



VIRGINIA BEACH

GREEN RIBBON COMMITTEE
C/O DEPARTMENT OF PLANNING
& COMMUNITY DEVELOPMENT
115 OPERATIONS BUILDING
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September 30, 2015

Mayor William D. Sessoms, Jr.
Members of City Council
2401 Courthouse Drive
Municipal Center, Building 1
Virginia Beach, VA 23456

RE: 2017-2022 Bureau of Ocean Energy Management (BOEM)
Offshore Oil and Gas Leasing Program for the Mid-Atlantic Coast
Including the Commonwealth of Virginia

Dear Mayor Sessoms and Members of City Council:

The potential for seismic testing and drilling for oil and gas off the coast of Virginia is moving forward. As a city, Virginia Beach is considering this issue and has the opportunity to make a statement regarding the effect this could have on our community.

As the group tasked with advising on water quality issues in Virginia Beach, the Green Ribbon Committee has considered the benefits and risks to the city from seismic testing, exploration and drilling for oil and gas off the coast of Virginia and offers the following thoughts for your consideration.

We support diversification of our economy and the creation of new, well-paying jobs. However, we are aware of the importance of the military and tourism to our local economy. We hope that careful consideration will be given to the impact that offshore exploration and drilling for oil and gas may have on military operations off our coast and on our tourist economy. Both NASA and the US Navy have expressed their concerns regarding the impacts that oil and gas drilling off the coast of Virginia will have on their operations in the same area.

As a committee, our primary responsibility is to advise you – the City Council - on issues related to water quality and our marine environments. Oil and gas operations are potentially very risky to our beaches and waterways. The effects of a disaster similar to the BP Deepwater Horizon spill in 2010 would be catastrophic for Virginia Beach tourism, commercial fisheries and recreational fishing. A pipeline spill similar to the one in Santa Barbara, California earlier this year is also a potential risk and would detrimentally impact our tourist industry.

The concern for environmental risks extends beyond a potential disaster to the problems associated with the day to day operation of exploration equipment, drilling operations and transport of gas and oil.

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Regular smaller spills are a routine part of operations. Oil and gas are toxic to blue crab larvae that are spawned at the mouth of the Bay and float miles into the Atlantic. Virginia Beach has a special responsibility for the blue crab fishery in the Chesapeake Bay along with our oceanfront. Juvenile and larval forms of other finfish and shellfish are also vulnerable. In addition, oil can directly poison or debilitate oysters, fish, seabirds, and other wildlife.

Lastly, spills are difficult to contain and have long-term effects on marine ecosystems and coastal communities. Oil reaching land and spill response activities can destroy sensitive areas like wetlands. Wetlands are essential for habitat, water quality and flood protection. The benefits these areas afford the city are even more pronounced as we increasingly are confronted with recurring flooding and sea level rise.

We appreciate everything the Mayor and City Council have done to restore and protect our natural resources in Virginia Beach. Your leadership has led to significant improvements in water quality, a vibrant tourist industry, a growing commercial fishery, a thriving recreational fishing industry and Virginia Beach being recognized as the cleanest beach on the east coast. Our partners in the military are a major economic driver and stabilizer for our City and region.

Thank you for considering our thoughts on this important issue. If you would like to discuss these thoughts further, please feel free to contact us.

Sincerely,

Wayne McCoy, Chair
Green Ribbon Committee


Karen Forget, Vice Chair
Green Ribbon Committee

CC: Green Ribbon Committee Members