

Editorial - (Greg Schaale, Vice President, Surry County Chamber of Commerce)

February 14, 2017 - The Town Council of the Town of Surry deferred action on the Hampton Roads Sanitation District Plan until they meet again in March. Despite the pleas from approximately 30 spectators that filled every available seat in the council chambers, the town fathers could not see their way clear to pass the proposal. Even though the County of Surry has passed their resolution to adopt the system, and have verbally offered to forgive the debt of the town for their existing system, the council was not motivated to act. It is our understanding that without the combined wastewater flow of both the county *and* the town via HRSD, businesses like Edwards Virginia Smokehouse will not be able to operate in Surry. Edwards will have no alternative but to rebuild its business in a location outside of the county, where standard utilities are readily available for businesses' waste disposal needs.

The Mayor of Surry, Will Gwaltney, and Town Councilman Chris Anderson seemed completely opposed to adopting the system. The other three members of Council present at the meeting sat silently while many Surry residents voiced their encouragement for passing the proposal. It seemed there was a lack of understanding of the details concerning the plan's anticipated results on the part of the councilmen when it came to rates. The Mayor warned the audience that if the proposal was passed, and residents would be required to pay a higher water rate – "...you won't believe how high your water rate will be... it could be 3 times what you're paying now..." It is my understanding that Surry town residents now pay \$2 or \$3 dollars per month for water. Four times that rate would only amount to \$12, hardly an amount to be considered threatening. Claremont town residents pay a minimum of \$26 dollars per month for their water utility.

Clearly the town council is attempting to act in the best interests of the townspeople, but I feel they are missing the big picture. The County of Surry has 6,709 residents; Surry is a town within that county of only 262 residents. A desire to stand independent would seem misguided.

Adopting HRSD will be an opportunity that will not only save one of our oldest and best established businesses, but will open the door for new businesses to move to Surry County that require more robust sewage treatment facilities.

After the last census, it was reported that Surry County dropped 5% in population, more than any of the adjacent counties that show generally positive growth numbers. Something must be done to put the County on a positive track to grow, expand economic development, and bring positive benefits to everyone. Pulling together to adopt the HRSD plan and improve the infrastructure of the County would be a great first step.