth principles and planning-area framework.

IV. THE CHESAPEAKE PERMIT PROMISE

120 Days or It's Free

Businesses understand deadlines. Government should too.

Permitting involves legitimate work. Engineering matters. Fire safety matters. Stormwater matters. Traffic matters. Building codes matter. A faster permit that produces an unsafe or poorly planned project isn't success.

But neither is a business sitting indefinitely between departments without knowing when it will receive an answer.

The Comprehensive Plan itself says the process for development and redevelopment should be clear and predictable for developers and the public.

So I will propose:

120 DAYS OR IT'S FREE.

For qualifying commercial applications, the City would establish a defined 120-day review standard beginning once an application has been determined complete.

If the applicant has fulfilled the requirements of the process and the City fails to complete the defined review within 120 days for reasons attributable to the City, applicable City permit-review fees would be refunded under the policy.

The clock cannot reasonably run while an application is incomplete, while required information remains outstanding from the applicant, or while applicant-requested changes require additional review.

This is about government accountability, not gaming the process.

I would also propose

A single point of contact. Qualifying projects should know who is responsible for helping navigate the City's review process.

A visible status system. Applicants should be able to determine where their application sits, what remains unresolved and which review is outstanding.

Concurrent review where practical. Departments should coordinate rather than unnecessarily creating sequential bottlenecks.

Quarterly performance reporting. Council and the public should be able to see actual review performance - not anecdotes from either side.

And one point must be explicit:

This requires City Council approval.

A council member cannot unilaterally establish this policy or obligate the City to refund fees.

I can propose it. I can make the case for it. I can work with the City Attorney, City Manager and staff to make the mechanics workable. I can build consensus. And I can vote for it.

That's governing.

Source: Chesapeake 2045 Comprehensive Plan, Smart Growth principle 10: Cost Effective and Predictable.

V. GROW WHERE THE INFRASTRUCTURE CAN SUPPORT IT

Growth Has to Pay Attention to What Is Already There

Growth isn't automatically good. Growth isn't automatically bad. Growth has consequences.

A development application may look perfectly reasonable when viewed only within its property lines. But City Council has to look beyond those lines.

What happens to the road? What happens to the school? What happens to water and sewer demand? What happens to emergency response? What infrastructure will taxpayers eventually have to build?

Chesapeake 2045 directly acknowledges the lesson from previous periods of rapid growth: infrastructure lagged behind development, and the City should proactively provide infrastructure needed to support future growth.

The Plan also recognizes that utility decisions influence development patterns and must balance existing residents' needs with future growth opportunities.

That is the standard I intend to bring to land-use decisions.

Southern Chesapeake

Southern Chesapeake is not simply vacant land waiting for development.

Agriculture, open space and rural character are part of Chesapeake's identity.

Chesapeake 2045 explicitly calls for protecting agricultural and environmentally sensitive land while directing development toward more suitable areas to minimize suburban sprawl.

I support that principle.

Protecting rural Chesapeake and supporting economic development elsewhere are not contradictory.

They are two sides of responsible growth management.

Source: Chesapeake 2045 Comprehensive Plan, Guiding Principles, Smart Growth, and Growth Management.

VI. DATA CENTERS

Evidence Before Enthusiasm

Data centers illustrate exactly why land-use policy cannot be reduced to "growth is good" or "growth is bad."

They can generate significant investment and tax revenue.

They can also create legitimate questions involving electricity demand, transmission infrastructure, water and wastewater, noise, land use and the long-term effect of infrastructure decisions.

My position is deliberately evidence-based.

I am cautious about hyperscale data centers.

I am not interested in signing onto a predetermined conclusion before Council has the evidence necessary to evaluate a particular application.

I support Chesapeake's move away from treating future data centers simply as a by-right proposition and toward a use-permit process that allows proposals to receive individual scrutiny.

For major data-center applications, I want Council asking:

- What is the net fiscal benefit?
- What infrastructure does it require?
- What effect does it have on electrical capacity and reliability?
- What are its water and wastewater requirements?
- What is the effect on surrounding properties?
- Who pays for infrastructure improvements?
- What does Chesapeake receive in return?

That is not being vague.

That is being responsible.

Source: Policy position in this paper reflects the candidate's governing framework; any final ordinance language should be verified against the current Chesapeake Zoning Ordinance and adopted use-permit requirements.

VII. DESTINATION CHESAPEAKE

Give People a Reason to Come - and Stay

Chesapeake has spent decades becoming a very good place to live.

The next economic-development opportunity is making it a stronger place to visit, experience and spend money.

Chesapeake 2045 calls for placemaking, amenities and quality-of-life investments that strengthen the City's identity and sense of place.

Destination Chesapeake takes that principle seriously.

The Wish List

Yes, I want Chesapeake aggressively recruiting businesses and attractions residents currently leave the city to enjoy.

That can include destination retail, restaurants, entertainment concepts and recognizable regional or national brands - including the kind of high-traffic destination business represented by Buc-ee's.

A wish list is useful.

But a wish list is not a policy.

Council cannot simply vote a private company into Chesapeake.

The Policy

Destination Chesapeake is about making the city competitive for those investments.

A Waterfront Destination Strategy built around Chesapeake's waterways, Great Bridge, recreational assets, history and appropriate hospitality opportunities.

Destination retail and entertainment recruitment focused on businesses that generate activity beyond ordinary neighborhood retail.

Medical and innovation development that builds on regional health, education and research assets.

Mixed-use redevelopment in appropriate commercial areas.

Sports, recreation, festivals and signature events that create repeat visitation.

Hospitality development where market demand and infrastructure support it.

Placemaking that gives different areas of Chesapeake recognizable identities rather than trying to manufacture one generic downtown.

The objective isn't to turn Chesapeake into Virginia Beach.

It isn't to turn Chesapeake into Norfolk.

It is to build something those cities cannot duplicate:

Destination Chesapeake.

Source: Chesapeake 2045 Comprehensive Plan, Placemaking and Design / Quality of Life framework.

VIII. PUBLIC SAFETY

A Core Responsibility, Not a Future Revenue Experiment

Public safety is expensive.

It is also one of the reasons local government exists.

Preliminary FY2026 results show approximately \$143.1 million in General Fund public-safety expenditures, including approximately \$65.7 million for the Police Department and \$69.2 million for the Fire Department.

The original Delivery Plan linked future public-safety expansion too directly to projected redevelopment revenue.

I no longer think that is the right fiscal construction.

Commercial growth can absolutely strengthen Chesapeake's ability to fund police, fire and other essential services.

But public safety should not have to wait for a speculative redevelopment spreadsheet to materialize.

Public safety gets funded because it is a core responsibility.

My priorities include:

- competitive police and fire compensation
- recruitment and retention
- appropriate equipment and technology
- officer and firefighter wellness
- training
- responsible use of technology with appropriate safeguards
- developing local pipelines into public-safety careers

Economic growth helps us pay for these priorities. But the obligation exists regardless.

Source: City of Chesapeake, FY2026 Year-End Operating Results (Unaudited), General Fund expenditures.

IX. THE CHESAPEAKE BUSINESS CONCIERGE

Make Government Easier to Navigate

The original Delivery Plan proposed The Heron, a physical small-business resource center requiring a substantial City investment.

I still believe strongly in the problem it was trying to solve.

I am less convinced that government needs to start by buying the building.

The better first move is a Chesapeake Business Concierge.

An entrepreneur shouldn't need to understand the City's organizational chart to figure out whom to call.

The Concierge concept would connect businesses to the appropriate City departments and outside resources - economic development, permitting, workforce services, financing resources, veteran-business assistance, small-business counseling and educational partners.

Start with coordination. Measure demand. Use partnerships. Then determine whether a permanent physical center is justified by actual usage.

That is a more conservative approach to the same objective:

help Chesapeake businesses start, grow and hire.

X. REDEVELOPMENT FINANCE

South Norfolk Shows Why the Details Matter

Economic development isn't only about recruiting the next company.

Sometimes it means investing strategically in an existing part of Chesapeake.

Tax Increment Financing provides one tool for doing that.

Chesapeake currently maintains both Greenbrier and South Norfolk TIF funds. Preliminary FY2026 figures show approximately \$15.0 million in South Norfolk TIF revenue and approximately \$15.6 million in Greenbrier TIF revenue.

The lesson isn't that every neighborhood needs a TIF.

It is that Council has more sophisticated economic-development tools available than simply raising taxes or approving whatever happens to arrive at City Hall.

The questions should always be:

- What problem are we solving?
- What private investment are we trying to unlock?
- What public investment is required?
- What is the measurable return to Chesapeake?
- And when does the public intervention end?

That same discipline should apply to Revive Dead Corners, Destination Chesapeake and future redevelopment districts.

Source: City of Chesapeake, FY2026 Year-End Operating Results (Unaudited), Special Revenue Funds Schedule M-4.

XI. HOUSING

More Choices Without Pretending Every Parcel Is the Same

Housing is an economic issue, a workforce issue and a quality-of-life issue.

Chesapeake 2045 calls for a balanced inventory of housing options and increased homeownership.

I support expanding housing choices.

But that does not mean every zoning request should be approved.

And it does not mean "affordable housing," "workforce housing" and "low-income housing" should be treated as interchangeable political phrases.

Housing decisions must still account for roads, schools, utilities, neighborhood character, environmental conditions, and infrastructure capacity.

Redevelopment of aging commercial properties may provide opportunities for housing in locations where infrastructure and surrounding uses make sense.

But the answer should come from the characteristics of the location - not from a blanket political promise.

Source: Chesapeake 2045 Comprehensive Plan, Housing and Smart Growth principles.

XII. HOW THIS PLAN GETS DONE

Five Votes Matter

This may be the most important change from the first Delivery Plan.

No member of Chesapeake City Council governs alone.

There are nine members.

A good idea that cannot attract sufficient support remains an idea.

So implementation begins with coalition building.

The Comprehensive Plan recognizes that implementation occurs through capital expenditures, operating expenditures, development proposals and partnerships, and that changing budgets, staffing and funding affect implementation timing.

That is a realistic description of government.

My approach will be:

Propose. Bring a developed idea rather than a slogan.

Verify. Ask the City Attorney, City Manager, Finance, Planning and affected departments what authority exists, what implementation requires and what it costs.

Listen. Council colleagues, staff, residents, businesses and neighborhoods may identify something I missed.

Refine. A good proposal does not become bad simply because someone else improves it.

Build consensus. Find the votes.

Measure. After implementation, determine whether it worked.

That is how I intend to approach the 120-Day Permit Promise, Revive Dead Corners, Destination Chesapeake, taxpayer protection and every other major initiative in this document.

Source: Chesapeake 2045 Comprehensive Plan, Implementation framework.

XIII. THE FIRST 180 DAYS

1. Chesapeake Permit Promise

Request a formal staff and legal analysis of a 120-day qualifying commercial permit-review standard, including eligibility, tolling provisions, departmental benchmarks, fee-refund authority and fiscal impact. Then bring a workable proposal to Council.

2. Revive Dead Corners Inventory

Request identification of aging or underperforming commercial centers and existing redevelopment barriers. Determine where redevelopment aligns with Chesapeake 2045, infrastructure capacity and surrounding neighborhoods.

3. Destination Chesapeake

Request a coordinated review of Chesapeake's destination assets and economic-development opportunities - including waterfront, recreation, hospitality, destination retail, entertainment and medical/innovation opportunities.

4. Business Concierge

Evaluate how existing City resources can be reorganized or coordinated to create a single, understandable pathway for businesses without first creating an expensive new bureaucracy.

5. Infrastructure and Growth

Use Chesapeake 2045's infrastructure and growth-management principles as an explicit framework when evaluating major land-use decisions.

6. Fiscal Accountability

During the budget process, distinguish recurring from one-time revenues, examine assessment growth, protect reserves, evaluate the real-estate tax rate and prioritize core services before considering additional burdens on taxpayers.

XIV. HOW TO MEASURE ERIC WRAY ON CITY COUNCIL

Don't measure me by how many times I speak at a meeting.

Don't measure me by how many headlines I generate.

And don't measure me by whether every idea in this document passes exactly as I first proposed it.

Measure me by harder standards.

Did I do the homework?

Did I understand what Council actually had the legal authority to do?

Did I tell residents the truth when an easy promise wasn't realistic?

Did I bring solutions instead of simply identifying problems?

Did I work with people who disagreed with me when doing so could produce a better result?

Did I protect taxpayers?

Did I support public safety?

Did I help strengthen Chesapeake's commercial economy?

Did I protect the rural character that makes Chesapeake different?

Did I demand that growth and infrastructure make sense together?

Did I help turn aging commercial properties back into productive places?

Did I help make Chesapeake a city people don't simply drive through - but intentionally come to?

And ultimately:

Did Chesapeake work better because I was there?

That is the standard.

CONCLUSION

Chesapeake's Next Chapter

I am excited about the future of Chesapeake.

Not because I think everything is perfect.

And not because I believe government can solve everything.

I'm excited because Chesapeake already possesses most of the ingredients other cities spend decades trying to create.

We have strong neighborhoods. We have rural land. We have major transportation connections. We have waterways. We have businesses. We have excellent public services. We have room for reinvestment.

And we have a Comprehensive Plan that calls for an economically strong city with treasured rural areas, vibrant neighborhoods and thriving commercial and industrial centers.

The challenge now is execution.

We don't have to choose between growth and preservation. We have to put growth in the right places.

We don't have to choose between economic development and taxpayers. We need economic development that helps taxpayers.

We don't have to choose between business and accountability. We can make government easier to navigate while maintaining standards.

And we don't have to choose between having a vision and understanding reality.

We need both.

My vision is a Chesapeake that remains one of Virginia's best places to Live, Work, Farm & Play - but becomes more deliberate about investment, more competitive for business, more disciplined about infrastructure, more ambitious about becoming a destination and more protective of the taxpayers who make all of it possible.

That's the Chesapeake I want to help build.

Not alone. Not by decree.

With eight other members of Council, a professional City staff, our business community, our neighborhoods - and the people who call Chesapeake home.

Because the road to success is always under construction.

And Chesapeake's next chapter is ours to build.

Eric Wray

Candidate for Chesapeake City Council

SOURCE NOTES

This edition is grounded primarily in City of Chesapeake source documents supplied for the preparation of this white paper. Fiscal Year 2026 figures are preliminary and unaudited unless otherwise stated.

- City of Chesapeake. Chesapeake 2045 Comprehensive Plan - Introduction.
- City of Chesapeake. Chesapeake 2045 Comprehensive Plan - Executive Summary.
- City of Chesapeake, Department of Finance. Fiscal Year 2026 Year-End Operating Results (Unaudited), August 26, 2026.
- City of Chesapeake. FY2025 Popular Annual Financial Report.
- The Chesapeake Delivery Plan, April 2026, used as the foundation for the revised policy framework.

Legal authority, ordinance language, fee-refund mechanics, and implementation details for proposed policies - including the Chesapeake Permit Promise - should be reviewed by the City Attorney and appropriate City staff before formal introduction to City Council.