



**Virginia
Beach
Vision, Inc.**

"Looking Toward Tomorrow's City"

BRAC Commission

AUG 04 2005

Received

July 28, 2005

Mr. Anthony Principi, Chairman
And Commission Members
Base Realignment & Closure Commission-2005
2521 S Clark Street
Arlington, VA 22202

Dear Mr. Principi and Commission Members:

This letter is written in behalf of the Board of Directors of Virginia Beach Vision, Inc. Vision is an organization of in excess of 100 CEO- and senior-level business, professional and educational leaders whose purpose is to investigate and support public policy issues the board deems in the best interests of Virginia Beach, the surrounding region and its residents.

The purpose of this letter is to express our strong support for the continued presence of NAS, Oceana in our community, and to provide you with a perspective on the integral importance of NAS, Oceana relative to its military value that has not received much public attention, but yet is critical to the operational readiness of the Atlantic Fleet's Naval Air Forces, and ultimately, the national defense. That this perspective has lacked attention seems unusual, because its ultimate impact is so important.

In broad terms the issue is operational readiness. More specifically it is personnel retention, a critical issue for all branches of America's Armed Forces, particularly since the operational tempo necessitated by force deployments to Iraq and Afghanistan has surged since 9/11. For Naval and Naval Aviation forces in particular, these deployments have been essentially "business as usual"—except there is a lethal, real enemy awaiting their arrival.

Also, lost in the debate is an understanding of the dramatic difference in composition of today's Navy from the Navy that enjoyed the luxury of the wide-open "farmers' fields" of Princess Anne County during NAS, Oceana's early years. That farmland is long gone, as is the predominantly "bachelor Navy" that was characteristic of that era. Today's Naval Aviators indeed peer out of their cockpits to see commercial and residential development as they approach and depart Oceana. Also different, however, is the fact that today's aviators, and the

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highly skilled, high-tech sailors who service and support them and their aircraft are part of what is essentially a "married Navy."

In the modern, "married Navy," families have often the greatest influence in the ultimate reenlistment and Navy career decisions. A happy, content family is one much more inclined to accept the arduous challenges inherent in Navy life. This change is principally a result of the All-Volunteer Force, which has without question attracted a much more educated, higher skilled individual. Essential to retaining these personnel is not only that they enjoy a high degree of "job satisfaction." This is true for bachelor and married sailors alike. However, retaining married Aviators and their high quality, highly skilled and sought-after married sailors also necessitates that their families be as happy and content as possible, considering the arduous lifestyle of repeated separations due to the frequent deployments and training exercises, which make Navy life so unique and different from civilian life.

Factors that provide such family contentment include adequate spousal employment opportunities, access to quality education, available cultural and recreational amenities, quality shopping and restaurants, and in general, a high quality of life that paradoxically only a larger, vibrant city like Virginia Beach can provide.

Stick these folk in an isolated environment and watch how quickly retention problems arise and military readiness suffers. How do we know this is true?

We know it because the Navy has told us so. During the period preceding the 1998 F/A-18 Super Hornet relocation decision, Navy officials sought the Virginia Beach business community's support for a relocation decision that would bring the aircraft to Oceana, rather than to Cherry Point or Beaufort, SC, both essentially rural areas.

The argument they provided? Exactly that I outlined above—is serious concerns over the impact on personnel retention, if Navy families were to lose access to the superb lifestyle Virginia Beach uniquely provides them. It was a valid argument in 1998 and remains valid, though seemingly currently overlooked in terms of Oceana's military value.

The paradox is that much of the "encroachment" that poses a training concern on the one hand is responsible for the quality of life so badly needed on the other.

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Without the successful growth enjoyed by Virginia Beach over the last several decades, its many quality, desired amenities would not be possible.

The vast majority of today's encroachment is not new, and existed during past BRAC iterations, as well as during the 1998 decision to relocate the Super Hornets to NAS, Oceana when the quality of life amenities trumped the encroachment issue. We feel the Navy has made clear the relative importance of the two issues.

The City of Virginia Beach, its business community and the vast majority of its residents (even those living in the highest noise zones, according to a recent scientifically conducted survey) support the presence of NAS, Oceana in our City and gladly endure the "Sound of Freedom" overhead in exchange for the presence of these brave and outstanding men and women as part of our community. We believe the Navy likewise endures the City's encroachments in exchange for the quality of life that they enjoy in our community.

We urge that you weigh this delicate balance carefully in reaching your ultimate decision regarding the future of NAS, Oceana and its impact on military value.

Sincerely,



Robert S. Miller, III
President