PRESERVING RURAL CHARACTER: A ROUTE 33 HIGHWAY CORRIDOR PLAN FOR DELTAVILLE

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EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

INTRODUCTION

Charting the Course: County of Middlesex, Virginia 2001 Comprehensive Plan identifies preserving the rural character of the county as a high priority. In Section V.C.3, rural developmental patterns are addressed: “an essential element of the rural development pattern is the open space containing agricultural fields and the natural and wooded lands that separate its settlements.” It is further stated, “in order to maintain the rural nature of the County undeveloped open areas separating these general centers should be left undeveloped except for sparsely located residential and farmstead-like settlements.” Also the basis for this study originated from an implementation strategy found in V.C.12 of Charting the Course: County of Middlesex, Virginia 2001 Comprehensive Plan which states “study the creation of corridor protection districts...”

Middlesex County is currently in the process of updating its Comprehensive Plan. Corridor protection was identified in the 2001 Comprehensive Plan as a high priority in preserving overall rural character. The development of corridor plans will be a major part of the updated Comprehensive Plan process. This corridor plan is intended to be a model for development of other corridor plans throughout the County.

The main corridor of Middlesex County, Virginia is Route 33. Development has already begun to spread between settlements, merging centers together in a strip development pattern along the County’s Route 33 Highway Corridor. Corridor planning is needed to address the County’s desire to maintain its rural, open space character in the face of new development pressures.
Deltaville is located at the most eastern part of Middlesex County and is the last town-like-development on the Rt. 33 Highway Corridor. Rt. 33 ends at the edge of the County’s peninsula in the Deltaville area. Deltaville is a place name and is not an incorporated town. Currently there are no growth boundaries that apply to this area. As with many rural areas, commercial growth is occurring on the main thoroughfare in a linear manner.

VISION

COMMERCIAL CORE

Deltaville is an enticing vacation spot that continues to draw travelers along the Rt. 33 Corridor to their destination. Deltaville’s unique nautical theme attracts tourist while providing for the needs of year-a-round residents. Deltaville is a community that effectively capitalizes on its close proximity to the Rappahannock River, the Piankatank River, the Chesapeake Bay, and the numerous marinas, which provide numerous boating and water recreation opportunities. Deltaville’s commercial core has a small-town “main street” feel that is safe and inviting for both pedestrian and vehicular traffic.

RURAL OUTLYING AREAS

The lands just outside of commercial core areas remain rural in character protecting the beautiful countryside along the Rt. 33 corridor in between town-like developments. Permanent measures are in place to protect the open space and scenic elements. Landowners in the rural outlying areas along the corridor are given incentives to preserve land adjacent to Route 33.
PLAN STATEMENT

HIGHWAY OVERLAY DISTRICT

The creation of an overlay district is imperative to the implementation of this plan. Overlay districts serve to create an additional layer of regulations and standards that are superimposed over the underlying zoning designation. This useful planning tool allows the County to provide unique and specific attention, by the way of additional standards, to select areas while avoiding the rezoning process. A rezoning process would be politically undesirable at this time. The corridor requires immediate attention in order to stop the strip development pattern and a rezoning would be a lengthy process that the corridor protection effort cannot afford. Overlay districts have been used to deal with various planning issues such as historic preservation, environmental protection, economic development, and scenic highway and byway preservation.

A Route 33 Highway Overlay district is the first necessary step in protecting the corridor's rural character. An overlay district is the appropriate tool because of the necessary flexibility required to address the area's unique rural character. The following plan's recommendations are contingent on the creation of a highway overlay district.

HIGHWAY OVERLAY DISTRICT BOUNDARIES

For the purpose of this plan the overlay district is separated into two categories: the commercial core and the rural outlying areas. The commercial core is defined as the area in which commercial development should be concentrated and contained. The rural outlying areas correspond to those areas just outside of the commercial core, which serve to separate town-like development areas along a corridor.
COMMERCIAL CORE OVERLAY DISTRICT BOUNDARIES

The commercial boundaries correspond with Lord Mott shopping center at Providence Road and the NAPA building at Horseshoe Bend Road. In addition to this linear boundary between these two roads, a 1,000-foot buffer area extends on both sides of Rt. 33.

The 1,000-foot buffer area was chosen because on average it was the distance needed to encompass the majority of parcels that front onto Route 33. Also, the 1,000-foot buffer treats all parcels owners on Rt.33 equitably by requiring the same amount of land to be subject to the additional regulations. Having a set buffer area distance can also avoid complications that might arise when parcels subdivide. Finally, determining which parcels are eligible for the overlay district requirements can be easily determined using a geographic information system.

RURAL OUTLYING AREA OVERLAY DISTRICT BOUNDARIES

When considering growth boundaries for a commercial core, it is also essential to consider the land outside of those areas, which serve to separate town-like-developments from one another. Protecting those commercial core boundaries has as much to do with planning for the land outside the boundaries as it does those parcels within the core. For the purpose of this study, the 1,000-foot buffer applies to those parcels on either side of Rt. 33 between each town-like-development.

The 1,000-foot buffer was also chosen for the rural outlying areas because encompassed the majority of parcels fronting on Rt. 33. As with the commercial core, the uniform 1,000 buffer area is equitable, easy to determine, and does not change as parcels subdivide in the future.
THE PLAN

Goal 1: The Route 33 Highway is a rural scenic corridor with preserved open spaces, sightlines, and pristine view sheds.

The preservation of scenic elements along the RT. 33 corridor is an essential component of preserving the overall rural character in Middlesex County. Open space countryside, rural sightlines, and pristine view sheds are all elements this corridor plan seeks to enhance and preserve. Along the Route 33 corridor, development has already begun to spread between town-like development areas merging centers together in a strip development pattern. Immediate action, including incentives to landowners, vegetative requirements, development boundaries, and decreased access, is required to prevent the stripping of the countryside along the corridor in the rural outlying areas.

Goal 2: Deltaville is a mixed-use town-like development with a strong commercial core that continues to have regional tourist appeal as well as provide for the needs of its year-round residents.

Deltaville’s commercial core should provide a mixture of uses with both residential and commercial opportunities. Encouraging residential to coexist with commercial can strengthen businesses by increasing consumer traffic and accessibility. In addition, overall business within the commercial core can flourish by the creation of a merchant’s association. The merchant’s association should combine efforts with the existing civic association, facilitate joint advertising campaigns, provide workshops, and reward outstanding local businesses.

Goal 3: Deltaville’s commercial core is both safe and
inviting for pedestrian and vehicle traffic.

Creating a safe and inviting commercial core that caters to both pedestrian and vehicle traffic has numerous benefits such as encourages consumer activity, alleviates vehicular dependency, and promotes ease of access. Establishing strong pedestrian links, calming traffic, and reducing access points are essential in developing a more safe and inviting commercial core. This should be accomplished through requiring sidewalks as part of subdivision and site plan approval, lowering speed limits, installing crosswalks, and regulating access points.

Goal 4: Deltaville's strong development character serves to define it as a fun unique place.

The commercial core of Deltaville already has a unique development character consisting of a nautical theme. Fun beach inspired colors, boat related signage, and landscape elements work together to give Deltaville a strong identity. However, these are all voluntary elements, as no development guidelines currently exist. Guidelines need to be addressed to ensure future development continues this nautical theme. A flexible site plan review point system should be utilized for parcels within the commercial core. Also Deltaville’s unique image needs to be marketed in such a way to maintain its resident and tourist appeal. This can be accomplished through hosting an annual summer festival, creating unique logo, marketing logo, and promoting Deltaville as a marine related supply destination.