SMITHFIELD

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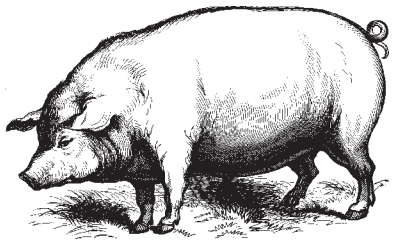

HISTORIC DISTRICT
DESIGN GUIDELINES

PREPARED FOR THE
TOWN OF SMITHFIELD

BY

FRAZIER ASSOCIATES
2005-2006

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Owning Property in the Smithfield Historic District

Owning Property in the Smithfield Historic District

Background I

A. Purpose of Design Guidelines

The town of Smithfield has one of the best collections of historic buildings of any community in Hampton Roads, Virginia. The community has done much to maintain this rich architectural heritage. An early architectural survey that identified historic properties in the town led to the listing of the Smithfield National Register Historic District in 1973.

It is up to the locality and to individual property owners, however, to protect the integrity of the historic district. Toward this end, Smithfield enacted a Historic Preservation District Ordinance in 1979. This ordinance set boundaries for a local historic district roughly comparable with the National Register District and created an architectural review board (known as the Board of Historic and Architectural Review or BHAR) to review proposed changes to property in this district. The ordinance included general design guidelines to provide direction to the review board and promised "more definite standards" later. The resulting *Smithfield, Virginia Historic District Design Guidelines*, were first published in 1990 to take some of the guesswork out of deciding what is "appropriate" for the district. These current guidelines are a 2005 update to the 1990 publication are are also available on the town's website.

As a property owner, you should refer to these design guidelines whenever you plan changes to your property. The guidelines clarify what is valuable and worth preserving in the district and explain how you can respect these features as you make changes or repairs to your historic building or design new buildings adjoining the old.

An early historic photograph of Main Street (courtesy Isle of Wight County Museum).

The "Understanding District Character" section introduces you to the important historic features within the district and "Before You Begin" leads you through the process of having your project reviewed.

Another reason you should use these guidelines is that the members of the Board of Historic and Architectural Review (BHAR) will be using them. It is the review board's responsibility to decide whether your proposed change is appropriate for the district. These guidelines give them basic standards for making these decisions.

These guidelines are tailored to your community. They are based on extensive study of Smithfield's historic district, including the types of buildings in the district, their condition, and the current policies and goals of the town. Smithfield's commercial buildings are given special attention in these guidelines, reflecting the desire of the town to strengthen the historic integrity of its central business district.

I Background

B. Brief History of Smithfield's Development

The town of Smithfield was incorporated in 1752. The oldest part of the town was set on a slight crest along a bend in the Pagan River and consisted of 72 lots encompassing the few blocks around what are now South Church, Main, Mason, and Cedar streets. Early settlement was centered around the courthouse and the neighboring wharf area. As the town grew, the street plan took on the constraints of the river's contours and the marshlands abutting Little Creek.

Smithfield has a richly diverse collection of historic buildings. An unusually high number of eighteenth-century structures survive, including town buildings and the two farm complexes of Windsor Castle and Pierceville. Other notable examples are the Georgian-style residences on South Church Street, Smithfield Inn, and several public buildings including the courthouse, clerk's office, and the original jail. Federal-style homes from the early nineteenth century are well represented on South Church and North Mason streets. Because local examples of the Federal style borrowed so heavily from the Georgian style, these two styles are treated as one throughout these guidelines.

The late nineteenth century was a period of great expansion in Smithfield and good examples of Victorian styles, from showcase Queen Anne residences to more modest vernacular houses, are common throughout the district. Steamboat traffic contributed to Smithfield's prosperity. The town's two major products, peanuts and ham, were shipped out from the wharf and merchants enjoyed connections with ports up and down the seaboard.

The town's street plan was extended to include Grace Street, in 1882. North Mason Street, formerly a private lane, also was added. Compact neighborhoods, such as Riverview, were developed in the early twentieth century. More recently, Grace and Thomas streets were connected.

The commercial and industrial growth of the town took a slightly different pattern. Early activity focused on the water and the busy wharf. No buildings remain from this era. Commerce Street lived up to its name in the busy years around the turn of the century, as factories were added to the waterfront.

Within a few decades, however, water transportation declined and with a major fire in 1921, the district was largely abandoned. The large Gwaltney's peanut factory, a mainstay of the town's economy, was not rebuilt after it burned and in the late 1930s the meat-packing industry, rather than expanding at its Commerce Street location, moved across the Pagan River beyond the Old Town boundaries. Meanwhile, retail business had shifted inland onto Main Street. Most of the district's historic commercial buildings were erected on Main Street in the early twentieth century and today this is still the heart of the district.

In 1999, the town completed a decade-long $2 million public improvement project in downtown Smithfield after a long-term project. Main Street began declining in the late 1960s and the process was becoming more pronounced by the mid-1970s. The first effort to turn around Main Street was in the mid-1970s, however, that effort never came to fruition.

Main Street business and property owners, together with residents of the historic district continued their interest in a revitalization project, but with little direction until 1988. Mr. Joseph W. Luter, III, president of Smithfield Foods, Inc. then offered to make a challenge grant if an organization could be put together and plans made for a downtown project. Historic Downtown Smithfield, Inc. was created a short time later in January 1989 and that led to a financial commitment by a large percentage of Main Street businesses and property owners.

The Main Street project concluded in February 1999 with the completion of landscaping. Public improvements included relocation of all overhead utilities underground, construction of brick sidewalks, installation of period street lights and street signage, landscaping, granite curbing, street resurfacing, water and sewer line replacements, drainage

B. Brief History of Smithfield's Development

enhancements, additional parking as well as informational kiosks on local history and street art sculptures. Private investment resulted in many significant building renovations, reconstruction, and/or facade improvements. Just a few of the before and after pictures that epitomize downtown Smithfield are shown on this page.

The Virginia Downtown Development Association (VDDA) awarded Smithfield for its Main Street Beautification Project in April 1999 in recognition of these improvements. The Town of Smithfield was one of 20 communities in the United States designated a Preserve America Community. The Preserve America initiative is a new White House effort to encourage and support community efforts for the preservation and enjoyment of America's priceless cultural and natural heritage. On March 18, 2004 in Washington, D.C. Smithfield Mayor, James B. Chapman and Town Manager, Peter M. Stephenson received the certificate of designation signed by First Lady Laura Bush.

Above and below: facade improvements, underground utilities, and new paving of streets and sidewalks have changed the appearance of Main Street in the past ten years.

A former gas station at the corner of Main and North Church has become the Chamber of Commerce.

Smithfield's waterfront improvements include a boardwalk with historic styled light fixtures.

I Background

C. Smithfield's Preservation Program

The two historic districts in Smithfield have essentially the same boundaries but serve slightly different purposes.

1. Smithfield National Register Historic District

The Smithfield National Register Historic District contains approximately 295 acres and is bounded roughly by the Pagan River on the north, Cypress Creek on the east, the Windsor Castle tree line and southern marshlands on the south, and Route 10 on the west. The district contains the downtown commercial area and surrounding residential neighborhoods. The district was originally registered in July 1973 and its boundaries were revised in 1990.

Designation as a National Register district does not restrict you as a property owner in any way. It does, however, offer the benefit of several federal and state programs.

- If you are undertaking a major rehabilitation of a contributing building in the historic district you might qualify for state and/or federal tax credits. See *Chapter IV* for details.
- Any adverse impact of a federally funded or licensed project on the district must be determined and minimized if possible.

2. Smithfield Local Historic District

The local historic district has essentially the same boundaries as the National Register Historic District, with a few extensions to make the district more self-contained.

The distinction between the two districts is that properties in the local district are under architectural review. These restrictions are placed on property owners in order to protect the rich architectural integrity of the district.

3. Contributing/Noncontributing Buildings

Not all of the structures in the district are historic or "contribute" to the integrity of the district. Noncontributing structures are those that were built less than fifty years ago or have been altered to such a degree that they are no longer representative of the period in which they were built or are in such poor physical condition that their retention is difficult.

A majority of the noncontributing buildings were built at an appropriate scale and of material compatible for the historic district. However, unlike the earlier buildings, many of the newer commercial structures are dominated by large parking lots and a number of the noncontributing residences have a deeper setback than neighboring historic dwellings. Properties which contribute to the historic character of the Town but which do not contain certain landmark structures shall be known as contributing properties. All structures from the 18th century to pre-Civil War or structures with architectural significance from the period after the Civil War shall be considered as landmarks or landmark structures.

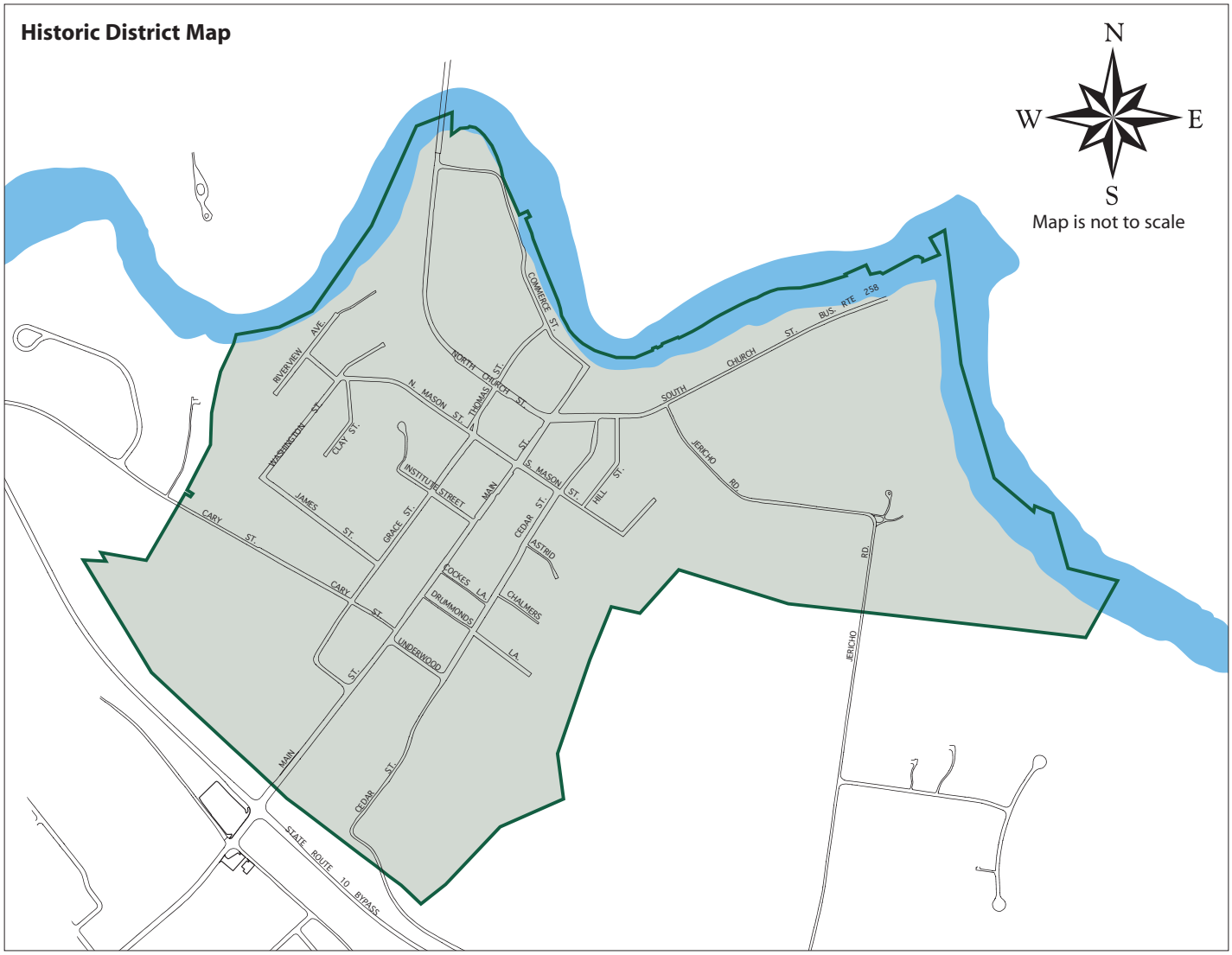
Presently, the local historic district contains 376 buildings, of which 71 are landmarks, 167 are contributing and 138 are noncontributing. The landmark and contributing buildings together consist of 37 commercial structures, 211 residences, 4 churches, 1 warehouse, and 38 residential and agricultural outbuildings.

4. HP-O Zoning

The (Historic Preservation) Overlay (HP-O) District is an overlay zone which provides for the review of certain changes that affect the appearance of buildings. The underlying zoning, however, still governs basic site features like setback, minimum lot size, maximum height, and use. The standards for the six zoning districts that occur within Smithfield's local historic district are summarized in the Zoning Chart in *IV - Planning a Project in the Historic District* (later in this section).

Background I

C. Smithfield's Preservation Program



This map shows the boundaries of the Smithfield Historic District.

I Background

C. Smithfield's Preservation Program

6. Building Codes and Zoning Regulations

Any requirements of the Historic Preservation District Ordinance are in addition to zoning regulations or building codes. Check with the Planning Department to make sure that your plans will be in compliance. Both zoning regulations and building codes are most likely to come into play during new construction or a change in use.

Whereas new construction must comply strictly with the letter of the code, Section 3407 in the 2003 edition of the International Building Code (IBC) allows a certain amount of flexibility for historic buildings:

"The provisions of this code relating to the construction, repair, alteration, addition, restoration and movement of structures and change of occupancy shall not be mandatory for historic buildings where such buildings are judged by the building official to not constitute a distinct life safety hazard."

Section 3407 means that if you are renovating a contributing building in the historic district, you might be allowed some flexibility in complying with the building code. You would have to convince the building code official that your planned alternative follows the intent of the building code. While such permission is not automatic, this clause has the potential to help you retain historic elements that otherwise might not meet the requirements of the code.

Several other provisions of the building code provide historic property owners with code compliance alternatives. IBC Section 3410 contains a test that can be used to evaluate the safety of a building. If the score on the test meets a certain criteria, the building will not have to comply with other sections of the code. The IBC Existing Building Code also contains provisions that can be used as alternatives when the constraints of the existing building are difficult to adapt to the letter of the code.

Contact the Isle of Wight Building Official's office if you need more information about building codes.

Chart of Major Underlying Provisions of Zoning Districts in Smithfield's Historic District

Zoning District	Minimum Lot Size	Maximum Density	Maximum Building Height	Minimum Front Yard	Minimum Side Yard	Minimum Rear Yard
CC - Community Conservation	40,000 sq. ft.	One Unit per Acre	35 Feet	60 Feet	25 Feet	60 Feet
DN-R - Downtown Residential	6,000 sq. ft. (single family) 4,000 sq. ft. (duplex)	5 Units per Acre	35 Feet	25 Feet	10 Feet	25 Feet
A-R - Attached Residential	1,600 sq. ft. (interior lot) 2,400 sq. ft. (corner lot)	8 Units per Acre	35 Feet	25 Feet	25 Feet	25 Feet
MF-R - Multi-Family Residential	1,600 sq. ft. (interior lot) 2,400 sq. ft. (corner lot)	12 Units per Acre	40 Feet	30 Feet	15 Feet	30 Feet
D - Downtown (Mixed Use District)	Not Regulated	Varies With Use	35 Feet	Not Regulated	Not Regulated	Not Regulated