

## Update: Preliminary Comparable Analysis

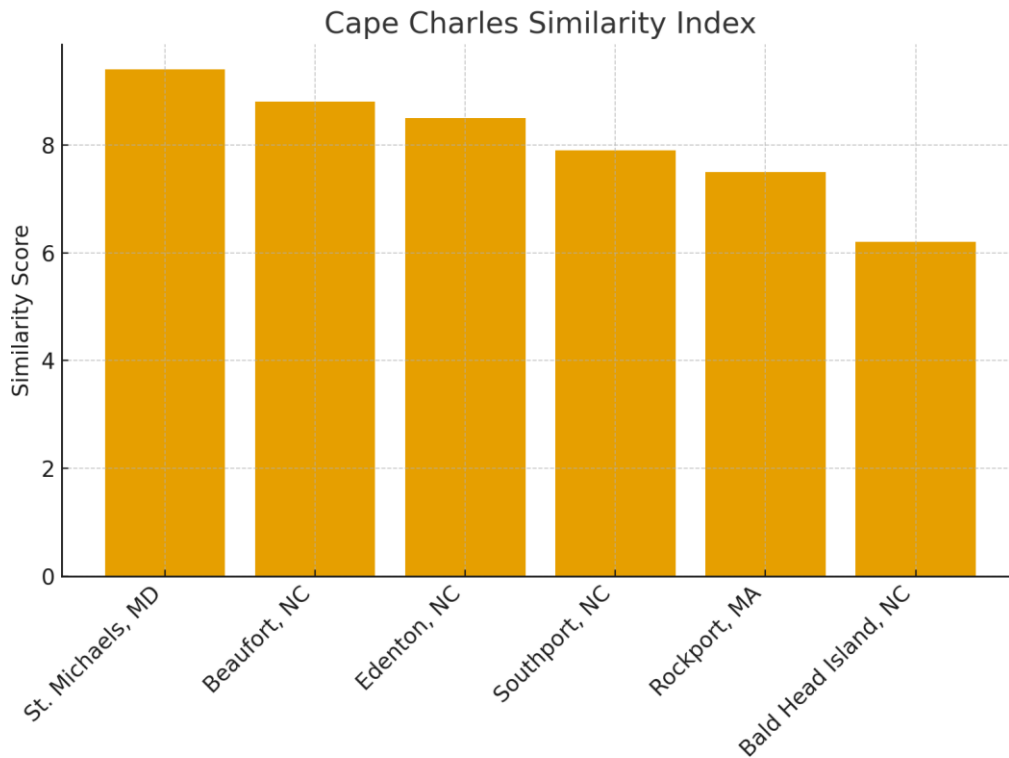
### Cape Charles Coastal Peer Profile and Similarity Index

#### Executive Summary

This briefing compares Cape Charles, Virginia with six carefully selected coastal peer towns along the East Coast. The analysis evaluates similarity across categories including historic character, tourism economy, maritime identity, infrastructure, and overall community profile.

#### Similarity Ranking

1. St. Michaels, MD: 9.4
2. Beaufort, NC: 8.8
3. Edenton, NC: 8.5
4. Southport, NC: 7.9
5. Rockport, MA: 7.5
6. Bald Head Island, NC: 6.2



Comparative Profile Table

Location	Cape Charles	St. Michaels, MD	Rockport, MA	Beaufort, NC	Southport, NC	Bald Head Island, NC	Edenton, NC
<b>General Profile</b>	Historic Chesapeake Bay town with tourism, marina, and arts economy.	Chesapeake maritime town with strong tourism and preserved district.	New England arts/fishing village with strong seasonal tourism.	Carolina harbor town with heritage and marine research sectors.	Coastal Carolina town with historic core and tourism/retirement economy.	Barrier island with conservation-driven tourism and limited access.	Historic Albemarle Sound town with heritage tourism and civic culture.

Two additional locations were suggested in the Council meeting. An update on these two include:

**Cape Charles, Bald Head Island, and Edenton: Comparative Community & Coastal Profiles**

Cape Charles, Virginia stands at a unique intersection of **historic small-town identity, coastal amenity, and a rapidly strengthening tourism and residential economy**. When compared with Bald Head Island, NC, and Edenton, NC, three distinct models of coastal community life emerge—each defined by its access, economic orientation, history, and relationship with visitors.

**Cape Charles and Edenton** share the strongest alignment. Both are **walkable, compact historic towns** with meaningful civic fabric, year-round populations, and a heritage-driven sense of place. Each centers its brand around architectural preservation, public waterfront access, boutique retail, and community events. Edenton leans more heavily into colonial heritage and government/institutional presence, while Cape Charles expresses a more mixed-use coastal village identity with stronger **beach tourism**, marinas, and hospitality development. Cape Charles’s recent growth pressures—rising STR activity, residential construction, and new retail—contrast with Edenton’s more controlled, steady, preservation-forward trajectory. Nevertheless, these two towns are highly comparable for strategic benchmarking around community balance, heritage management, and diversified local economies.

**Cape Charles and Bald Head Island**, by contrast, represent fundamentally different development models. Bald Head Island is a **ferry-access-only, no-cars, conservation-managed barrier island** with a primary economic base in high-end real estate, resort amenities, and environmentally controlled tourism. Cape Charles, conversely, is a **publicly accessible harbor town** with a working waterfront, public beaches, restaurants, events, and mixed-income neighborhoods. While both rely on tourism and possess strong place identity, Cape Charles functions as a **traditional town with infrastructure, civic life, and full-time residents**, whereas Bald Head Island operates as a **destination resort community** with limited year-round economic activity beyond property management and hospitality. This contrast highlights Cape Charles’s significantly broader economic foundation and deeper community structure compared with BHI’s exclusivity and conservation orientation.

In summary, **Edenton offers Cape Charles the clearest analog for understanding heritage-centered revitalization**, while **Bald Head Island provides insight into the upper range of coastal amenity-driven, conservation-limited development models**. Cape Charles occupies a strategic middle ground—blending accessible coastal living, strong heritage, tourism vitality, and a functional civic core.

**EXPANDED ECONOMIC COMPARISON**

***Cape Charles, Bald Head Island, and Edenton***

Below is a detailed comparison across core economic dimensions relevant to tourism, residential development, municipal planning, and economic strategy.

**1. Population & Demographic Base**

Community	Year-Round Population	Notes
Cape Charles, VA	~1,200	Small but rapidly growing; increasing young families and remote workers.
Bald Head Island, NC	~200	Primarily second homes; population swells seasonally.
Edenton, NC	~4,400	Stable, diversified population; significant civic and institutional presence.

**Implication:**

Cape Charles and Edenton function as civic communities; Bald Head Island does not.

**2. Accessibility & Visitor Flow**

Factor	Cape Charles	Bald Head Island	Edenton
Road Access	Excellent (US-13)	None— <b>Ferry only</b>	Excellent (regional highways)
Visitor Type	Families, boaters, beach tourists, retirees	High-income, resort visitors	Heritage tourists, families, retirees
Peak Seasonality	High	Very high	Moderate

**Implication:**

Cape Charles and Edenton attract broader visitor segments; BHI intentionally limits access.

**3. Tourism & Hospitality Economy**

Metric	Cape Charles	Bald Head Island	Edenton
STR Activity	High + expanding	Very high but restricted	Moderate
Lodging Mix	Boutique hotels, rentals, B&Bs	Rental homes + resort accommodations	Inns, B&Bs, small-scale lodging
Hospitality Revenue Dependence	High	Very high	Moderate

**Implication:**

Cape Charles’s tourism model is robust but more diversified than Bald Head Island’s, and significantly more intensive than Edenton’s.

**4. Real Estate & Housing Market**

Category	Cape Charles	Bald Head Island	Edenton
Median Home Price (approx.)	High & rising	Very high	Moderate

Category	Cape Charles	Bald Head Island	Edenton
Development Trend	Rapid shoreline & in-town infill	Strictly controlled, expensive	Slow, preservation-led
Housing Mix	Mixed-income + luxury	Luxury-dominant	Affordable relative to peers

**Implication:**

Cape Charles is transitioning toward a higher-cost coastal housing market. Edenton remains more stable; BHI is luxury-only.

**5. Commercial Base**

Economic Area	Cape Charles	Bald Head Island	Edenton
Retail & Dining	Growing, diverse	Limited, resort-focused	Stable, traditional
Maritime Economy	Active marinas, boat repair, charters	Marina exists but orientation is recreational	Limited boating economy on the Sound
Government / Institutional	Limited	Minimal	Strong (county seat, schools, courts)

**Implication:**

Cape Charles has the most diverse small-town economy of the three; Edenton has more stability in government/institutional employment.

**6. Environmental / Climate Exposure**

Factor	Cape Charles	Bald Head Island	Edenton
Elevation Risk	Moderate (flooding, sea-level rise)	High (barrier island)	Low-moderate
Resilience Infrastructure	Improving	Strict building/environmental restrictions	Protected inland position

**Implication:**

Cape Charles has coastal risk but far less than a barrier island; Edenton’s inland position offers relative protection.

**Strategic Takeaways for Cape Charles**

**Lessons from Edenton**

- Preservation + civic identity can support stable long-term growth.
- Year-round residents anchor the economy in ways tourism can’t.
- Heritage-led branding produces durable value.

**Lessons from Bald Head Island**

- Coastal amenities can command very high value when access is controlled.
- Conservation-oriented planning can shape brand identity and economic trajectory.
- Infrastructure limits create exclusivity—but also vulnerability.

**Cape Charles’s Position**

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Cape Charles balances **accessibility, heritage,** and **coastal amenity** in a way neither Edenton nor Bald Head Island individually achieves, making it a uniquely positioned mid-Atlantic coastal community with strong capacity for sustainable and diversified growth.