

Historic Smithfield statement on the 2016 update to the Town of Smithfield Comprehensive Plan June 13, 2016

Historic Smithfield submits the enclosed recommendations – primarily related to land use in the Historic District – for consideration by the Planning Commission as it prepares an update to the Town’s Comprehensive Plan. The recommendations reflect the evolution of the Historic District in the last decade and highlight specific challenges and opportunities that should be addressed in a 2016 update that retains and strengthens the current revision’s core goals and objectives.

Historic Smithfield, Inc.

Historic Smithfield has worked closely with Town leadership since 1989 when it provided fundraising and project management resources for the ten year effort to rehabilitate Main Street and revitalize the Historic District economically and culturally. Its advocacy of physical improvement, quality of life and economic development of the Historic District subsequently involved financial and fiduciary support of the Schoolhouse Museum, Church Street beautification and other projects, sponsorship of Smithfield 2020, and assumption of the ownership, significant repair and operation of the 1750 Courthouse.

This statement was developed by members of Historic Smithfield’s Board of Directors and its Smithfield 2020 Team. Its submission to the Planning Commission has been approved by the Historic Smithfield Board. Inquiries should be directed to HistoricSmithfieldVA@gmail.com.

Recommendations for consideration by the Planning Commission

In the following pages, an issue is identified, a recommendation is proposed, supporting Planning Objectives and Policies from the 2009 Comprehensive Plan are highlighted, and other considerations are offered. The recommendations are presented in the order the associated issue is first discussed in the 2009 Comprehensive Plan.

- Add a Parks and Recreation planning objective for waterfront access – Page 2
- Add a Parks and Recreation planning objective for a public events venue – Page 3
- Add a Transportation, Traffic and Parking planning objective for a parking area – Page 4
- Add an Environment planning objective for additional stormwater management – Page 5
- Define a Planning Area and Sub-Area for the Historic District – Page 6
- Propose land uses for the Pierceville Sub-Area – Page 7
- Extend the Historic District Overlay boundary – Page 10
- Promote the Riverview campus assets – Page 11
- Adjust sub-areas 3 and 4 for commercial uses – Page 12
- Establish a local tax abatement program for historic renovation projects – Page 13
- Incorporate miscellaneous edits and updates – Page 14

The page references below are to the 2009 Comprehensive Plan’s chapters as cataloged in multiple PDFs at www.smithfieldva.gov/content/index/view/id/77/.

Chapter II: Goals and Objectives – Page 8 – IV. Historic Preservation, Parks and Recreation

Issue: The earliest cultural and commercial traditions of Smithfield are tied to its birth as a river port. Currently, the access to the Pagan River waterfront is limited but can be expanded with modest efforts.

Recommendation: Add to Section IV two planning objectives (as was done in 2009 with objective F to evaluate the future of the Windsor Castle property):

- Make Clontz Park pedestrian-accessible from the Historic District. Initiate an engineering evaluation of linking a point of access on North Church Street or the Smithfield Center to Clontz Park with a waterfront boardwalk or walkway. Incorporate signage or information stations that relate the role of the Pagan River in 18th to early 20th century commerce.
- Purchase or lease the several waterfront lots at the foot of Wharf Hill and develop a landscaped pocket park with explanatory signage that relate Smithfield’s river port heritage. Extend the park’s use with added parking capacity.

Supporting planning objectives and policies from Chapter II: Goals & Objectives:

- Public Services planning objective N (page 11): “Identify and secure waterfront property to provide access to the Pagan River for recreational opportunities.”
- Transportation, Traffic and Parking planning objective C (page 12): “Increase parking capacity in the downtown area by providing new and/or expanded public parking facilities.”

Additional considerations: The Major Goal Statement for Historic Preservation, Parks and Recreation (page II. 8) explicitly challenges “...pro-active expansion ...within the context of Smithfield’s historic and cultural traditions.”

Chapter VII: Historic District at page 18, under Additional Opportunities in Public Education, second paragraph (at top of page 19), suggests “introduce eco-tourism tours incorporating a historical theme via the many waterways found in Smithfield.”

The 2009 Sanford Holshouser report, *Enhancing the Economy of Historic Downtown Smithfield*, cataloged the many assets that create an “experience economy” for residents and visitors and it identified several areas of unrealized potential. Specifically, the report recommended (at page 23) that the Town’s comprehensive development plan for the Historic District “designate areas suitable and acceptable for different types of water oriented development and/or facilities.”

83% of respondents to the survey conducted for the 2009 Comp Plan update agreed or strongly agreed that preservation of the waterfront area should be a high priority (chapter VI, page 14).

Chapter II: Goals and Objectives – Page 8 – IV. Historic Preservation, Parks and Recreation

Issue: An appropriately sized venue for outdoor concerts and other public gatherings is needed in the core of the Historic District.

Recommendation: Add to Section IV a planning objective to develop an outdoor public event venue.

Supporting planning objective and policy from Chapter II: Goals & Objectives:

- Public Services planning objective Q (page 11): “Encourage the acquisition, planning and development of appropriately-sized properties for the establishment of new park and recreational areas within the Town to serve both local and regional recreational demands.”

Additional considerations: After three decades of Friday evening performances, the Summer Concert Series is woven into the character of the Historic District. However, the concerts are presented on private property. In recent years, public events such as Olden Days and Town and Country Day have also featured musical performances throughout the Historic District; a location for the placement of the Town’s Christmas tree downtown is a recently highlighted need. The development of a permanent public venue for outdoor concerts and events should be identified as a parks and recreation planning objective.

Chapter II: Goals and Objectives – Page 12 – VII. Transportation, Traffic and Parking

Issue: Parking capacity in the Historic District is near capacity on week-ends and over capacity on special event days and evenings.

Recommendation: Add to Section VII a planning objective to develop Town-owned Joyner field into a well landscaped parking area.

Supporting planning objective and policy from Chapter II: Goals & Objectives:

- Transportation, Traffic and Parking planning objective C (page 12): “Increase parking capacity in the downtown area...”

Additional considerations: The *de facto* public lot behind the Bank of Southside Virginia may be utilized to or nearly to its capacity during week days if 131 Main Street (the former Imagine Art Gallery) is converted to office space, further straining the limited parking availability for visitors and shoppers in the lower blocks of Main Street and first block of North Church Street.

Adding a parking area at Joyner’s field will draw pedestrian traffic to the retail shops in the 300 block.

A larger issue was identified in planning objective C noted above: “...initiate a study that yields a consolidated downtown parking plan.” This and the recommendation for a riverfront park and parking area (page 2 of this document) should be addressed in an analysis and plan for the Historic District’s parking capacity.

Chapter II: Goals and Objectives – Page 13 – Topic: VIII. Environment

Issue: Stormwater management into Cypress Creek, Little Creek and the Pagan River is inadequate. The run-off from much of the downtown area, including Main, Grace, Cedar, Church and connecting streets, flows unfiltered directly into Cypress Creek, Little Creek and the Pagan River.

Recommendation: Add a planning objective to initiate an engineering feasibility study to construct BMP retention pools for run-off into Cypress Creek, Little Creek and the Pagan River. Our creeks and river are environmentally important to our commerce, health, and enjoyed beauty. The Chesapeake Bay Foundation guidelines can be the source for the future.

Supporting planning objectives and policies from Chapter II: Goals & Objectives:

- Community Development planning objective B (page 4): “Promote development opportunities which respect, preserve and protect the Town’s ambiance, historic properties, waterfront areas and sensitive environmental areas.”
- Transportation, Traffic and Parking planning objective J (top of page 13): “Incorporate expanded standards into the Design Standards for ... road and drainage improvements.”

Additional consideration: Chapter XII, Facilities and Infrastructure, sections on Stormwater Management (page 14) and Recommended Future Stormwater Management Improvements (page 19) focus primarily on enforcing Best Management Practices for new developments. The lack of explicit support for existing infrastructure is acknowledged in the chapter; a planning objective to address the issue in developed areas should nonetheless be documented.

Chapter VI: Future Land Use – Page 9 – Planning Areas

Issue: The Historic District is not a designated Planning Area; it should be.

Recommendations: Add an eleventh Planning Area whose boundaries are defined by the Historic District Overlay and remove Pierceville from the current West Main Planning Area.

Retain the current six Historic District Sub-Areas (Chapter VII: Historic Areas, page 10) in the recommended Historic District Planning Area and add a seventh sub-area, Pierceville, circumscribed by Route 10, Main Street, Grace Street and Cary Street.

Document in a new Historic District Land Use sub-chapter three Pierceville Sub-Area Recommendations: commercial property (the former Little’s Market), historic sites (the Schoolhouse Museum and the Pierce house and out-buildings), and developable parcels (the agricultural area west of Cary Street).

Current Chapter VII: Historic Areas provides much of the source material for the content of this recommended new Land Use sub-chapter to Chapter VI. Additional recommendations on the Pierceville sub-area are presented on the next page.

Supporting statements from Chapter VI: Future Land Use:

- Community Development Stages describes at page 7 “Stable”. In the first paragraph, it cites “... taking actions to reinforce the existing character of the area and preventing actions that would compromise or degrade its character.” In the next paragraph, it addresses “threatened neighborhoods” and cites growing development pressures as an example.
- At page 8, it is acknowledged that the Comp Plan’s approach is “... to focus on infill / transition and vacant areas, since these evolving growth sectors could have the most dramatic impact on the future of the Town...”, implying that at the time of the last update the Historic District was not considered as warranting designation as a Planning Area. In 2016, the potential sale of Pierceville qualifies the area as a significant-impact growth sector.

Additional considerations: As presented in other recommendations in this report, there is sufficient unrealized land use potential in several sub-areas of the Historic District to merit an aggregation of objectives, policies and land use recommendations into a newly defined Planning Area. A discussion of the Historic District as a Planning Area also ensures the evaluation of any future use in any sub-area is guided by an analysis process that is consistent with the process used in the other currently defined planning areas.

Critical to the Historic District’s near future – certainly until the next Comp Plan revision – is the land use of the area generally described as the Pierceville property. As presented on the next pages, the recommended Pierceville Sub-Area in particular should be discussed in depth in the 2016 revision of the Comp Plan. This will capture land use objectives to guide developers’ proposals to the current owners and the Planning Commission, and the subsequent evaluations of those proposals by the public, community organizations, the Planning Commission and the Town Council.

Chapter VI: Future Land Use – New sub-chapter K: Historic District Planning Area and the included Pierceville Sub-Area

Issues: The designation of Community Conservation for the Pierceville sub-area was assigned in 2009 in anticipation of possible use for baseball fields, a consideration that is now moot. The need for a carefully considered update to the Future Land Use plan for this last significant open space in the Historic District was brought to the fore by the recent proposal for the development of a single-family home sub-division.

The former Little’s Market and the historic Pierceville farmstead and its agricultural acreage are private properties and are for sale; their future use will, ultimately, be driven by the vision of new owners and developers and their assessments of market demand for a proposed use. To manage how any future land use is proposed by potential new owners and evaluated by Town leadership, the Comprehensive Plan should document specific sub-area recommendations.

Recommendation: As is done with other Planning Areas and sub-areas in the Land Use sub-chapters, the new Historic District Land Use addendum to Chapter VI proposed on the prior page should present the following Sub-Area Recommendations for Pierceville:

- Over-arching vision:
 - A cohesive development of commercial, historic / agricultural and residential land use can complement and enhance the unique character of the Historic District;
 - The involvement of multiple owners and developers with a range of creativity, expertise and experience will be needed;
 - A net positive cultural and economic impact on the Historic District can be achieved.
- Primary objectives:
 - Provide residents in the Historic District and in neighborhoods west of Route 10 access to a commercial area not dependent on tourism;
 - Preserve the Pierce farmstead and surround it with enough acreage for it to be suitable as a private residence or a financially self-sustaining historic interpretation site;
 - Develop the open acreage into a mixed-use neighborhood based on New Urbanism design to add to the cultural and economic vitality of the Historic District.
- Commercial area fronting Main Street: Update to planning category Mixed Use and allow associated zoning designations D, Downtown district and TND, Traditional Neighborhood Overlay.

This accommodates the re-use of the Little’s Market building (assuming structural and financial suitability) and its large parking area. Alternately, if the building is razed, the Main Street frontage could accommodate upper level residential quarters above commercial.

- Historic area encompassing the Pierce house: Retain the “holding pattern” land use Community Conservation and zoning designation C-C, Community Conservation until a specific proposed use is presented. The update to the Comp Plan should acknowledge that future owners may propose a public historic site compatible with the Public and Conservation land use category and the associated Downtown zoning. If rehabilitated into as

a private residence, the land use would default to Low Density Residential, Single Family Detached and the associated DN-R, Downtown Neighborhood Residential zoning district.

This accommodates planning for an uncertain future of an historic building currently the subject of legal action to save it under the Town's Demolition by Neglect ordinance and for which restoration as an historic attraction or private residence will be a considerable technical and financial challenge. It is left to negotiations between the property owner and a potential buyer to establish the amount of acreage around the house and out-buildings that transfer with the ownership. Any such negotiation must reflect the imperative that the restoration and future use of the house and outbuildings will be guided by an unequivocal commitment to preserving the rich heritage of what may be the oldest buildings in the Historic District.

Two recently proposed scenarios suggest creative public uses for the historic site. One envisions a cultivated area featuring fresh produce in a Pick Your Own enterprise anchored by the Pierce House. Another contemplates an interpretive site of Colonial era farming. Neither contemplates being a Town-supported tourism attraction but rather, a financially self-sustaining modest commercial venture or non-profit community organization. Adding another local and tourism destination dependent on Town taxpayer support is not recommended as an acceptable option for consideration.

The Schoolhouse Museum is currently sited in D zoning; no change is needed.

- Open land extending north from the commercial and historic areas: Update from land use categorization Community Conservation to Mixed Use and associated zoning of MU, Mixed Use district or TND, Traditional Neighborhood Overlay district. (MU and TND were proposed in the 2009 update; it is recommended that they now be implemented.)

Development of single family detached housing in the contemporary sub-division model cannot be rationalized to the character of the Historic District. Examples of vision, creativity and the expertise to execute TND communities exist and can be emulated.

Supporting planning objectives and policies from Chapter II: Goals & Objectives:

- The commercial use recommendation: Community Development planning objective G (page 5) encourages continued streetscape and pedestrian improvements and planning objective I calls for gateway and corridor improvements.
- The commercial use recommendation: Economic Development planning objective A (page 5) encourages new commercial retail and service development; it applies in particular to improving the Little's Market frontage's potential for "... diversification of the Town's consumer-oriented economic base." Planning objective F (page 6) "encourage[s] adaptive re-use within the Town's downtown areas, emphasizing architectural quality and compatibility."
- The historic area use recommendation: Historic Preservation, Parks and Recreation planning objective B (page 8): "Encourage the appropriate reuse of both publicly and privately owned,

historically significant structures in the Town.”

- The residential use recommendation: Community Development planning objective H (page 5): “Ensure high quality of future development...by enacting creative urban design standards... Emphasize, encourage and employ cluster development where feasible.”
- The residential use recommendation: Housing planning objective D (page 7) suggests development opportunities for single family homes “...including creative use of cluster development, new urbanism design concepts, and ‘smart growth’ practices.”
- The residential use recommendation: Historic Preservation, Parks and Recreation planning objective C (page 8): “Guide contemporary development in a way which complements the historic fabric of the Town and works to strengthen the overall character of the community.”
- The residential use recommendation: Land Use planning objective A (page 9) calls for new development and infill properties which are compatible with existing neighborhoods in (objective B) areas “...having the strongest urban development potentials.”

Additional considerations: Chapter V, Projections, at page 6, asserts “[a] major objective of the Comprehensive Plan is to identify adequate areas for future development of appropriate residential housing units” and identifies building on currently vacant property and “in concert with the revitalization and redevelopment of existing structures...”

The entrance corridor to the Historic District has been neglected and presents a development challenge; Pierceville adds a complicating factor. The two primary parcels will likely still be privately owned and for sale to the highest bidder when the Comp Plan update is adopted. Unlike the recent scenario when a developer’s offer to purchase the Pierceville property was contingent on land use and zoning changes, future development proposals should be guided and evaluated by clearly articulated Sub-Area Recommendations.

Parsing the Sub-Area into three land uses will likely result in multiple parties proposing development and negotiating the sale of discrete parcels. The complication of coordinating a commercial and residential mix that involves two current owners and coordinating a historic site and residential mix that also involves two owners is acknowledged. Further complicating any proposed residential land use is its cohesion with the adjoining Historic District neighborhoods. Historic Smithfield’s recommendations acknowledge that the Comprehensive Plan cannot dictate land use but the Comp Plan does establish clear parameters for the review of the fit of proposals within the zoning allowed for the land use. The presentation of Mixed Use in Chapter VI: Future Land Use (page 25) provides a comprehensive description and catalogs several objectives of the approach, including “...encourag[ing] mixed use greenfield and in-fill development” and “...provid[ing] the urban infrastructure and amenities...”

The challenge to introduce and adopt a new “Traditional Neighborhood Overlay Option” (last paragraph, page 26) is particularly germane to the Pierceville Sub-Area and offers an approach that is consistent with the Comprehensive Plan’s core goals and objectives.

Chapter VII: Historic Areas – Page 8 – Smithfield Historic Preservation Overlay District

Issue: A portion of the agricultural area on the Pierceville property – bounded on the west by Route 10 and the northeast by Cary Street – is outside the Historic Preservation Overlay District boundary.

Recommendation: Extend the northwest corner of the Overlay District to the point where Route 10 and Cary Street / Mill Swamp Road cross.

Supporting Comp Plan statement:

- The discussion on the Overlay District, in the 4th paragraph, explains that the Overlay imposes an architectural review requirement “...to protect the rich architectural integrity of the district.”

Additional consideration: The area is contiguous with the Pierceville agricultural acreage. Future land use proposals for the property could exploit an opportunity to exclude some portion of development from Historic District guidelines; extending the Overlay ensures that adherence to the Historic District guidelines is not dependent on a future developer’s proffers.

Chapter VII: Historic Areas – Page 10 – Sub-Area 1 – Riverview/James/Cary Streets

Issue: The sub-area’s description mentions the then-recently completed YMCA but does not include the Library, the Paul D. Camp Community College facility and the County-maintained Riverview Park (collectively, the “Riverview campus”).

Recommendations: Enumerate the several facilities that constitute the Riverview campus as key resources to the sub-area and the Historic District.

Set an objective to investigate and exploit the full potential of the Riverview campus through a working partnership between the Town and County and by extension, the regional library system, the local community college, the Head Start program’s local organization and the YMCA.

Supporting planning objectives and policies from Chapter II: Goals & Objectives:

- Community Development planning objective J (page 5) suggests stronger and better coordinated planning and review of proposals in the County that could impact the Town. The Riverview campus recommendation is a new opportunity for a joint effort.
- Public Services planning objective L (page 11) addresses the recommendation unequivocally: “Increase utilization of the Paul D. Camp Community College and promote other local continuing education and vocational opportunities.”

Additional consideration: The Riverview Campus is a significant neighbor to the Pierceville Sub-Area recommended at page 6 of this document. Promoting Campus resources and community value should factor into any planned development of the Pierceville Sub-Area; an explicit commitment of support for the campus encourages such planning considerations by developers.

Chapter VII: Historic Areas – Page 12 – Sub-Areas 3 and 4

Issue: A more cohesive and coordinated planning approach for the commercial activity in Sub-Area 3 (Main Street west of its intersection with Grace Streets) and Sub-Area 4 (Commercial Main Street) is needed.

Recommendation: Remove from Sub-Area 3, Main and Grace Streets, that portion of Main Street that extends beyond its intersection with Grace Street (in particular the former Little's Market parcel) and assign it to Sub-Area 4, Commercial Main Street.

Supporting planning objectives and policies from Chapter II: Goals & Objectives:

- Economic Development planning objective C (page 5): “Work with existing businesses and property owners to ensure the continued viability of the Town’s existing commercial areas.”
- Economic Development planning objective F (page 6): “Encourage adaptive re-use within the Town’s downtown areas, emphasizing architectural quality and compatibility.”
- Land Use planning objective B (page 9): “Develop and implement initiatives and procedures to encourage development in target areas identified as having the strongest urban development potential.”

Additional considerations: The entrance corridor to the Historic District is primarily commercial and though it does not date to the original center of early commercial activity, its character should be managed more cohesively with lower Main Street than with the Main and Grace Streets areas that are primarily residential.

The 300 block of Main Street has become a mix of residential and commercial use and the Town has indicated that it supports a continued shift in uses. Placing that section of Main Street in Sub-Area 4 will facilitate the town’s efforts to promote viable commercial activity throughout the entire Main Street corridor that lies within the Historic District.

Chapter VII: Historic Areas – Page 19 – Promoting Preservation Incentives

Issue: The current revision catalogs incentives such as the Federal and state tax credit programs for the rehabilitation and preservation of historic properties. It recommends that the Town “... actively promote these programs among residents and property owners within the Historic District.” The local incentive support, however, is presented less forcefully with a statement that the Town “... may also consider developing a local tax abatement program...” (last paragraph of the section, page 20).

Recommendation: Promote the development of a property tax abatement incentive for historic preservation or restoration projects.

Supporting planning objective and policy from Chapter II: Goals & Objectives:

- Historic Preservation, Parks and Recreation planning objective A (page 8) calls for preserving “... the integrity of the architectural and historic character...by protecting historic buildings and neighborhoods...”

Additional considerations: The tax abatement should be limited to the increased property value for a finite number of years.

The Comp Plan update can also cite an opportunity for a complementary Isle of Wight real estate tax abatement incentive. Jointly developing a tax abatement incentive program demonstrates Town and County commitment to historic preservation.

Chapter VII: Historic Areas – Miscellaneous edits and updates

Page 11, Exhibit VII-2 (map of Historic District Sub-Areas) and pages 13 and 14

The delineation of Sub-Areas 5 and 6 on the map and the related descriptions are reversed.

Page 18, Recommendation for future preservation planning

The second line references the implementation of preservation strategies “... particularly over the past decade...” To ensure less time-specific context in this and future updates and to underscore the Town’s long-term commitment to historic preservation, alternate wording might suggest that the strategies have been pursued since 1989.

Page 18, Expansion of the Corridor Overlay District

A recommendation was made in the last update that the ECOs also include the Great Springs Road and Cary Street corridors. The recommendation should be broadened in this update and suggest that the West Main Street entrance corridor be extended east beyond the Route 10 Bypass down Main Street to its intersection with Underwood Lane, encouraging that the ECO guidelines be applied to the critical transition from Route 10 into the Historic District.

Chapter II: Goals and Objectives, Community Development planning objective G (page 5) supports this recommendation: “Encourage continued streetscape, landscaping and pedestrian improvements throughout the Town.”

Page 20, Continued Town Staff Support:

The reference on the 14th line to “Historic Downtown Smithfield (HDS)” should be updated to “Historic Smithfield”. A change in the name of the organization was filed with the State Corporation Commission in 1990.

Page 20, Continued Town Staff Support:

A recent example underscoring the comment on the 14th line related to the Town Staff and Historic Smithfield working together to expand historic preservation should be cited: The ownership of the 1750 Isle of Wight Courthouse was transferred from Preservation Virginia to Historic Smithfield in 2013 and subsequently more than \$200,000 was raised to rehabilitate the iconic building.