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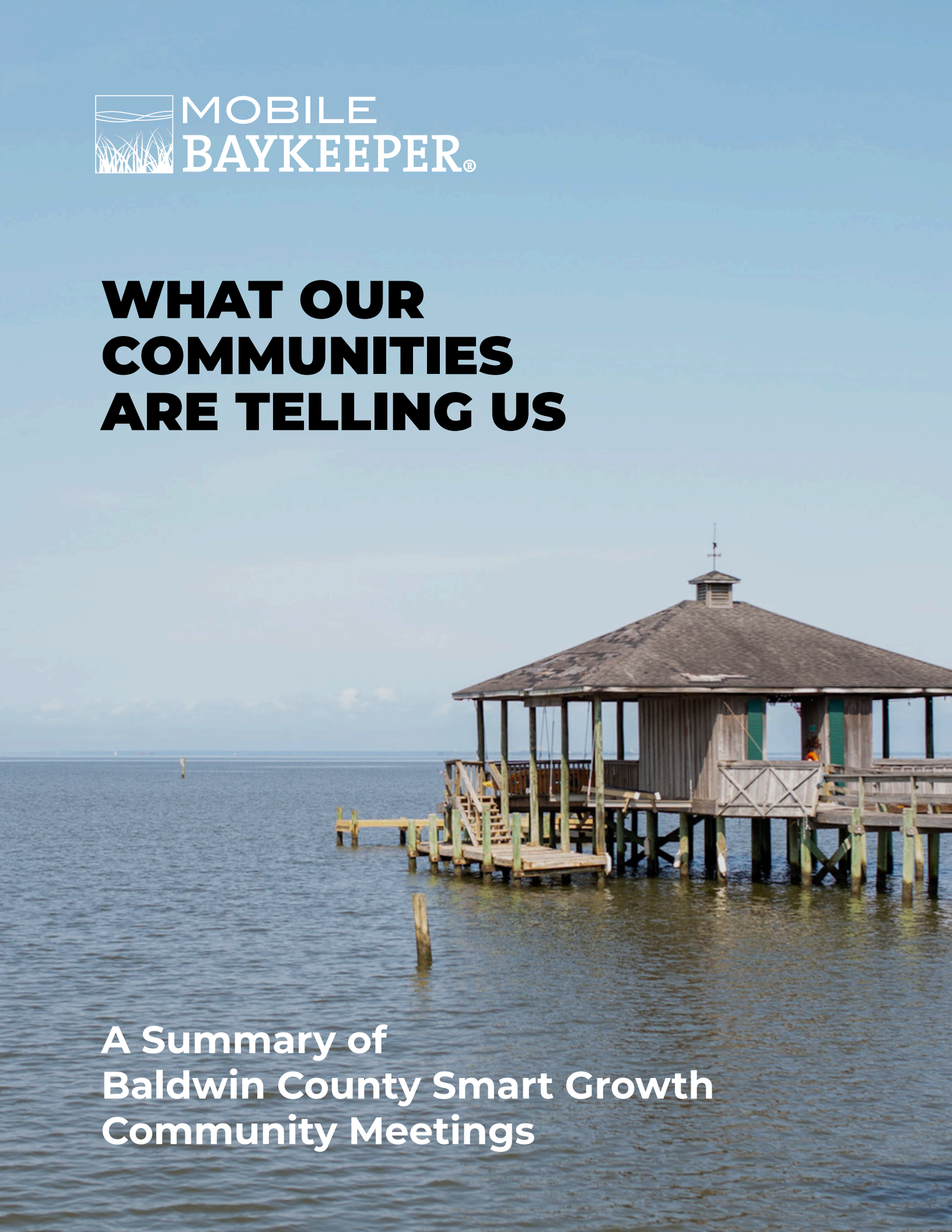
WHAT OUR COMMUNITIES ARE TELLING US



A Summary of Baldwin County Smart Growth Community Meetings

MOBILE BAYKEEPER®

WHAT OUR COMMUNITIES ARE TELLING US:

A Summary of Baldwin County Smart Growth Community Meetings

Over the past several months, Mobile Baykeeper convened a series of Smart Growth community meetings across Baldwin County — in Silverhill, Gulf Shores, Fairhope, and surrounding communities. Residents, local leaders, and advocates came together to share their experiences and concerns about how growth and development are affecting water quality, natural resources, and quality of life in our region.

This document summarizes the key themes, recurring concerns, and actionable suggestions that emerged from those conversations. It is intended to inform policy discussions and Smart Growth recommendations for the county as a whole.

THEME 1: STORMWATER RUNOFF AND EROSION FROM CONSTRUCTION SITES

The single most consistent concern raised across all meeting locations was the impact of construction site runoff on local waterways. Residents from communities throughout the county — coastal, inland, and in between — described observing turbid, sediment-laden water flowing from active development sites into bayous, creeks, rivers, and bays.

Key patterns observed:

- Multiple sites were identified where Best Management Practices (BMPs) for erosion and sediment control were inadequate, absent, or poorly maintained during active construction phases.
- Downstream impacts — elevated turbidity, sedimentation, and visible runoff — were confirmed through independent site visits and water quality testing in several cases.
- In at least one instance, a construction site was shut down by regulators after documented harm to an adjacent waterway.
- Residents noted that land clearing beyond permitted boundaries and removal of natural vegetative buffers compounded runoff problems at several sites.
- Flooding in established neighborhoods near new development was a recurring concern, with residents reporting that impervious surfaces upstream are increasing the volume and velocity of stormwater reaching their properties.

THEME 2: SEWAGE INFRASTRUCTURE FAILURES AND UNDERREPORTING

Community members raised serious concerns about the reliability of sewage infrastructure and the accuracy of public reporting when spills or overflows occur. Specific incidents cited by residents suggested that the volume of sewage released during overflow events may be significantly underreported by utility operators.

Key patterns observed:

- Sewage spill events have impacted private property, including residential ponds and water features, in ways that caused measurable and lasting environmental harm.
- Independent water quality testing conducted alongside community members showed results inconsistent with utility-reported spill volumes in at least one case.
- Recurring sewage overflows — not isolated incidents — are affecting communities near certain infrastructure nodes, with downstream impacts reaching rivers, bays, and tidal waterways.
- Some utility representatives characterized infrastructure performance as adequate, citing regulatory permit status rather than documented environmental outcomes.

THEME 3: INADEQUATE SCRUTINY OF LARGE RESIDENTIAL DEVELOPMENTS

Residents across multiple communities expressed concern that large-scale residential projects — particularly those seeking municipal annexation or approval in sensitive areas — are advancing without sufficient review of cumulative environmental impacts.

Key patterns observed:

- Proposed developments adjacent to or near rivers, creeks, and tidal waterways received significant community opposition based on drainage, flooding, and water quality concerns.
- In several cases, planning commissions tabled or delayed projects for extended periods in response to unresolved community and technical concerns — suggesting existing review processes may be insufficient to catch issues earlier in the approval timeline.
- Communities expressed frustration that natural areas providing ecological services — buffering, filtration, flood attenuation — are being removed without accounting for the value of those services.
- Residents near proposed developments on rural roads and in unincorporated areas felt they lacked meaningful opportunity for input into projects that would directly affect their quality of life and property.

THEME 4: WATERWAY HEALTH AND FLOODING ALONG FISH RIVER, PERDIDO BASIN, AND COASTAL TRIBUTARIES

Residents living near Fish River, the Perdido River and Bay, Moccasin Bayou, Boggy Branch, and other coastal tributaries reported noticeable declines in water quality and increases in flooding frequency that they directly attribute to upstream development activity.

Key patterns observed:

- Long-time residents described measurable changes in water clarity, algal growth, and flooding patterns that have worsened in recent years alongside construction activity in upstream watersheds.
- Gulches and drainage corridors — including Red Gulley, Big Mouth Gulch, and Mazie's Gulch — were identified as chronic erosion and runoff problems requiring attention.
- Concern was expressed that proposed future development near sensitive tributaries could cause irreversible harm without rigorous advance planning and BMP requirements.
- Swim advisories and bacteria contamination in and around inland waterways were raised as public health concerns that reduce recreational access and community enjoyment of natural resources.

THEME 5: THE IMPORTANCE OF COMMUNITY ENGAGEMENT AND LOCAL ADVOCACY

A recurring theme throughout all meetings was the critical role of an informed, engaged citizenry in holding both developers and public agencies accountable for environmental outcomes. Multiple community members — including current and former local elected officials and candidates — emphasized that technical and policy reforms must be accompanied by meaningful avenues for public participation.

Key patterns observed:

- Residents who brought documentation, photographs, and independent data to public meetings described those materials as essential to achieving action from regulators and planning bodies.
- Community members repeatedly noted that organizing, showing up to planning meetings, and maintaining relationships with elected officials has produced tangible results in delaying or modifying harmful projects.
- There is broad community appetite for clearer information about how to engage with permitting, zoning, and planning processes before projects are approved.

MOVING FORWARD

The concerns raised at these community meetings are not isolated complaints about individual projects. They reflect a coherent, county-wide pattern: rapid growth outpacing environmental oversight, infrastructure capacity, and community input mechanisms. The residents who participated in these meetings are not opposed to growth — they are asking for growth that is planned thoughtfully, executed responsibly, and held accountable when it falls short.

Mobile Baykeeper calls on county and municipal leaders to use these findings as a foundation for developing a comprehensive Smart Growth policy framework for Baldwin County — one that protects the water quality, natural resources, and quality of life that make this region worth living in and building for the future.

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