SMITHFIELD

VIRGINIA

ENTRANCE CORRIDOR
DESIGN GUIDELINES

PREPARED FOR THE
TOWN OF SMITHFIELD

BY

FRAZIER ASSOCIATES

2005

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A. Historical Context

Smithfield's early commercial history depended on the local waterways as entrance corridors. Today, rivers and creeks continue to add a distinctive quality to the town.

"Perhaps the best preserved of Virginia's Colonial seaports, " according to the *Virginia Landmarks Register*, Smithfield celebrated its 250th anniversary in 2002. From its Colonial beginnings, Smithfield has evolved into a meat-processing center; home to Smithfield Foods corporate headquarters and three plants producing "Smithfield Ham" and other pork products. In recent years, the National Register Historic District core, with its heavy concentration of eighteenth and nineteenth century architecture, has witnessed renewed enthusiasm stemming from a revitalized Main Street.

The Town of Smithfield, is positioned in the northeastern portion of Isle of Wight County, and is located in the Hampton Roads Metropolitan Statistical area. U.S. Route 17, to the southeast of town provides access to Interstates 664 (north/south) and 64 (east/west). Main Street, U.S. Route 258, connects to Route 460 which follows the southern side of the James River to Petersburg. State Route 10 which runs north/south on the eastern edge of Smithfield provides access to Interstates 95 and 85.

For local residents this connectivity means an easy commute to employers in Chesapeake, Hampton, Newport News, Portsmouth, Norfolk and Virginia Beach. For visitors, Smithfield is located southeast of Richmond and west of the more densely populated portion of the Hampton Roads area, within an hour's drive for close to two million people, and within a day's drive of over half of the population of the United States.

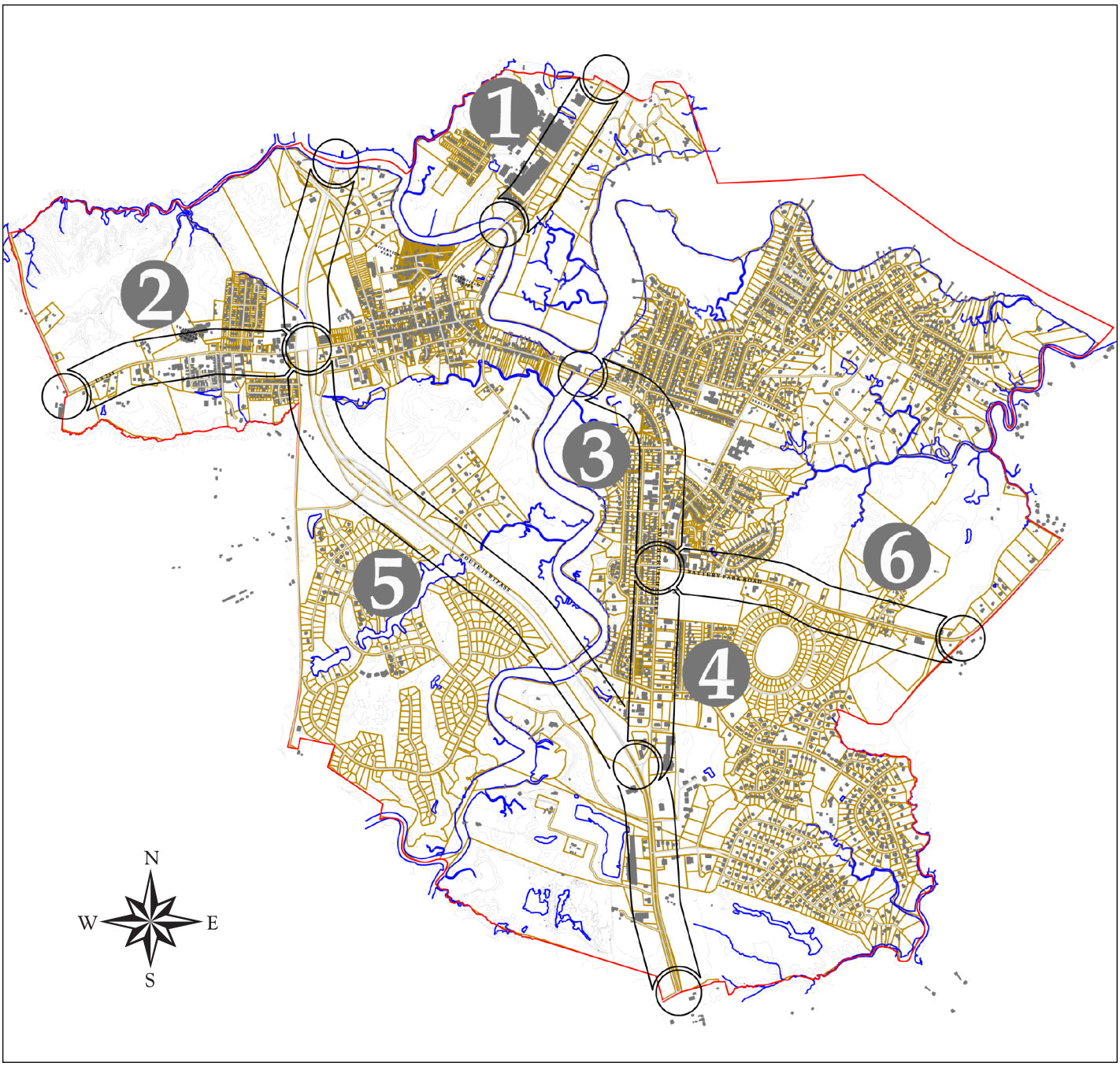
A burgeoning economy in the Hampton Roads area has recently put increased development pressure on the Town and resulted in a concerted effort by Town staff and citizens to define a community vision.

In that regard, the Town of Smithfield has designated certain significant routes of tourist access as Entrance Corridors to ensure a quality of development compatible with the Town's historic, architectural, and cultural resources.

Smithfield's entrance corridors have several characteristics including:

- wide variety in character and quality
- variety in degree of permanence and potential change
- many opportunities for quality new development
- some opportunities for preservation, rehabilitation and infill
- numerous opportunities to incorporate significant vegetation and natural features
- numerous opportunities for supportive streetscape improvements

B. Designated Corridors List and Map



1. North Church Street/Business Route 10:
From the town limits to the Pagan River Bridge

2. West Main Street/US Route 258:
From the town limits to the Route 10 Bypass

3. South Church Street:
From Battery Park Road to Cypress Creek Bridge

4. South Church Street:
From the Bypass to Battery Park Road

5. Benns Church Boulevard/Route 10 Bypass:
From town limits to town limits

6. Battery Park Road:
From South Church Street to the town limits

C. Role and Purpose of Design Guidelines

A set of guidelines is an official policy document responsive to the desired vision for each individual corridor, clearly written and well-illustrated in order to provide a framework for better designed corridors. This manual provides recommendations more specific than the vision statements and design principles set forth in the Comprehensive Plan, and less detailed than the requirements found in Town's Zoning Ordinance. While these guidelines provide specific recommendations for development, they cannot, and are not intended to, cover all circumstances. Rather, the structure and content of the manual are meant to give property owners, developers and reviewers the perspective to address the unique conditions of each project and the flexibility to develop designs that meet the intent, principles and spirit of the guidelines.

1. **General Role and Purpose**

   The Smithfield Entrance Corridor Design Guidelines are intended to serve a number of purposes. They are to:

   - Educate property owners, designers, developers, the public, and plan reviewers on what the Town of Smithfield expects and desires for new development along the designated corridors. This is accomplished by increased public awareness of design issues and the detailed guidance available through the dissemination of the guidelines publication. As an end result current property values can be protected and, in some cases, enhanced.
   - Present clear concepts based on the Town's Comprehensive Plan principles for achieving this vision. These include promotion of attractive and orderly development while ensuring consistency of building design, signage, and landscape design respectful of Smithfield's regional architecture.
   - Identify important design concerns and recommend appropriate design approaches. Therefore, guidelines can help resolve specific design issues, resulting in more appropriate changes and improving the quality of new developments and redevelopments.
   - Illustrate specific techniques to use when planning and designing developments and individual buildings.
   - Provide an objective and fair basis for review of projects by the Planning Commission.

2. **Limits of Design Guidelines**

   While design guidelines may have numerous benefits, they also have limits:

   Design guidelines do not:

   - Increase new construction or rehabilitation activities
   - Improve maintenance
   - Regulate amount/location new development
   - Regulate interior design
   - Insure highest quality design
   - Restrict creative solutions

Entrance Corridor Design Guidelines provide guidance for property owners, developers, designers, and a tool for the reviewing entity, Smithfield's Planning Commission, to assist them in this review process. These guidelines are based on general design concepts stated in the Comprehensive Plan, and discussed in the next section.

D. Background for Design Guidelines

1. The 1999 Comprehensive Plan

In the *Smithfield Comprehensive Plan, Chapter 2: Goals and Objectives*, is the following Major Goal Statement:

> "Protect and enhance both existing and future development in Smithfield through pro-active growth management programs and progressive community design guidelines."

A number of the steps outlined to move this goal forward are particularly applicable to the Entrance Corridor Overlay (ECO) and are listed as below:

- Protect and enhance the unique qualities of Smithfield's small town atmosphere, as well as its sense of history and place.
- Promote development opportunities which respect, preserve and protect the Town's ambience, historic properties, waterfront areas and sensitive environmental areas.
- Ensure the high quality of future development in the Town by enacting creative urban design standards and implementation procedures.
- Emphasize strict adherence to well-coordinated urban design themes as well as the organized phasing of adequate public infrastructure to support the Town's remaining undeveloped parcels.
- Encourage continued streetscape and pedestrian improvements throughout the Town.

In the *Comprehensive Plan, Chapter 7: Historic Areas Plan - Recommendations for Future Preservation Planning*, the ECO zoning is further tasked to:

- Mark distinct entrance points to the historic area
- Preserve viewsheds and important landmark views
- Guide development and ensure compatibility with existing zoning, conserve the natural, historical, and architectural character of the district and
- Define a visual identity for the district.

Recommendations for issues to be addressed include:

- Provide visual clues which draw visitors to the Historic Area.
- Create a strong sense of arrival to the historic area through the use of distinctive signage.
- Achieve consistency in streetscape through simplicity of design and repetition of common landscape and streetscape elements.
- Create a set of design standards similar to the Smithfield Virginia: Historic District Design Guidelines, which is tailored to address entrance corridor objectives, providing guidance for building and landscaping improvements within these transitional zones.

In *Chapter 8: Major Urban Design Planning Objectives* relating to the Major Goal Statement from Chapter 2 add:

- Reduce structural decay of buildings throughout the Town by strengthening planning, zoning and building code enforcement.
- Promote developments that preserve water quality in the Town's rivers and creeks.

2. The 1999 Corridor Study

In 1999, Higgins Associates of Richmond in conjunction with Smithfield's Town Manager and a volunteer committee, developed an *Entrance Corridor Master Plan* for the Town of Smithfield. This document, which provided the impetus for the development of the Entrance Corridor Overlay (ECO) zoning, included a physical site analysis, site development guidelines, identification of corridor issues and recommendations for the implementation of proposed changes with cost estimates. In addition to the enactment of the overlay zoning, this study has resulted in the installation of corridor gateway signage.

E. Design Principles

Smithfield's special visual character is defined by the area's natural beauty and historic resources. The intent of the entrance corridor guidelines and review process is to enhance the Town's historic, architectural and cultural resources, by ensuring a quality of development compatible with those resources through design control measures. Smithfield's Entrance Corridor Guidelines are based on the following eight Design Principles:

1. **Conserve the natural character of Smithfield including environmentally sensitive areas and view sheds.**

   Preserve open estuaries, and the water quality of the Town's rivers and creeks. Minimize grading and limit the introduction of impervious surfaces. Retain natural topography including mature trees, natural buffers, and wildlife habitats. Encourage plantings of a wide range of native species.

2. **Protect and enhance the unique qualities of Smithfield, as well as its sense of history and place.**

   Preserve historic buildings and distinctive architecture from earlier periods. Encourage new design that is respectful of historic building design. In corridors where substantial pedestrian activity occurs or is encouraged, or where mixed-use and multi-building projects are proposed, strive to create a sense of place. Architectural transplants from other locales and poor quality imitations of the "Colonial" architectural style are examples of building designs that are neither appropriate nor desirable. New development, including franchise development, should complement the Town's character and respect those qualities that distinguish the Town's built environment.

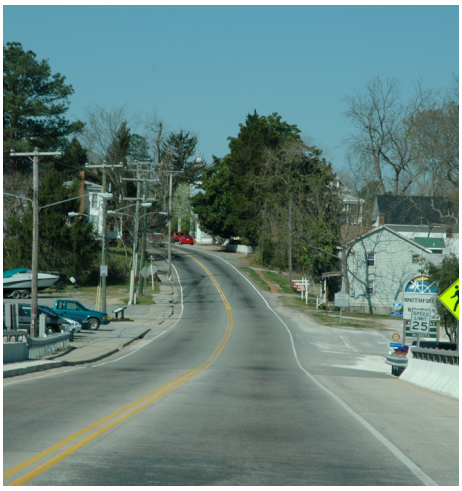
3. **Promote new development opportunities that respect the distinctive atmosphere of the town.**

   Encourage human-scaled, compact, walkable developments. Building arrangements, uses, natural features, and landscaping should contribute, where feasible, to create exterior space where people can interact. Consider the impact of building design, especially height, mass, complexity of form, and architectural details, and the impact of spaces created, on the people who will pass by, live, work, or shop there. The size, placement and number of doors, windows, portals and openings define human scale.

4. **Create a comprehensive system of distinctive signage and repetitive visual clues that identify and direct visitors to Smithfield's historic district.**

   Tourism is playing an increasingly important role in Smithfield and providing a distinctive and attractive public sign system is a vital component in providing a gracious welcome. Gateway signs, community-wide

E. Design Principles



wayfinding sign systems, and area-specific street identification signs all can enhance visitor experience and civic pride.

5. **Emphasize well-coordinated urban design themes and phasing of public infrastructure to support the town's remaining undeveloped parcels.**

   New building design should be compatible (in massing, scale, materials, colors) with neighboring structures that contribute to the overall quality of the corridor and minimize intersections and site access points.
   Redevelopment of existing properties should encourage upgrades consistent with the corridor vision, that enhance the existing streetscapes, and create an engaging public realm. Site designs should contain some common elements to provide continuity along the corridor.

6. **Encourage continued streetscape and pedestrian improvements throughout the town.**

   Design safe, efficient and inviting streetscapes and public spaces. Achieve a consistency of design through repetition of common landscape and streetscape elements.

7. **Promote community development by encouraging proactive and self-sufficient neighborhood groups throughout the town.**

   An involved citizenry is the benchmark of a vital town. Whether a need is originally identified by the town or by an interested group of residents/ business owners, community groups are often the impetus for positive change.

8. **Ensure the high quality of future development in the town by enacting creative urban design standards and implementation procedures.**

   Design pedestrian connections

from sidewalk and car to buildings, between buildings, and between corridor properties and adjacent residential areas. Private signage and advertising should be harmonious and in scale with building elements and landscaping features. Provide screening from adjacent properties and public view of: parking lots, outdoor storage and loading areas, refuse areas, mechanical and communication equipment, and other uses that have adverse impacts. Where feasible, relegate parking behind buildings.
Reduce structural decay of buildings throughout the town by strengthening code enforcement.

F. Design Review Authority

1. Authority: Zoning Ordinance

The *Smithfield Zoning Ordinance, Article 3.R: Entrance Corridor Overlay District (ECO)* defines the purpose of the district as follows:

> "...to protect the aesthetic and visual character of land in the Town of Smithfield adjacent to major existing and proposed highway corridors and to provide for and promote their orderly development. The overlay district regulations are intended to supplement the regulations of the underlying zoning districts and to provide for compatibility of development along the identified corridors."

In particular, this distinct zoning classification was established to:

1. Encourage and better articulate positive visual experiences along the town's major existing and proposed highway corridors.
2. Provide for the continued safe and efficient use of these highway corridors.
3. Maintain natural beauty and scenic, cultural, and historical character of these corridors, particularly distinctive views, vistas, and visual continuity.
4. Protect existing natural vegetation and wildlife habitats along these corridors.
5. Discourage indiscriminate clearing, excessive grading, and clear cutting along these corridors.
6. Minimize cut and fill operations by placing emphasis on the retention of natural topography of these corridors.
7. Minimize intersections and individual site access points along these corridors.

Authority for entry corridor review was first created in the Zoning Ordinance in 2000. The Zoning Ordinance states that:

> "The Planning Commission shall evaluate all proposed development activities within the Entrance Corridor Overlay District, which will include a review of the location, character and appearance of new development in the District. It is the purpose of such review to determine, in a cooperative fashion with the applicant, whether a proposed development plan meets the guidelines and other standards of this District."

State Enabling Legislation

Section 15.2-2306 of the Code of Virginia authorizes localities to regulate the design of development along arterial streets or highways that are significant routes of tourist access to the locality or to designated historic landmarks, buildings, structures or districts, to ensure that such development is architecturally compatible with the historic landmarks, buildings, and structures to which these routes lead.

2. Standards for Review

The following features and factors must be considered by the Planning Commission in determining the appropriateness of proposed construction, reconstruction, alteration or restoration of buildings or structures:

- Overall architectural design, form, and style of the subject building or structure, including, but not limited to the height, mass and scale;
- Exterior architectural details and features of the subject building or structure;
- Texture, materials and color of materials proposed for use on the subject building or structure;
- Design and arrangement of buildings and structures on the subject site;
- The extent to which the features and characteristics described within the paragraphs above, are architecturally compatible (or incompatible) with similar features and characteristics of other buildings and structures having frontage on the same ECO street(s) as the subject property; and
- Provisions of these Entrance Corridor Design Guidelines.

F. Design Review Authority

3. Design Review Process

a. A complete development plan shall be submitted to the Zoning Administrator (see item #4 in this section).

b. After the complete development plan and related materials have been submitted, it shall be reviewed and processed by the Planning Commission and other affected governmental agencies for conformity to the Zoning Ordinance, these guidelines and other applicable regulations. The Planning Commission shall act upon a complete development plan and related materials as submitted by the applicant, or as modified by the development plan review process within thirty (30) days, unless extensive modification to the development plan or extenuating circumstances require additional time.

c. Applicants shall be informed in writing of the outcome of their review including a list of required revisions, if necessary.

d. Applicants shall be informed in writing of a final approval of the development plan.

Activities that do not require development plan review include:

a. Single-family dwellings on individual lots or parcels.

b. Detached single-family dwellings within legally platted subdivisions recorded prior to establishment of the ECO zoning.

c. Agricultural structures required for on-premise farming operations

4. Plan Submission

A development plan must be submitted by the owner of the subject property to the Zoning Administrator for any development in the ECO district. A complete development plan shall include clearly labeled plans, drawings, maps, photographs and/or narratives, the required review fee and other informational materials which may be reasonably required in order make the determinations including:

a. Surveyed property lines.

b. Survey of existing topography and the location of trees and other vegetation meeting the preservation and/or protection provisions of the Zoning Ordinance.

c. A site development plan or plans depicting the dimensions and location of all structures (including rooflines), all site improvements with distances and dimensions, and the bufferyard requirements of the Zoning Ordinance, Article 3.R, Section E.

d. Photographs or drawings of neighboring uses and architectural styles.

e. Location of bordering public or private streets or roads and existing, proposed, and/or approved access points.

f. Comprehensive sign plan prepared pursuant to the Zoning Ordinance, Article 3.R, Section L.

g. Location, dimensions, and layout of all areas to be used for pedestrian movement areas and vehicular and parking areas.

h. Architect's or artist's rendering of all proposed structures depicting the front, side and rear elevations including architectural treatment of all structural exteriors, including building materials and colors to be utilized.

i. A landscaping plan prepared pursuant to Zoning Ordinance, Article 3.R, Section K.

j. Location and design of all proposed exterior site lighting within the proposed development.

k. Location, size, and dimension of all yards and setbacks.

l. A time-line or schedule as to the project start date, completion date, and occupancy date.

5. Appeals

Appeals of a decision by the Zoning Administrator shall be to the Planning Commission as provided in Section 15.2-2311 (1997) of the Code of Virginia.

Appeals of a decision of the Planning Commission by the applicant or a party in interest regarding a site plan, waiver, variation or substitution shall be to the Town Council, provided that such appeal is filed with the Town Manager within ten (10) calendar days of the decision being appealed. The appeal shall be placed on the agenda of the Town Council at the next regular meeting. The Town Council may reverse or affirm, wholly or partly, or may modify the decision of the Planning Commission.

G. How to Use to Entrance Corridor Guidelines Document

The guidelines are organized into four general chapters. Following this introduction section, there are:

Chapter II: Streetscape Guidelines in which more detailed recommendations are given for roads, gateways, landscaping, pedestrian routes, bicycle route, lighting, street furniture, public signage, public art, and utilities and communication equipment.

Chapter III: Site Guidelines includes sections on building placement, parking, paving and sidewalks, landscaping and open space, lighting, fences, walls, berms and screens, signs, and service areas and appurtenances.

Chapter IV: Building Guidelines includes sections on architectural themes, entrance orientation, building mass, scale and height, facade organization, openings, materials and textures, color, details, roof forms and materials, awnings, appurtenances, additions and corridor conversions, franchise design, gas station canopies, and civic and institutional buildings. These general guidelines pertain to all of the corridors and are illustrated with various examples that reflect the particular recommendation.

Beyond these four chapters are individual sections on each of the six corridors:

Chapter V: Individual Corridors documents and evaluates the existing character of these corridors, breaks them into distinctive subareas and provides more specific guidelines for each of them with text, graphics and maps. They also explain the general zoning categories of each corridor and provide a general vision for them as well.

NOTE:

In addition, all individuals using these guidelines are urged to review the detailed sections of the Zoning Ordinance for the specific zoning regulations that pertain to a particular project. In the event that there appears to be differences between the guidelines and the Zoning Ordinance or other regulations, the more stringent standard should be applied.