

in the Chesapeake Bay - is gone. Temporarily, anyway. The Captain Eulice is wintering in Hilton Head, S.C., and may not return this spring to shuttle tourists.

An Associated Press report said Tangier businessmen are worried. They ought to be.

If the rest of America is entering a recession, Tangier is probably there. Everything seems to conspire against the island's watermen. Tight oyster and crab harvesting regulations, for instance. The price of fuel. The geography.

Tangier needs tourism for extra cash.

Ferries from three locations - Reedville and Onancock in Virginia and Crisfield, Md. - deliver visitors to the island every summer day.

Yet even Dorolena Thomas Bowis, a native who runs Tangier-Onancock Cruises with her husband, admits there's big hype about the little island.

"That's the trouble," she said when I asked what tourists do. "The magazine write-ups make the island sound like some kind of resort. People call us wanting to know what activities they can sign their kids up for. I have to tell them there isn't much of anything. ... It's pretty much a small fishing village.

"It's a nice place to read a book," she suggested.

Agreed.

Bowis said the Onancock ferry line will not open in May as is customary. By June, she says, the service will be back. If the Captain Eulice stays in South Carolina, they'll buy another boat.

The Captain Eulice is the smallest of the Tangier ferries. It's licensed to carry 85, Bowis said, but rarely has more than a dozen on board.

According to news reports, the ferry used to run until October. Bowis said it will

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inside

Norfolk Circuit Judge Chuck Griffith defends his record in Richmond.

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Three weakened dolphins were found on the shores of Back Bay National Wildlife Refuge and could not be saved. Experts have not determined what caused the strandings.

VIRGINIA BEACH | LAND REUSE

TEARING DOWN THE HOUSES

City starts to demolish properties in voluntary buyout near Oceana

By Deirdre Fernandes
The Virginian-Pilot

VIRGINIA BEACH

Joseph Williams and his six siblings grew up in this home, within sight of the highway and close enough to Oceana Naval Air Station to stop a conversation mid-sentence when the jets passed by.

Yet when an excavator chewed through the three-bedroom house in mid-February leaving behind a pile of sticks, Williams didn't shed a tear.

The place had been vacant

and attracting vandals since the city purchased it last year as part of an annual \$15 million plan to protect Oceana from development.

"It's a plus that it's coming down," said Williams as he watched from his own home across the street on Old Virginia Beach Road. "It leaves less room for undesirables to come into the neighborhood."

The Beach's voluntary buyout program of homes and businesses was a response to the federal government's threat in 2005 to move the master jet base out of the city because development had come too close to Oceana.

To keep the base in Virginia

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■ "It's a plus that it's coming down. It leaves less room for undesirables to come into the neighborhood."

Joseph Williams, watching the house he grew up in being demolished



DAVID B. HOLLINGSWORTH | THE VIRGINIAN-PILOT

An excavator leaves rubble recently in exchange for Joseph Williams' childhood home near Oceana Naval Air Station.

at a glance

WIFE'S COURT



Wesley Earnest has been charged with murder in his wife's death. She died in December.

Virginia Beach MURDERER'S WIFE S LAWSUIT

Wife of a police officer was killed last year led a \$1 million lawsuit against the driver of the car that struck him. The complaint, filed in Circuit Court last month, alleges that Shaun Mowbray was operating his vehicle in a careless and reckless manner when it struck Officer Randall Williams' sport utility vehicle. Williams, a school resource officer at Green Run High School, was off duty and driving on Holland Road near the intersection of Diana Lee on Oct. 10 when the crash occurred. Valden, 30,

BUYOUT | Officials try to reuse some properties, preserve neighborhoods

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Beach, the City Council put a stop to the construction of most new homes around the base. And to compensate willing property owners, the city is buying their land and its development potential.

Virginia Beach city officials are now starting to demolish, lease or sell these properties.

Those who live next to these homes say it's about time.

The city has a long history of purchasing land, such as for road projects, but this time Beach officials are trying to reuse some of the properties and preserve the neighborhoods.

"We're going through an inventing the wheel situation," said Jim Lawson, the Beach's real estate director. "It's taking a little longer than we would like it to take. We're trying to figure out the right way to do it."

Beach officials have already spent \$14.9 million and bought 43 properties in the high accident potential zone around Oceana. They are on track to spend another \$15 million this year.

Some of the buildings are being demolished because of termite infestation, water damage, or because they sit along the path of a future road project, such as the Southeastern Parkway and Greenbelt.

But the buildings and land that could be reused and generate taxes for the city pose more options.

City officials are debating which properties to sell and lease, whether to put



DAVID B. HOLLINGSWORTH | THE VIRGINIAN-PILOT

In mid-February, an excavator ripped through the Oceana area house where Joseph Williams and his six siblings grew up.

them up for bid as a group and if they should go to nonprofit organizations or individuals, Lawson said.

The properties would be sold with the understanding that the new owners won't increase the existing density, Lawson said.

In cases of open land, city officials are trying to determine if the parcel would be better used as a park or should be sold to neighbors, Lawson said.

The residents who have decided to remain in their neighborhood are anxious about the future of these city-owned properties.

"Which would you prefer across the street, a place boarded up or a vacant lot?" said Joe Ferrara, a Cheltenham Square resident who is on the committee that oversees the buyout program. "Neither one is a

good one."

Sam Reid, another member of the committee and the president of the Oceana Gardens Civic League, said he and his neighbors want to see stable families move into the homes.

The city has leased one of the homes in Reid's neighborhood to the Vets House, an organization that helps homeless veterans.

"It's a great organization, but there are no children," Reid said. "We don't want to see Vets House buying four to five houses in the neighborhood."

City officials are aware of the concerns and are keeping them in mind as they develop a plan to sell these properties, Lawson said.

Deirdre Fernandes, (757) 222-5121. deirdre.fernandes@pilotonline.com

PROJECTS | Proposal will need to be pared down before specifics are considered