

# Chapter 10

## DOWNTOWN REVITALIZATION AND URBAN DESIGN

One of the key issues of the Tappahannock Comprehensive Plan is the enhancement of the visual appearance of the town. This chapter includes a definition of the urban design districts and their attributes which can mean many different things to different members of the Planning Commission and residents. It will also identify the alternative methods available to the town for protecting or enhancing community appearance and the legal basis for doing so. It is the intent of this chapter to focus on the town's appearance by more clearly defining the town's urban design districts and by evaluating the elements which can influence the appearance, and by offering a framework by which the town's character will be, and can be preserved or enhanced.

### BACKGROUND AND ANALYSIS

Through observation and evaluation, three distinct design districts have been identified and were found to be appropriate for assigning different levels of treatment:

1. The Southern Business Corridor
2. The Northern Business District
3. The Historic District

The Southern Business Corridor is comprised of two miles of commercial land use along Route 360/17 in the southern section of Tappahannock south of Hoskins Creek. The Northern Business Corridor is situated along Route 360/17 between Hoskins Creek and the intersection of 360/17 in the northern section of town. The historic (business) district extends from Duke Street north to Queen Street and Route 360/17 west to the Rappahannock River.

#### **The Southern Business Corridor**

The Southern Business Corridor is easily identified by the commercial uses which incorporate numerous curb cuts into the road, front parking, and large signage. The commercial land use is geared toward convenience services for people passing through Tappahannock, and retail stores that attract customers both from the town and surrounding counties. Since the Southern Business Corridor is automobile oriented, there exists large open spaces associated with the parking lots

which contain little or no vegetation. The convenience stores oriented closer to Route 360/17 attract a number of customers for a short period time. Other stores are located further back and are oriented for customers spending longer periods of time. The recently constructed buildings in the Southern Business Corridor are one or two stories, large in scale, and built of concrete, metal, brick, and glass.

In analyzing the Southern Business Corridor it becomes apparent that two major problems exist. Numerous signs at different scales and styles tend to confuse motorists looking for a particular business. The great number of curb cuts onto Routes 360/17 create traffic conflicts due to the high volumes of vehicular traffic. The lack of vegetation gives the area a cold and utilitarian feeling.

It is important to resolve these conflicts since this design area is where tourists develop their first impression of Tappahannock while traveling north along Route 360/17. In addition, this section of town is economically important because it draws people from surrounding areas for shopping.

### **The Northern Business Corridor**

This design district is different from the Southern Business Corridor because the road narrows, the buildings are smaller in scale and are closer to the road. Entering into the area from the south across Hoskins Creek bridge provides the first view of water and activities associated with it including Captain Thomas's Cruise line and commercial crabbing boats. The bridge acts as a gateway into the Northern Business Corridor from the south, while a second gateway is formed by the stop light at the intersection of Route 360 and Route 17.

The signage is comprised of different sizes and styles; the lighting is oriented to the automobile. The sidewalks are narrow, close to the street, and are in a state of disrepair. All these problems combine to create an uncomfortable environment for the pedestrian.

### **The Historic District**

Tappahannock has a rich development heritage from both a historical and an architectural perspective. Tappahannock has a number of structures which have been identified as being historically significant, the majority of which are located in the old town section around the Courthouse green. Many well preserved colonial structures are found throughout this district. The Old Debtor's Prison on the Courthouse green was built before 1769 and now serves as the Essex Treasurer's Office. County-owned Beale Memorial Church on the Courthouse Square contains the original walls of the 1729 Courthouse. Anderson House on the St Margaret's campus is located on one of the oldest occupied tracts in Tappahannock, the Robert Coleman property.

While this heritage is only one of several things that attracts people to Tappahannock, it is too often taken for granted. As with other aspects of community character, the cultural richness of the town is a commodity that cannot be replaced once destroyed. Historic areas should not be

viewed as mere attractions for tourists, but as elements which enrich the experience of living in a community and make it more attractive for others. It is clear that the American work force now resists moving to communities that they perceive to be of low quality. The preservation of an area's historical heritage is an important economic development strategy because of its significant positive contribution to the quality of the community.

In general, the buildings and structures located within the historic district reflect a colonial design. The main street within the historic district is the portion of Prince Street east of Route 360/17. Two significant structures may be found within this section of Prince Street. One is a monument dedicated to Civil War soldiers from the region and other is the Essex County Courthouse Complex. Significant architectural examples can also be found on upper Prince Street to Falconer Circle and in Little Egypt.

The character of the historic district does not relate well with the character of either the northern or southern business corridors. Opportunities exist to carry the colonial theme to the highway corridor.

One of the concerns identified within the district is that many of the structures along Prince Street have either been altered or constructed in such a way that the colonial character is lost. Also detracting from the historic character is the inconsistent size and style of the signs used by the commercial establishments. Finally, there exist no strong or consistent visual linkages from one side of Prince Street to the other.

One of the opportunities offered within the town's historic district is that the structures within the district are designed predominately in colonial architectural style. One of the most notable of these structures is the Essex County Courthouse and Government complex. The lawn which is surrounded by the complex forms a pleasing green space within the surrounding urban townscape.

The historic district contains many positive physical aspects. A vista of the Rappahannock River or the monument can be observed when standing along Prince Street and looking east towards the river or west towards the monument. The river and the monument also form the termini of an axis formed between the two. The visual element of the river end of the axis could be enhanced.

Although the style of several buildings within the historic district may not be the same, all structures blend well in terms of texture and color. Brick is the predominant material used to face the buildings. In addition to brick, wood siding may also be found. The colors of the paint used are also complementary, consisting mainly of warm earth tones such as tan, soft grey and white.

The historic district also contains many positive yet subtle features that are not readily identified but add to the picturesque atmosphere of the district. The chiming of the bells in the courthouse complex along with the historic markers on the buildings serve to create a sense of time and place for the residents and visitors of the area.

The enhancement of the historic district is important for Tappahannock because of its regional history. A historic district is utilized for several purposes. Presently, it is an activity center for both local citizens and regional visitors and as such, it can attract tourism into Tappahannock which will help to strengthen the economic base of the community. Perhaps most importantly, it gives the town and its inhabitants a unique sense of place and identity.

## **GOALS AND OBJECTIVES**

***Goal: To maintain the mix of businesses which compliment the downtown character.***

Objective:

- Encourage the location of new businesses in the downtown area while maintaining the present businesses.

***Goal: Enhance the character of the historic district.***

Objectives:

- Encourage the renovation of building facades where appropriate within the historic district
- The identification and preservation of historic landmarks should be encouraged within the town.
- The removal or damaging of Historic buildings should be discouraged and the restoration or improvement should be encouraged.
- Considerations of compatibility should be given to areas adjacent to historic areas or buildings when proposed for conversion to uses which would damage or destroy the character of such historic areas.
- Develop design standards for the historic district for all new construction and exterior renovations to existing structures.
- Implement programs for the improvement of window and awning treatments to all structures within the historic district and the Northern Business Corridor.

***Goal: Enhance visual elements which would give the town identifiable boundaries.***

Objectives:

- Implement programs to improve and maintain the landscaping in all public places.

- Provide continuity in color and style of all street furniture.
- Implement standards for signage for all business establishments within the town.
- Strengthen the visual image of the town's gateways located at Hoskins Creek and the monument within the historic district.
- Create a visual gateway in the northern section of the town.
- Apply the positive architectural and other design elements which are found in the historic district to the Northern Business Corridor and the Southern Business Corridor where applicable in order that a sense of continuity exists within the town.

## **IMPLEMENTATION RECOMMENDATIONS**

There is little debate that the built environment plays a significant role in the quality of life a community enjoys. The purpose of the urban design element of the plan for Tappahannock is to provide a vision for the future and a framework for improving the town's man-made environment. Such a vision includes well trimmed and landscaped public areas which enhance the style, color and texture for the surrounding buildings. The buildings themselves should complement one another and reflect the mark of history on the town in their design. For example, the historic district represents Tappahannock colonial past; the Northern Commercial Corridor, through its eclectic architectural style, reflects the town's gradual economic growth and expansion. The Southern Commercial Corridor reflects Tappahannock's current regional economic importance through its newer and more modern architectural style.

Furthermore, the tourist visiting Tappahannock should be able to recognize the boundaries of the town by gateways that visually welcome them into the town. Gateways also convey to the tourist that the town is comprised of several different districts, each with its own identity and importance.

In short, the purpose of the urban design plan for Tappahannock is to reinforce the town's regional and historic importance as well as make the town a more aesthetically pleasing place.

### **The Central Business District**

The Central Business District encompasses the historic commercial area of the town from the waterfront back to adjacent residential areas that compose the older residential neighborhoods of Tappahannock. Any effort to improve the visual quality of this area must of necessity deal with economic realities, i.e., the competitive nature of the large commercial centers located in the town and the impact they have had on the economic viability of the older commercial district.

Revitalizing this area will require a concerted effort to attract shoppers and visitors to the downtown to purchase goods and services that cannot be obtained in the commercial centers, i.e., specialty items. Making the downtown an especially attractive area for visitors can best be

achieved by capitalizing on the positive qualities of this area, e.g., the waterfront, the historic charm and the contrast it presents to the glitz of modern centers that strip U.S. 17.

In addition, the CBD must function well, as shoppers and tourists will not be attracted to the area if it is congested and lacks adequate and convenient parking. Street and intersections that provide local access must be managed so as to permit convenient access to the shops and other attractions of the downtown.

Finally, improving the downtown will require a commitment on the part of the town and private sector, i.e., landowners, residents and merchants to undertake a program of improvement.

Working with representatives of these groups the town should undertake a Central Business District planning effort. The Central Business District Plan should address ways of revitalizing the CBD and include an action agenda for immediate implementation by both the private and public sectors. Among other things the Plan should include a detailed development evaluation and plan for increasing public access to the waterfront starting with development of the recommended Prince Street Park.

### **The Southern Business Corridor**

The visual elements of the Southern Business Corridor should be enhanced in several ways. Several varieties of trees should be planted in the median strip which will narrow the field of vision for those traveling on Route 360/17. By narrowing the field of vision, the traveler will be able to focus on what is ahead of him/her and will be less distracted by the intense activity which is surrounding them. Furthermore, the space in which people are moving is made smaller which identifies more closely with the general character of a small town. Help in enhancing this corridor may be achieved through a highway corridor overlay zone (see Chapter 3) and the Development Appearance Standards set forth below.

### **Development Appearance Standards**

All future development within the identified urban design districts, except for single-family homes, should be subject to design review for compliance with minimum development appearance standards. These minimum standards that should be achieved are performance standards rather than inflexible and stringent criteria. The intent of these performance standards is to promote quality development that will compliment the community character of Tappahannock. One of the reasons for implementing these standards is, of course, to positively influence development aesthetics. However, this objective is justified by the greater goals of protecting and enhancing real estate values, fostering of civic pride, and improving the overall investment climate within the town.

These standards are not intended to restrict imagination or development creativity, but rather, to assist in focusing on development design principals which should result in enhancing the visual appearance of the built environment in Tappahannock. The development appearance standards relate to such factors as: relationship of buildings to the site; relationship of existing buildings and site to adjoining areas; landscape and site treatment; building design; signs; and

maintenance. These standards should not be considered cost prohibitive or overly restrictive since they embody common sense design principles which were traditionally employed throughout the country prior to the advent of post-war suburbanization.

The following are recommended development appearance standards for future multi-family, commercial and industrial development in identified urban design districts of Tappahannock:

### **Relationship of Buildings to Site**

- The site should be planned to accomplish a desirable transition with the streetscape and to provide for adequate planting, safe pedestrian movement, and screened parking areas.
- Site planning in which setbacks and yards are in excess of zoning restrictions is encouraged to provide an interesting relationship between buildings. Buildings in the downtown and community centers are encouraged to minimize front setbacks to enhance the traditional street/building relationships typically found in rural villages
- Parking areas should be treated with decorative elements, building wall extensions, plantings, berms, or other innovative means so as to screen parking areas from public ways.
- Without restricting the permissible limits of the applicable zoning district, the height and scale of each building should be compatible with its site and existing (or anticipated) adjoining buildings.
- Newly installed utility services and service revisions necessitated by exterior alterations should be placed underground wherever possible.

### **Relationship of Buildings and Site to Adjoining Area**

- Adjacent buildings of different architectural styles should be made compatible by such means as screens, site breaks, and materials.
- Attractive landscape transition to adjoining properties should be provided.
- Harmony in texture, lines, and masses should be required. Monotony of design should be avoided.
- Adjacent incompatible land uses should be screened from one another by landscaping, berms, walls, and fences.

### **Landscape and Site Treatment**

- Where natural or existing topographic patterns contribute to beauty and utility of a development they should be preserved and developed. Modifications to topography should be permitted where it contributes to good appearance, or where it is necessary.

- Grades of walks, parking spaces, terraces, and other paved areas should provide an inviting and stable appearance for the pedestrian. Emphasis should be placed on facilitating pedestrian traffic in the historic/downtown area of the Town, especially traffic moving to and from parking lots to walkways.
- Landscaping should be pedestrian compatible and friendly throughout the Town.
- Landscape treatment should be provided to enhance architectural features, strengthen vistas and important axis, and provide shade.
- Unity of landscape design should be achieved by repetition of certain plant varieties and other materials and by coordination with adjacent development.
- Plant material should be selected for interests in its structure, texture and color, and for its ultimate growth. Plants that are indigenous to the area and others that will be hearty, harmonious to design, and of good appearance should be used.
- In locations where plants will be susceptible to injury by pedestrian or motor traffic they should be protected by appropriate curbs, tree guards, or other devices.
- Parking areas and traffic ways should be enhanced with landscaped spaces containing trees or tree groupings.
- Where building sites limit planting, the placement of trees in parkways or paved areas should be required.
- Screening of service yards and other places that tend to be unsightly should be accomplished by use of walls, fencing and plantings, or combinations of these. Screening should be effective in winter and summer.
- In areas where general planting will not prosper, other materials such as fences, walls, and pavings of wood, brick, stone gravel, and cobbles should be used. Carefully selected plants should be combined with such materials where possible.
- Exterior lighting, when used, should enhance the adjoining landscape. Lighting standards and building fixtures should be of a design and size compatible with the building and adjacent areas. Lighting should be designed to avoid excessive brightness.

## **Building Design**

- Architectural style should not be restricted. Evaluation of the appearance of a project should be based on the quality of its design and relationship to surroundings.



- Buildings should have good scale and be in harmonious conformance with permanent neighboring development.
- Materials should have good architectural character and should be selected for harmony of the building with adjoining buildings. Materials should be of durable quality. Materials should be selected for suitability to the type of buildings and the design in which they are used. Buildings should have the same material, or those that are architecturally harmonious, used for all building walls and other exterior building components wholly or partly visible from public ways. In any design in which the structural frame is exposed to view, the structural materials should be compatible within themselves and harmonious with their surroundings.
- Building components, such as windows, eaves, doors, parapets, should have good proportions and relationships to one another.
- Colors should be harmonious and should use only compatible accents.
- Mechanical equipment or other utility hardware on roof, ground, or buildings should be screened from public view with materials harmonious with the building, or they should be so located as not to be visible from public ways.
- Exterior lighting should be part of the architectural concept. Fixtures, standards, and all exposed accessories should be harmonious with building design.
- Refuse and waste removal areas, service yards, storage yards, and exterior work areas should be screened from view of public ways.
- Monotony of design in single or multiple building projects should be avoided. Variation of detail, form, and siting should be used to provide visual interest. In multiple building projects, variable siting of individual projects should be used to prevent a monotonous appearance.

## **Signs**

- Every sign should have good scale and proportion in its design and in its visual relationship to buildings and surroundings.
- Every sign should be designed as an integral architectural element of the building and site to which it principally relates.
- The number of graphic elements on a sign should be held to the minimum needed to convey the sign's major message and should be composed in proportion to the area of the sign face.
- The colors, materials, and lighting of every sign should be restrained and harmonious with the building and site to which it principally relates.

- Each sign should be compatible with signs on adjoining premises and should not compete for attention.

## **Maintenance - Planning and Design Factors**

- Continued good appearance depends upon the extent and quality of maintenance. The choice of materials and their use, together with the types of finishes and other protective measures should be conducive to easy maintenance and upkeep.
- Materials and finishes should be selected for their durability and wear as well as for their beauty. Proper measures and devices should be incorporated for protection against the elements, neglect, damage, and abuse.
- Provisions for washing and cleaning of buildings and structures, and control of dirt and refuse should be incorporated in the design. Configurations that tend to catch and accumulate debris, leaves, trash, dirt, and rubbish should be avoided.
- Provisions for landscape maintenance and replacement should be added.

## **The Historic District**

The historic district of Tappahannock is a distinctive place reflecting the colonial history of the town in its architecture and design character. The civil war monument will serve as a gateway into this district. As a gateway, the island in which the monument sets should be enhanced with plants and flowers and/or attractive masonry work. This will draw attention to the monument as a focal point. If illuminated, the monument's importance as a landmark and gateway would not diminished at night.

In addition to the general appearance standards presented above, the scale of design within the historic district is geared towards the pedestrian. As such, special emphasis on details will be placed on the urban design plan for this area. The street furniture will reflect a colonial character with street lighting designed to replicate traditional gas lamps. The benches and trash containers will also reflect the style used in colonial periods. The sidewalk planters will consist of a uniform style and will be rigorously maintained.

The character of the storefronts themselves will be enhanced. Mullions and shutters will be used in windows which again will reflect the town's colonial past and reinforce the pedestrian scale of the area. Flower boxes located in store fronts can help to beautify the streetscape and will also enhance any window displays utilized by stores in this district. Awnings of a uniform style can be utilized by the stores located in the historic district.

## Protection and Preservation Programs

Outsiders, whether they go to a new place as tourists or as potential residents, will be attracted to a community that seems to respect itself and to have character and individuality. Tourists spend money with local merchants, and new residents spend even more. Local industry and business, if they recruit from outside the region, benefit as well if it can be shown that the community is a good place to live. Historic preservation enhances the community character and shows that the community has pride and self-awareness. There are several methods available by which communities can make historic preservation a reality. While much has been done to preserve local architecture and history, many opportunities still exist to further preservation effort programs.

A number of existing programs provide assistance in protection or preservation, offer tax benefits, provide professional historical/architectural consulting and so forth. More detailed information on programs including the National Historic Landmark, National Register of Historic Places, Conservation and Preservation Easements, and Historic Overlay Districts can be found from various historic preservation organizations and such publications as Virginia's Heritage: A Property Owner's Guide to Resource Protection, published by the Virginia Department of Conservation and Historic Resources.

National Historic Trademark - A historical resource is generally a site over fifty years old. The criteria for determining these sites has been established by guidelines set forth by the Secretary of the Department of the Interior. A district, site, building, structure or object can be considered a historic resource. The criterion is that the resource must be noted to be significant in American history, architecture, archeology, engineering or culture.

One of the highest honors for a property owner to have bestowed upon their property is the designation of National Historic Landmark. This program, run by the National Park Service, is the primary Federal means of recognizing the exceptional national significance of historic properties. The program is also one of the major tools used to scrutinize proposals for additions to the National Park System and to select nominations to the World Heritage List.

In recognition of the historic significance of a property, the owner receives a certificate of designation and a plaque bearing the name of the property and attesting to its national significance. In return, the owner agrees to display the plaque publicly although is not required to grant public access to the property. Ownership and use of the property is not changed by being listed as a National Historic Landmark. Instead, an honor is granted.

National Register of Historic Place - In 1966, Congress established the National Register of Historic Places as the Federal Government's official list of properties, including districts, significant in American history and culture. In Virginia, the Register is administered by the Virginia Landmarks Register. Some benefits resulting from a listing in the National Register include the following:

1. National recognition of the value of historic properties individually and collectively to the Nation.

2. Eligibility for Federal tax incentives and other preservation assistance.
3. Eligibility for a Virginia income tax benefit for the approved rehabilitation of owner occupied residential buildings.
4. Consideration in the planning for federally and state assisted projects.
5. Listing does not interfere with a private property owner's right to alter, manage or dispose of property.

Virginia Landmarks Register - The Virginia Division of Historic Landmarks (VDHL) surveys historic buildings, structures and archeological sites to determine eligibility of being listed on the Virginia Landmarks Register. As with being on the National Register of Historic Places, listing does not limit or regulate the property owner in what can or cannot be done with the property. In order to be considered for listing on the National Register or having an easement on the property to be accepted by the VDHL, the site usually must first be listed on the Virginia Landmarks Register.

Virginia Historic Preservation Easement - A state-held historic preservation easement monitored by the Virginia Division of Historic Landmarks (VDHL) is an excellent means of perpetually preserving a historical structure and property for future generations. Regulations state that easements may be assignable to other parties or run with the land. The benefits for a property owner to donate his land to the VDHL include income, estate, inheritance, and gift and property tax benefits. In exchange, the owner gives the VDHL the final word regarding proposed alterations. However, for properties whose fair market value is largely based on the value of development rights, this method of preservation may not be the most financially expedient for the property owner or for the VDHL.

Local Historic Overlay Zone - A third, but separate, type of designation is the locally-zoned historic district which is an overlay on the existing zoning ordinance of a specified area. This district, allowed by the Code of Virginia, Title 15.2 - 2306, is designed to maintain the visual character of the community. It may allow an appointed Commission to monitor changes, alterations and demolition of buildings and structures of architectural or historic significance. In Tappahannock, the governing position could be filled by the Town Council or an appointed board. The main purpose of such zoning is:

1. to safeguard the heritage of the town by preserving the District therein which reflect elements of its cultural, social, economic, political or architectural history;
2. to stabilize or improve property values in such a District;
3. to foster civic beauty;
4. to strengthen the local economy;

5. to promote the use and preservation of Historic Districts for the education, welfare and pleasure of the residents of the county or municipal corporation.

Monitoring of historic buildings and structures by a Historical Committee under the supervision of the Town Council is done so that property owners can gain recognition and protect the special character of their historic neighborhood. There are well-publicized design guidelines that the Committee would employ when assisting the applicant in obtaining a certificate of approval for alteration or new construction. The government supports these owners' efforts through tax benefits and other programs. By creating such districts, a community can look forward to being able to maintain its identity in the face of advancing new developments.

The following criteria should be used when making the determination to designate an area eligible for classification as a Historic Overlay District.

A. Historic and Cultural Significance

The historic resource:

1. has significant character, interest or value as part of the development, heritage, or cultural characteristics of the town, county, state, or nation;
2. is the site of a historic event;
3. is a site that has yielded, or may be likely to yield, information important in prehistory or history;
4. is identified with a person or a group of persons who influenced society; or,
5. exemplifies the cultural, economic, social, political, or historic heritage of the town and its neighborhoods.

B. Architectural and Design Significance

The historic resource:

1. embodies the distinctive characteristics of a type, period, style, or method of construction;
2. represents the work of a master craftsman, architect, or builder;
3. possesses high artistic values;
4. represents a significant and distinguishable entity whose components may lack individual distinction; or,

5. represents an established and familiar visual feature of the town, due to its singular physical characteristics or landscape.

Non-Profit Preservation and Conservation Organizations - A number of organizations exist throughout the State of Virginia whose aim is to preserve and conserve archeological and historical resources. These include, but are not limited to, the Archeological Society of Virginia, the Association for the Preservation of Virginia Antiquities and the Council of Virginia Archaeologists. Individuals can contact the Virginia Department of Conservation and Historic Resources in Richmond, Virginia for a more complete listing of existing organizations.

