

Chapter 9

RECREATION

BACKGROUND AND ANALYSIS

Tappahannock does not own or manage any recreational facilities for the use of the town residents. Future land use plans identify public and semi-public areas for a neighborhood park system and waterfront access sites for the public. The county-owned sites are comprised of public schools and a public swimming pool, as well as the library and government buildings.

Schools are located primarily in the northern end of the town. The high school is located on Airport Road, the middle school at the end of Marsh Street, and the elementary school adjacent to Route 17. Although these facilities form the majority of Tappahannock's public use facilities, they are not connected by a non-vehicular transportation facility, such as a bike path or designated walking trail.

Water access is presently provided by two public boat ramps. One ramp is at the end of Prince Street, having poor access, inadequate parking, and no pier facilities. The other ramp is located on Hoskins Creek. The Hoskins Creek facility has both ample parking and a docking area; repairs to the dock are needed. The Hoskins Creek ramp is owned by the Virginia Department of Game and Inland Fisheries and not the Town, although the Town does provide some policing and maintenance services because they own the property the ramp is on.

No public beach access to the Rappahannock presently exists in the town. Other public access, if available, cannot be identified at this time. All public use facilities exist on the north side of town, with none south of Hoskins Creek. Publicly owned land exists at the base of the Thomas Downing Bridge between the overpass and Prince Street, but is presently undeveloped. The Town has been exploring the possibility of converting this area into a park.

Pilings from an historic wharf provide evidence of previous public access to the Rappahannock riverfront. This area however, has potential for a waterfront park facility.

The Town is a member of the Middle Peninsula Chesapeake Bay Public Access Authority. The Authority was formed in 2003 for the purpose of acquiring and managing public water access opportunities in the region that can be used by the general public for passive and active activities.

Privately owned recreation areas have been identified within the town, and nearby in the surrounding region. Privately owned ball fields are located in the northern end of town. The property on which they are situated is for sale and a change in ownership may discontinue this

use. The June Parker Marina has been evaluated as a possibility for conversion from private to public use. Numerous marinas, a golf course, overnight camping, and a private membership park are within close proximity to Tappahannock. A portion of the Rappahannock River Valley National Wildlife Refuge is located just north of Town and the Essex County Museum is located on Water Lane.

Waterfront Park

The town recognizes the opportunities for public shoreline enjoyment may be made available due to the proximity of the Rappahannock River. The following program for waterfront park development has been considered at the foot of Prince Street.

Potential Waterfront Park Development actions would include:

- Acquire 2 parcels between bridge and condominiums for development as a passive urban park
- Provide limited parking for park

Additional Activities Envisioned with this Proposed Park Concept

- Farmers market, produce market, seafood emporium
- Festival event for "kick-off" and annual follow-up
- Antiques "Alley" in downtown
- Dock activities: crabbing, fishing, walking, itinerant boat use

While opportunity for waterfront park development exists in this location, the site size is limited and the location of nearby residents suggests use should be limited to passive recreational offerings. This park concept is further discussed in the implementation recommendations of this section.

Assets

- Many historic structures and landscape features of high aesthetic value throughout the town.
- The Rappahannock River bordering town holds significant promise for future access, vistas, active recreation, marine activity, etc.

- Presence of Hoskins Creek meandering through town offers unique potential natural setting for passive recreation and aesthetic enjoyment.
- The upland area west of town at the head of Hoskins Creek offers future potential for a park facility.
- The dock on Hoskins Creek meets current access demand for boat use and could potentially be expanded and improved for mixed recreational use.
- Presence of commercial marina immediately north of town suggests possible downtown/wharf boat link for visitors by water or potential use of part of the Marina site as a small waterfront park facility.
- Town history is strongly linked to the waterfront and creeks. The history suggests possible festival or special event focus to increase tourism into the downtown commercial district.

Problems Identified

1. Lack of parks and recreation facilities for Tappahannock.
2. Lack of publicly-owned land south of Hoskins Creek, in the downtown and in the far western reaches of the town.
3. Lack of pedestrian access between public spaces, particularly evidenced by the Route 360/17 safe-crossing problems and the airport crossing conflict between the middle and high school sites.

Lack of neighborhood parks denies the town an important motivational tool for achieving developer-associated improvements for recreation in the town comprehensive plan and zoning ordinances.

GOALS AND OBJECTIVES

Goal: Develop and improve recreation services, facilities and programs for the citizenry of Tappahannock.

Objectives:

Provide recreation programs in association with a system of neighborhood parks, pocket parks, public lands, playgrounds and open spaces.

Provide public access to the waterfront on the Rappahannock River or on Hoskins Creek or both.

Develop water trails along Hoskins Creek or the Rappahannock River, or both.

Goal: *Provide safe public access for the residents of Tappahannock to public lands, government buildings, schools and open spaces and to a system of parks and facilities for recreation.*

Objectives:

Designate an urban trail system in the Town of Tappahannock utilizing the existing street system.

Provide expanded public access to public lands and open spaces for those areas of town not connected by the existing street system and for future development in the southern part of town via an expanded trail loop system.

Goal: *Provide town residents with adequate recreation and open space facilities.*

Objectives:

Develop an urban park at the end of Prince Street as part of a Central Business District revitalization effort.

Encourage development of other neighborhood parks and playgrounds.

Explore possibilities for the acquisition, development and maintenance of waterfront acreage for public use.

Require developer provision of recreation and open space areas adequate to serve the needs prompted by subdivision and residential development.

Considerations for Park Development

1. Parks system should be explored that relates to the downtown waterfront park.
2. Existing schools should be incorporated into park planning for programs and facilities development.
3. A joint town/county Park Authority, or planning committee, should be explored as one approach to planning for future park facilities.
4. Every effort should be made to relate the downtown dock/park component to the historical record of wharves or docks for accuracy in restoration, if possible and practical.

5. Early park support and visibility could be enhanced by building on an established festival event, such as the annual RivahFest, and supported by service organizations. Food sales, proceeds, and commissions would be associated with vendor activity. A parade, contest, or water competition would complete the "Water Day" event.
6. Another boat trip venture, of a local nature and brief in duration, might be introduced and linked to a historical town walk.
7. Seek funding mechanisms required for the downtown waterfront park development as a cooperative effort between the town and Adkins Oil Co.

IMPLEMENTATION RECOMMENDATIONS

1. Designate existing publicly owned lands shown on the land use plan as park lands/open space lands. These sites would include the elementary, middle and high schools, the Dock Street dock, the parcel under lease to VDOT that is managed by the U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service and owned by the Town, the government building sites and the Downtown statue, as well as the conservation lands associated with Hoskins Creek.
2. Designate and develop a waterfront park facility.
3. Establish a program to upgrade all park sites for appropriate public use as recreation facilities.

Enabling a Parks and Recreation Authority

A Parks and Recreation Authority can be developed to carry out the task associated with a system of open spaces for public use. Among the structures to consider for implementation are a Parks Authority, a Parks Commission, and a Parks and Recreation Department. A Parks Authority, whether it is a town authority or a joint City/County Authority, is the political structure that sets rules and regulations, establishes development priorities and funding mechanisms, and provides for comprehensive management and overall system maintenance. A Parks Commission is comprised of community leaders and representatives from the town citizenry who are tasked with development of specific actions, programs, and land use priorities that impact upon delivering recreation for the community at large. A Parks and Recreation Department would be responsible for the day-to-day operation and maintenance of facilities and for programming events and activities.

Utilizing Publicly Owned Land and Facilities

Given the history of excellent cooperation between Tappahannock and Essex County, it seems logical to presume that this cooperation will certainly extend to County-owned land located in the town. For Tappahannock, this suggests with a minimum of public expense that the town can anticipate reasonable access to adequate publicly owned land to form the basic "spine" of a system of parks and open spaces for public use.

The town owns the property on which the Dock Street dock is located, the prominent statue downtown as a street focus, and the parcel currently maintained by, and leased to, the Virginia Department of Game and Inland Fisheries near Hoskins Creek. While the town holds other properties as well, these parcels appear most suitable for inclusion in a system of parks and open spaces.

The County operates the three schools, as well as the library and the downtown government buildings and grounds, all of which are suitable for inclusion in the proposed system.

The airport facility has strong potential for a mixed-use designation, which could in the future make some portion of that land available for use in a system of open spaces and parks. The airport property consists of over 70 acres of land that the Town envisions becoming a mixed-use district within the town. There is the potential there for light industry, office spaces, more parking areas, and open space to be used for recreational purposes such as a recreational trail or a cross country course for the schools. Please see the Figure 2 (Analysis Plan) and Figure 7 (District Use Plan) following this section that illustrates what the property and surrounding area looks like now and what the Town envisions for the future of the airport property. The figures are taken from an analysis report created for the Town by the Community Design and Assistance Center of the College of Architecture and Urban Studies of the Virginia Polytechnic and State University.

The considerable wetlands areas that adjoin Hoskins Creek provide an extremely rare and exciting conservation land area, highly suitable for inclusion into the proposed open space system. This large area presents a great opportunity for use as a passive observation area for wildlife and the natural environment, as well as an excellent location for pedestrian use and access via the urban trails system.

Figure 2:
Tappahannock Commerce Center-
Analysis Plan

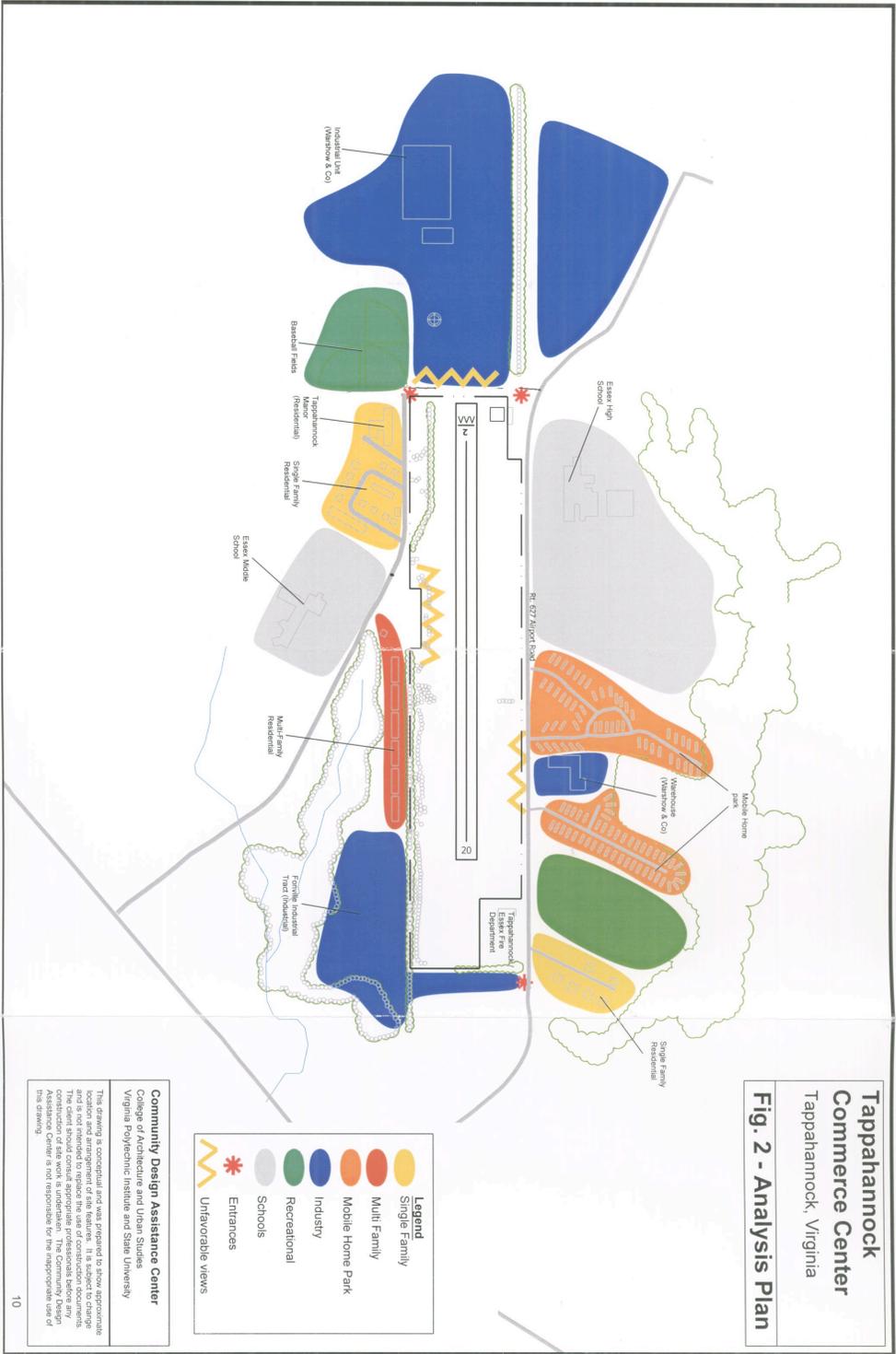


Figure 7:
Tappahannock Commerce Center-
District Use Plan



Leasing/Acquiring Additional Public Lands

While the inventory of publicly owned land in Tappahannock is substantial, a comprehensive and balanced system of parks and open spaces implies the need for additional lands. This is particularly acute in the case of the need for a waterfront access park facility downtown, and similarly important in the town at or south of Hoskins Creek where no public lands are currently held except for the leased VDOT land.

Waterfront Park Facility Development

The property immediately south of the Downing Bridge at the end of Queen Street offers potential for a waterfront park site. Specifically, there are two small lots of green open space between the waterfront and eastern edge of the existing residential use, bounded on the south by the Atkins Oil property. Acquiring the described open space could serve to provide access for the public to the waterfront, and potentially serve as a vital interest component for a revitalized downtown commercial district. However, the site size and configuration will limit parking opportunities and water depths will preclude development of boating facilities. Recreational offerings that should be provided include passive uses such as picnic facilities, pedestrian seating and opportunities for enjoying views of the waterfront. More intensive uses on the site could be disruptive to the area's peaceful residential character and are not recommended.

As an alternative or in addition, the town may consider locating a passive waterfront park on portions of the June Parker Marina property. The existing marina could complement public recreation offerings and at the same time afford an opportunity to enhance the visual quality of this entry point to the town by creating a town gateway statement through park design.

The Town can work with the Middle Peninsula Chesapeake Bay Public Access Authority to address needs for access to the water within the Town.

Improvements to Land and Facilities for Park Use

While designation of publicly owned lands and the dedication of leased or acquired properties together provide a network of parks and open spaces, the facilities appropriate for a parks system will not necessarily be distributed evenly or satisfactorily given the current status of each parcel. Improvements to the sites and the addition of equipment and facilities are essential to meet the needs of the community in recreation programming.

Depending on the specific site and the programmed use, essential improvements would include:

1. Safety considerations: drainage, improved sod or groundcover, safe sidewalks, curb ramps, parking surfaces, traffic control devices for pedestrians, bicycle racks, and lighting.
2. Use considerations: signage, traffic flow pattern, traffic barriers, benches, tables, trash cans, waste spigots, lights, bathrooms, swing sets, jogging and exercise trail stations, and storage buildings.

3. Aesthetic considerations: trees for shade and definition, shrubs for space control definition, fences, planter boxes, flowers for beauty, hedges, preparation of vistas or views, etc.

The input of the citizenry in Tappahannock via a Parks Department, Commission, Board, or Authority would provide valuable guidance for town leaders in assessing and inventorying existing facilities and developing a capital improvements budget for long term development and improvements.

