

COMMUNITY DESIGN

Winston Churchill once said, “We shape the buildings; thereafter, they shape us.” That thought is not just applicable to a single structure, but to the community as a whole. The quality of our life is enhanced or impeded by the environment we live in. The experiences of living, working, traveling and engaging in recreation are, in large measure, defined by the natural and built environments of our community.

Good community design presumes using practical and aesthetic principles to create a community that functions at a high standard. Such a place provides its residents with a quality of life that responds to the needs for beauty, safety, health, economy, leisure, recreation and vitality. After reviewing existing community design conditions, this chapter presents strategies for improving those conditions to produce a community that is functional and aesthetically pleasing.



I. EXISTING CONDITIONS

The bedrock of community livability is community design—design that takes into account and deliberately reflects the aspirations and goals of the community for life, work, learning, play and growth. Defined thus, “design” is far more than a “product.” It’s both a way of looking at challenges and problems and discovering opportunities.” John Anderson FAIA, (2001 AIA President.) Community design combines public policy and social concerns with the physical layout and appearance of a community. A community with a clear identity is distinctive. This identity is communicated through the general urban plan, the layout of the streets, the physical design of the buildings and the preservation of historical assets. An enhanced community is a place that people are proud to call home.

Any discussion of design necessitates the defining of vocabulary. The artist speaks of line, color, shape, form and texture. The design of community does not depart from these same concepts, only expands upon them into the three-dimensional world we live in. Line, color, shape, form and texture are experienced in the linear quality of streets and rivers, the texture of the soft landscape and hard pavement, the diverse colors of brick and board and so on.

TERMINOLOGY

Articulation: The use of varying depth of wall planes both in the vertical and horizontal dimension to create interest and an aesthetically pleasing appearance in a building façade.

Context: The interrelated conditions in which something exists or occurs.

Corridors: Built paths that serve pedestrian and automobile traffic and the surrounding development that is served by them, as well as natural paths such as rivers and/or streams.

Curvilinear edge: A curvilinear edge is an undulating line where the planting bed and or groundcover/shrubs meet the lawn area. Curvilinear lines in a natural landscape are considered more aesthetically pleasing than linear lines.

Districts: Sub-components of Rocky Mount that are defined by neighborhoods, land uses, etc.

Edges: Transition areas that separate natural and built environments as well as districts.

Franchise Architecture: The term “franchise architecture” means the design and construction of buildings for which the tenants and/or uses are readily recognizable solely by the buildings’ architectural elevations, colors, materials, other architectural elements and/or the arrangement thereof.

Façade: The elevation or exterior “face” of a structure.

Gateways: Gateways are located at the key vehicular points of entry to the city limits of Rocky Mount. Effective use of design elements reflect community pride and sense of place.

Groves: A grouping of trees comprised of the same species.

Major Arterials: These roads are the major traffic carriers in urban areas. The major arterial has as its main objective the carrying of traffic through the community, from one part to another. Chapter 5, Transportation, includes a full discussion of major arterials.

Nodes: Areas that attract and/or support high volumes of activity and interaction.

Overlay District: A defined area within which additional zoning requirements are “overlaid” onto the existing base zoning district.

Pedestrian Scale: An environment that is a pleasing walking experience will have common ingredients that define it as related to the pedestrian as opposed to the vehicular scale. The appropriate size and placement of elements, landscaping, choice of materials, buffers from traffic etc. all contribute to pedestrian scale.

Proportion: The relationship of one part to another with respect to magnitude, quantity, or degree.

Scale: A distinctive relative size, extent or degree.

Signage: The physical and structural means of promoting and identifying with graphics and or text. This would include signs for the purposes of promoting products, events, businesses, institutions, or other establishments. Examples include business signs, neighborhood association signs, subdivision signs, billboards, banners, sales signs and notices, building group signs and other various forms which may be viewed on structures, posts and at roadside edge.

Street Buffer: A landscape screening element located on private property adjacent to the street right-of-way line.

Vision without action is a daydream. Action without vision is a nightmare.”

Old Japanese Proverb



A. GATEWAYS

The primary gateways for Rocky Mount are the front doors of our community and make that first impression upon all who enter. While Rocky Mount is easily accessible from most directions, many of our entry points are lacking in focus. There are few places in entering the city that are announced with a sense of arrival, a sense of place and a feeling of pride in the community. It is important that these gateways are given ample consideration in the future to provide a positive and lasting first impression.

Primary gateways include Winstead & US-64, NC 301 at the northern and southern municipal boundaries, N. Raleigh Street at Springfield Road, S. Church Street at the southern municipal boundary, Business 64 entry from US 64 at Sunset Avenue, Benvenue Road at Peele Road, Amtrak/CSX rail lines and the exchange at I-95 and US 64.



Gateway sign on NC-97 south of the City.

In addition to those mentioned above, there are several interchanges within the City limits along US 64 and US 301 (Bypass and Business) that serve as internal entry points. These also deserve attention

at a scale appropriate to the individual place. Primary gateways should announce that you have arrived at a destination of importance. A program of City Entrance Landscape should be enhanced and prioritized. Site design should take into consideration the physical parameters and relative importance of the individual site in the selection of design approach. Some design elements that may be used to enhance our gateways include: well designed signage, landscape, lighting, beams, fencing, etc.

Nodes are those areas of highest activity and prominence in the City. The visual quality of any such place should reflect visually that prominence and be respectful of Rocky Mount as a community.



Tarrytown—the symbol of loss to Hurricane Floyd. This critical node stands at the corner of Sunset & Wesleyan Blvd.

B. NODES

Nodes or activity centers are those areas that serve as gathering places for residents and visitors. Examples include parks, commercial shopping centers, historic areas, etc. Nodes provide opportunities at the neighborhood and City scale for people to gather and exchange ideas. This interaction can greatly affect the community's quality of life; therefore, it is important that these areas be well planned and inviting. The major nodes in Rocky Mount include the following:

- Downtown Rocky Mount
- North Carolina Wesleyan College
- Battle Park and Sunset Park
- Tar River Reservoir
- Golden East Mall and the former Tarrytown Mall
- Westridge Shopping Center (Sunset and Winstead)
- Oakwood Shopping Center
- Development at intersections of Major Thoroughfares



Vietnam Memorial at Sunset and Thomas



NATIONAL HISTORICAL REGISTER PROPERTIES FOR NASH AND EDGECOMBE COUNTIES

NASH COUNTY

BATTLEBORO Vicinity

- The Meadows (Robert Carter Hilliard House)
- Bellamy-Phillips House

HILLIARDSTON Vicinity

- General Joseph Arrington House

WHITAKERS Vicinity

- Bellamy's Mill

Rocky MOUNT Vicinity

- Bellemonte
- Benvenue
- Falls Road Historic District
- Dr. Franklin Hart Farm (Hidden Path)
- Mac Haven (Hines House)
- Rocky Mount Central City Historic District
- Rocky Mount Electric Power Plant
- Rocky Mount Mills
- Rocky Mount Mills Village Historic District
- Rose Hill Plantation
- Stonewall
- Villa Place Historic District

NASHVILLE Vicinity

- Bissette-Cooley House
- Dr. Hassell Brantley House
- Nash County Courthouse
- Nashville Historic District

RED OAK Vicinity

- Black Jack

DORTCHES Vicinity

- Dortch House

MIDDLESEX Vicinity

- Taylor's Mill

SPRING HOPE Vicinity

- Spring Hope Historic District

EDGECOMBE COUNTY

TARBORO Vicinity

- The Barracks
- Calvary Episcopal Church and Churchyard
- Coats House
- Coolmore Plantation (NHL)
- Cotton Press
- Eastern Star Baptist Church
- Edgecombe Agricultural Works
- The Grove (Blount-Bridgers House)
- Howell Homeplace
- Lone Pine
- Oakland Plantation
- Quigless Clinic
- Railroad Depot Complex
- Redmond-Shackleford House
- St. Paul Baptist Church
- Tarboro Historic District
- Tarboro Town Common
- Walston-Bulluck House (Pender Museum)

Old SPARTA Vicinity

- Bracebridge Hall
- Piney Prospect

LEGGETT Vicinity

- Cedar Lane

Rocky MOUNT Vicinity

- Edgemont Historic District

MERCER Vicinity

- Dr. A.B. Nobles House and McKendree Church

BATTLEBORO Vicinity

- Old Town Plantation
- St. John's Episcopal Church

PINETOPS Vicinity

- Vinedale

CONETOE Vicinity

- Wilkinson-Dozier House
- Worsley-Burnette House



D. HISTORIC AND ARCHAEOLOGICAL RESOURCES

The City of Rocky Mount has a significant variety of historic resources of local and national designation. Those listed in the National Register of Historic Places include a fine group of Historic Districts and Landmarks. See the table on the previous page for a complete listing.

The Rocky Mount City Council established the Historic Preservation Commission in 1997 to designate local historic districts. The majority of Nash County's recognized historic sites are concentrated in the Rocky Mount and Nashville areas. According to the Edgemcombe



Downtown Rocky Mount—1940's

County Historical Society, several historic homes exist in the Rocky Mount area as well. The table on page 4 lists all National Registry sites for the two counties. Although many historic landmarks have been destroyed, the Rocky Mount area still has many significant early homes, some of which are in excellent condition and some of which are still intact with working farms. Such landmarks display the City's heritage and add to the surrounding rural character and visual beauty.

Rocky Mount has been the subject of very few archeological investigations. While the number of known sites is small, it is likely that many hundred unrecorded archeological sites exist within the boundaries of Rocky Mount. Pre-historic sites are likely to exist along the major rivers and streams and within the broad upland areas. Historic period sites are most likely to occur along old road networks and major river transportation routes. Until more archeological investigations are undertaken, specific site locations cannot be identified.

D. Corridors

The corridors of our community are linear areas that develop in response to the available transportation opportunities of the natural and built environment. For this discussion, we will focus on corridor areas including the road systems, the surrounding built environment and the quality of the environment therein. These corridor areas frequently link and include the major Nodes of our Community, the focus areas of high activity and Districts, sections or areas of the greater city with its own distinct function and form. The elements and patterns developed greatly influence the sense of place of any individual corridor area. In Rocky Mount, the primary built corridors include I-95, US 301, US 64, Sunset Avenue, Winstead Avenue, Benvenue Road, Jeffries Road and the CSX Railroad.

1. I-95 and US-64 Corridors



While the design aspects of these highways themselves are set by the North Carolina Department of Transportation (NCDOT) and outside of the jurisdiction of the City, they do distinctly influence our overall Community Design. From a circulation aspect, these corridors heavily influence the community form. Access onto the highways and access across them control much of the flow of traffic and ultimately the development of the City. Transportation Map 5-2 illustrates this point very well. The highways divide our city and the collector streets unite it.

Another aspect of the highway deserving attention is the planted environment, the green space that accompanies the right of way. The NCDOT highway flower program, with its expansive plantings of cosmos and daisies, is an example of enhanced environment that is appreciated by all who travel these roads. US-64 has extensive median plantings of crepe myrtles and shrubbery. The access ramps also show intensive landscape efforts. The City benefits from these immensely and could utilize these kind of landscape details at major Nodes and Arterials and Gateways through the ETJ.

The development immediately adjacent to the highways, Gold Rock, is included in this corridor area. Since Gold Rock is part of the City, it should reflect much of the same qualities desired in other gateways. Gold Rock is a small area dominated by the motel/travel industry, serving the needs of travelers on I-95. Thousands of people travel by and through these corridors daily and this makes it imperative that Gold Rock's visual appearance have a welcoming quality.



US-64 and the NCDOT flower program



This view from the Southern part of the Downtown corridor illustrates the prominence of the railroad in our community and the design challenges it presents.

2. Downtown Central City District Corridor

This district and corridor is characterized by a variety of land uses including residential, commercial, office, government and religious. The most prominent characteristic of the Downtown is the CSX Railroad which divides the Downtown into two halves. The historical significance of the placement of the tracks is clear, but the consequences of its continued presence are many. While it continues to provide a marvelous opportunity as a transportation system, the tracks represent a physical and mental division of the city in many ways. The inconvenience of trains blocking access crossing throughout the day is a hindrance to traffic flow which is only partially solved by the Sutton tunnel and bridge at the southern end and railroad overpass at the northern end of the Downtown area. The difficulty in pedestrian crossings of the tracks is a critical design problem that must be addressed. Currently, pedestrians must brave the car traffic, the trains and the very tracks themselves to cross from one side of Main Street to the other. This is a daunting task to say the least. One aspect of the railroad in Downtown that is most welcome is the Train Station. This building is a major landmark of our community and recently underwent extensive renovations. (Note the Train Station photograph on page 1 of Chapter 5).



100 Block of South East Main Street— a resource to be celebrated

The core of the district is 3 1/2 blocks of near contiguous historical facades on Main Street. Few communities have such an intact resource. The area is designated as a National Historic District and contains many beautiful examples of historic commercial architecture. The challenge comes with the lagging real estate market for these properties, the high vacancy rate and the lack of maintenance for too many buildings. Earlier renovations to some historical facades have not been well planned or executed, leaving a portion of the buildings with fragmented design of little appeal. In the most recent past, the Downtown is experiencing an increased energy level. The combined low interest rates, facade grant programs and emerging interest are all promising developments.

Just to the north of this area on the Douglas Block, the adjacent tobacco warehouse is currently being demolished. This building suffered from lack of attention over many years and is now lost. This is not an isolated case. Dedication to improving the overall maintenance of these buildings should be a priority. New approaches will be needed to accomplish that task.



Douglas Block Area
Courtesy of R. M. Telegram

There are currently two façade programs (see Chapter 12, Neighborhoods) to provide funding for the improvement and preservation of the Downtown area. Further funding options should be researched and developed. The new Land Development Code, currently being drafted, should establish the basis for enforcing codes that preserve our existing buildings and raise the standard for new Community Design.

The City must recognize the importance of the Downtown District and continue to seek ways to revitalize the area. Safety, function and appearance must each be addressed. Particular emphasis should be placed on creating a safe environment. In addition to safety, appearance is critical to improving the health and well-being of the area. The use of underground utilities on both sides of the tracks would significantly improve the appearance. The development of green spaces and pedestrian amenities such as benches, lighting, tree-scapes and increased handicapped-sensitive detailing will increase the pleasurable experience of walking through the Downtown area. The community design needs of the Downtown area present unique challenges and opportunities for the City.

3. Sunset Avenue, Winstead Avenue, Benvenue Road Raleigh Road, Jeffreys Road

These corridors are distinctly commercial for a significant portion of their length. The development is of numerous strip areas branching off into mini-malls and connecting with the larger commercial corridor of 301/Wesleyan Boulevard. They do share many of the same problems and assets. Commercial development varies greatly in appeal, quality and economic viability. Some are more successful than others in appeal. The architecture is adequate in some ways and the buildings well maintained. The most attractive stretches of these corridors have tree plantings and landscaped medians. However, there are numerous appearance concerns that should be addressed.

- High intensity franchise signs clutter the view in many places.
- It is disturbing to see whole buildings painted in loud color schemes that are not conducive to the harmony of the City as a whole.
- Utility service lines are not an attractive element in the corridors.
- Some of these areas could benefit greatly with sidewalks and additional tree and median landscaping.
- The newest retail area features a Super WalMart and strip mall. The typical franchise architecture makes this area not all that it could be in terms of design.



301 Corridor - a reductions of utility lines, competing signage, and the appropriate landscaping materials would greatly improve this corridor. (photo by R. M. Telegram)

quality, insufficient landscape, huge expanses of parking, utilities lines above ground and varied quality of site design applies to this corridor. While acknowledging the deficits, these are viable businesses in this area. They frequently show well-maintained buildings, a better quality of materials and design than exhibited in the rest of the community. Still the community must consider the repercussions of larger expanses of such areas, how they will age in terms of function and appeal and how to improve the outcome of growth and age of this crucial corridor.



Sunset and Business 64 is an important intersection in this community. The design treatment of it does not display that prominence as a node and a gateway.

The City of Rocky Mount deserves Community Design that is appropriate to the context of our community in articulation, scale, and proportion...design that takes reference from and contributes to the fullness of life.

4. US 301/Wesleyan Boulevard N. (Sunset to NC 43)

The primary commercial corridor, it serves the Golden East Crossing Mall, a substantial number of restaurants and additional retail. This boulevard is the largest major crossing in the City with broad open medians and wide shoulders. Pedestrian scale is completely lost here. There are virtually no sidewalks, and crossing the street is dangerous. The traffic in the area immediately around the Golden East Crossing Mall and neighboring Super Wal-Mart is significant by Rocky Mount standards. Concerns for sign design



Old Walmart stands empty since the company moved to a larger location a few blocks away. The loud color scheme at the entry do not compensate for the immense unbroken façade of the big box architecture.



301 South is represented by widely spaced commercial businesses. Time will likely bring development to this area as well.

5. US 301 North and South of the Golden East Mall

This corridor is dominated by commercial properties. These corridor stretches have broad unplanted medians and wide shoulders. They lack sidewalks, landscaping, and underground utilities. The density of traffic and buildings is distinctly less than in the area described near the Golden East Mall. The businesses vary tremendously in quality of site design, signage, age and condition of structure and economic viability.

The Battleboro district, at the Northern part of the ETJ, serves as one of the lesser gateways into and out of Rocky Mount. Several land uses exist in this district including single-family residential and supporting commercial services. Before being incorporated into Rocky Mount, Battleboro was an independent town. The CSX Railroad divides Battleboro across Nash

and Edgecombe counties. The tenor of this area is very small in scale.

E. NATURAL CORRIDORS

The single most dominant natural corridor in Rocky Mount is the Tar River and the creek system that contributes to it. The Tar River Basin defines our city's history, form and function. This element controls the form of Rocky Mount more significantly than any other. To recognize and celebrate this wonderful asset is paramount to the success of the City. It also dissects Rocky Mount from east to southwest. Access by car, bicycle and pedestrian is controlled by the quality and design of the crossings. Only a few places to cross are available in the City. Regular analysis to identify changing patterns of circulation and a commitment to provide safe adequate crossings for all modes of transportation are needed.

Passive recreation, such as open space and parks and more active opportunities such as swimming and fishing, exist along the entire length of the river and its tributaries. Hurricane Floyd and the resulting Hazard Mitigation program resulted in the addition of over five hundred properties that have been added as green spaces to the corridor that is defined by the Tar River.

The Tar River Reservoir is located outside the city limits providing 1,860 acres of water recreation area for boating, water skiing, fishing and other activities. As a major destination for residents and visitors, the Tar River and the Tar River Reservoir are essential parts of the City's image. The Tar River indeed defines this community in many ways.



II VISUAL SURVEY

A community is physically unified by common design features which include building mass and style, façade treatment, materials, colors, landscape and street-scene details. In order for the comprehensive plan to be effective, it must represent a clear, desired vision of the future appearance and character of the community. One tool to define the community's sensitivity to good and bad design is the Image Preference Survey. This survey is the most important component where participants rank images of places, spaces and land uses. Typically a questionnaire will offer participants a forum for providing demographic and marketing information as well as written comments, ideas, opinions and suggestions regarding past development, the quality of existing zoning and preferred future directions. A complete Image Preference Survey addresses the following building types: residential, commercial, industrial, civic and outbuildings. Elements included are commercial building forms, roof types, façade treatment, windows, towers, walls, driveways, parking lots, landscaping, signs, etc. The participants are asked to provide input on images of the elements as to what they like and do not like. The images are not arbitrary and nor are they unreasonable. The images become a product of a public process.

Ideally, the design of a building should be sympathetic to its neighbors, that is to recognize and contribute to the total area in a way that is neither overbearing nor demeaning to the surrounding sites. Contextually sympathetic design will enhance and improve by responding to the environment it shares in the community.

What comes after the Visual Preference Survey? The results are to be utilized for the future of Rocky Mount. The review and update of the Land Development Code is critical and currently underway. The responses given in this survey become the basis for future decisions.

III. DESIGN FOR A BETTER CITY

The City of Rocky Mount has a unique blend of history and new growth. The design of our community should reflect that uniqueness. The following illustrations show some approaches that are working for our community in terms of effective Community Design. There are also some approaches that are effectively being utilized in other communities to create a more appealing, functional and unique environment. What can be learned and adapted to our particular context is the subject of this section.



- **Unified Design Theme**

This grouping of buildings shows a creative use of proportion and form, within a defined vocabulary of materials that bring a unity to the whole while allowing each individual building its own identity. Small building groups such as these are a beautiful addition to the community. In some communities around the country, design guidelines that encourage these kinds of creative concepts are in place.





Home Depot—Greenville



Home Depot—Wake Forest

• **Franchise Architecture**

The City of Rocky Mount continues to see franchise architecture, those buildings whose form is strongly identified with a single company, emerge in growing numbers on our commercial streets. The proliferation of such forms takes away from our identity as a singular community. This is particularly a problem with the “Big Box” massive buildings of immense scale. Articulation of the façade and roof design would bring a more human quality and higher appeal to the building. Other elements effective in encouraging better design than the standard franchise plans include higher quality building materials, improved landscape plans, color schemes and signage. All of these are included herein as valid for Community Design of the community as a whole.

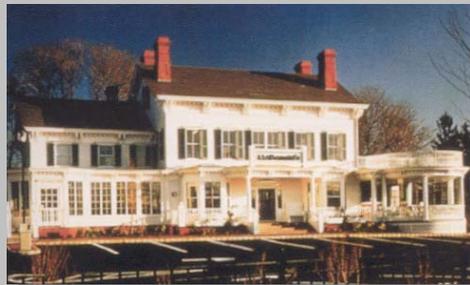
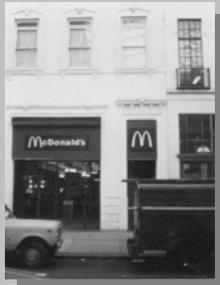
Home Depot shown above is located in Greenville. While the landscape seems to

be adequate, there is much that could be improved upon in design. Notice the picture below which shows the same company’s Wake Forest location. This building displays superior materials over all with the use of brick and accent detailing. The more subdued use of the orange color greatly improves the design. The articulation of the roofline and the facade breaks up the box look and brings a more human scale to the building. This franchise has plans to put a location in Flower Mound, Texas with limestone and copper roof flashing. Franchises can and do make contextually sympathetic architecture when required to do so.



McDonald's—These series of photos show the gamut of architectural styles which this leader in franchise food produces when required. The standard red roof and arches we see to the left are absolutely put to shame by the beautiful and sensitive treatments of the remaining examples. Placed within the correct setting, each of these buildings with their sensitive color schemes and signage would be a contributing asset to their communities.

Source: Fleming, Ronald. *Saving Face*. APA. 2002.



• **Effective Screening**

It certainly is preferable to utilize screening methods such as fencing, berming, landscape and effective site location to hide the less desirable elements of sites. Service areas such as refuse dumpsters, outdoor storage areas, docking areas etc. may be blocked from prominent view to minimize the visual impact on the community.

The two pictures to the right show a best- and worst-case scenario in our community. In the top example, the effective use of berming and beautiful plantings to enhance the view and shield for privacy are wonderful examples of effective screening. These are sharply contrasted with the bottom photograph which illustrates the visible presence of auto salvage inside our city. While it would be highly desirable to eliminate this problem in its entirety, the use of landscape, berming and effective fencing would help tremendously.

Although fencing can help improve some problems, it is not a panacea. Fencing can be an asset or a liability. Cheap, barrier fencing, particularly with barbed wire at the top, is inappropriate for primary corridors. Context is always the key.



• **The Quality of Building Materials**

The context of a building site makes a great deal of difference in the appropriate choices for building materials. Ideally the design of a building should be sympathetic to its neighbors, that is to recognize and contribute to the total area in a way that is neither overbearing nor demeaning to the surrounding sites. The overall visual appeal of our community would be improved with the concentrated focus of higher quality materials such as brick, stone and split-face masonry in the more prominent locations around the City.

The photographs here show three examples of the use of building materials in the City of Rocky Mount. Some are more appropriate than others, primarily due to the context of the site. The gray metal material of the top example is truly suitable only in an industrial context and suffers greatly in comparison to its site near to the downtown. The upscale brick buildings which surround it also suffer from the proximity of this poor choice of design for this particular area. Contrast the metal building with the treatment of the Michael's store which shows creative use of relatively inexpensive synthetic stucco materials with good detailing and articulation to enhance the overall effect. The modern interpretation of traditional details such as cornices and mouldings make this building seem more expensive than it is. It is placed in a grouping of buildings of similar materials and scale. This is much more successful. The textural choices on the lower right photograph illustrates how a simple building mass can be greatly improved in visual and commercial value with var-

ied use of quality materials. It will be interesting to see the final treatment at the entryway. A choice of materials which places focus there certainly would be appropriate. This building, currently under construction, shows sympathetic but higher quality material choices with the surrounding buildings. All told, it is an effective example of good Community Design.



"Never underestimate the value of a tree, and when confronted with architectural failuresplant generously."

Professor Patrick Horsbrough, University of Notre Dame.

The City of Rocky Mount has received national awards for its commitment to tree planting. The beauty of this investment pays off in dividends every year along Winstead Avenue (see photo below). This incredibly valuable attention to the landscape should not be confined to those areas already planted. Note how wonderful the photo above right ,Ramp Road with the trees and shrubbery located at medians and shoulders, compares to the photo of 301 near the Golden East Mall. Additional landscape would greatly enhance the quality of this critical corridor.



Ramp Road



Trees at Winstead and US 64

Landscape Materials:

In certain areas of our Community, landscape materials could be increased with quantities and qualities of plantings that improve the overall design. Gateways could be developed with mini green spaces to create that sense of entry. Landscape materials do a great deal to break up the effects of large parking areas and improve the sense of pedestrian scale to corridors that have previously lost that quality.



301/ Wesleyan Blvd

- **Municipal Art**

The City Hall is the site of a large number of art pieces. The use of art around the community should be encouraged to enhance the overall quality of life. Sculpture at a few significant nodes and gateways would be an appropriate and desirable addition to our City.

- **Effective Lighting**

Effective lighting allows for the practical conveyance of information of the signage, increase in safety, as well as drama and beauty in the evening hours.

The photo at right shows vintage lighting being installed on Peachtree street. These lamps are visually interesting and add to the feeling of history in this residential area. This attention to detail is a contributing element to the overall effectiveness of the neighborhood design.



Photo by R. M. Telegram



• **Signage**

The display to the left shows a number of different designs for single business signage. The gasoline station sign is universally lowered, shows higher quality detailing and the overall scale is more in keeping with the neighborhood. An approach such as this, along with landscaping would immensely improve our cluttered retail corridors such as Sunset Avenue (see photo at right).

A better example locally in a commercial development, is shown in the picture to the lower right. The detailing is appropriate, the colors attractive without being intrusive. Note how it ties to the store color scheme in the background. The example further shows the inclusion of Talbot's brand name with it's copyright logo placed in proportion and taste on the shopping center sign. Corporate logos need not visually shout their existence to be effective.



Image Source: Fleming, Ronald. Saving Face, APA. 2002



• **Appropriate Use of Color**

The gas station canopy to the right shows beautiful restraint, quality of materials and refined design for a structure that frequently stands as a goliath-sized tribute to the gasoline company. The color scheme is subtle and harmonizing. Contrast this approach with the Texaco Station at the lower right photo. This tiny white cottage is dominated by the billboard-like colors and scale of the remaining canopy and structures of this site.

Rocky Mount has seen this problem on our streets as well. The high intensity orange walls of the building below were only in place a week before public pressure mandated a change to white. The context of placement at a major tersection among more restrained buildings had a great deal to do with the public opinions expressed.



Image Source for photos above and below: Fleming, Ronald. Saving Face, APA. 2002



IV. GOAL

A city in which the whole community, its residential neighborhoods and commercial areas uphold high, consistent standards for historic preservation, beautification, sidewalk and roadway enhancements, landscaping and natural open spaces

V. OBJECTIVES AND STRATEGIES

A. PRESERVE HISTORIC NEIGHBORHOODS AND HISTORIC RESOURCES

The City has many special historic assets. Some of its buildings and neighborhoods have received a special designation that signifies their uniqueness both on the national and local historic registers. These places contribute to the community's sense of place and identity, and they constitute important resources that should be preserved, protected, and acknowledged. All historic neighborhoods and structures should be evaluated for placement on the national and local registers. Historic preservation can often happen more effectively if linked to a comprehensive strategy, rather than a site-by-site process. These strategies describe ways for the City to continue to make historic neighborhoods and resources a positive, contributing factor to the City's physical and economic environment.

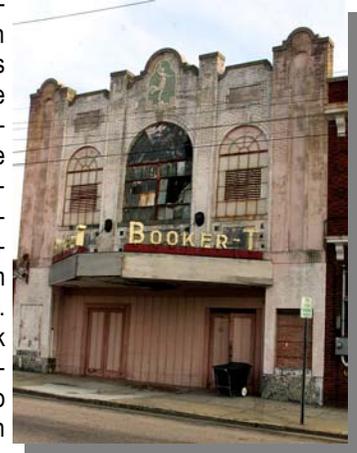


1. Continue To Support The Historic Preservation Commission

The Historic Preservation Commission plays an important role in preserving the City's historic resources. The City should continue to support this organization as a partner in the preservation of older neighborhoods and historic resources. As historic resources play a stronger role in the economic vitality of the City, the role and function of the Historic Preservation Commission should be reviewed for expansion. The City should also evaluate its level of support, including staffing and budgeting.

2. Maintain An Inventory Of Historic Resources And Promote Restoration And Rehabilitation

Maintaining a comprehensive information source about the City's historic resources is the first step toward protecting them. Educating the public by raising awareness about the resources and the importance of protecting them is another logical step. The City should work with its partners in historic preservation to create and maintain an inventory of historic



buildings, sites, neighborhoods and districts. Moreover, the City should use this inventory to promote restoration and rehabilitation activities among businesses, homeowners and other property owners. The City should also consider developing and adopting a "demolition by neglect" ordinance to protect properties that are not being maintained and to give property owners another tool to help preserve historic structures. This ordinance provides a tool to enforce basic maintenance on commercial historic structures rather than allowing them to slowly demolish from lack of basic care.

3. Create A Historic Museum In The Downtown Area Of The City And Its Heritage

The City of Rocky Mount has a significant history. From its natural heritage to its early years as a mill town to its role as a stop along the Wilmington and Weldon Railroad, the community has a unique and multi-faceted past. The City should celebrate this past and educate citizens and visitors about it by studying the feasibility of creating a historic museum. The feasibility study should consider programming, operations and costs (capital and operational). Such a place should be part of an overall strategy to improve Downtown and should be linked to other cultural institutions within the community—such as the planned Cultural Arts Complex.

4. Research and Develop Creative Funding To Support Historic Preservation

The Historic Preservation Commission must research, and maintain thorough and up-to date information on tax credit financing for Historic preservation as well as creative financing techniques that will promote rehabilitation and preservation in the City of Rocky Mount.

5. Provide Technical Assistance To Property Owners

Good information is key to progressive re-use of existing properties in historic districts.

6. Encourage Owner Occupancy Of Historic Properties

7. Work With The Historic Preservation Commission And Property Owners To Find Alternatives To Demolition Of Historic Structures

B. ENHANCE THE BUILT LANDSCAPE

The built environment has a powerful influence on quality of life in the community. Residential, commercial, and industrial buildings, community facilities, institutional property and roads are all part of a physical environment that can be shaped and managed to be beautiful, safe, unique and uplifting. The result is a community that attracts residents, businesses, investors and visitors. These strategies recommend ways for the City to enhance the many aspects of its built environment.

1. Development Should Satisfy Illustrated Design Standards That Maintain Local Community Character

When local builders use local materials and contextual design, cities have a special look and feel. That distinctiveness of place is gradually being lost to a standardized form of development found throughout suburban America. Illustrated design standards for streets, lot layout, site plans and buildings maintain the traditional small-city feeling. Franchise architecture, site design, color schemes, signage, screening of less desirable areas, etc. are all aspects of community design to be considered in the development of design standards.

C. IMPROVE IMAGE OF MAJOR CORRIDORS (BUSINESS US 64, 301, BUSINESS 301)

Corridors help to establish an image for the City. Most visitors get their first impression from the physical characteristics of these routes into the City, and those who pass through Rocky Mount only know the community based on their perceptions of the primary corridors that they mark. Corridors should be improved to make much greater contributions to the City's community design. These strategies describe how the City can take a comprehensive approach to enhancing the major routes into the community.

1. Adopt And Implement Comprehensive Beautification Plans For Improvements In The Right-of-Way

City right-of-ways constitute a large percentage of the built environment. The design of corridors can be greatly affected by the activities permitted on these lands. The City should adopt and implement beautification plans for right-of-ways with the objective of enhancing the appearance of Rocky Mount's corridors. These plans should address design and landscaping, directional signage, and public art. It will be essential to coordinate with the North Carolina Department of Transportation, since many of the major corridors in the City are owned, managed, and maintained by that agency. They should also consider ways to encourage the placement of utilities underground. This strategy may involve the creation of an appearance commission to develop and enforce such standards.

2. Study The Feasibility Of Adopting And Implementing Zoning Overlay Districts To Address Private Property

The built environment on the private properties that abut major roadways greatly affects the design of these corridors and the experience of driving along them. The City should adopt and implement a corridor overlay district that regulates design and land use in these areas. These regulations should set standards which support local community character in order to produce a more pleasing appearance along these corridors.



3. Provide An Appropriate Level Of Street Lighting

An appropriate level of street lighting is important to community design. Lighting improves the driver's ability to see directional signage and oncoming traffic, and improves pedestrian safety. It also highlights attractive features of the



City. The City should ensure that public safety and community design programs address the lighting of important community corridors. Older neighborhoods, in particular, should have a specific lighting standard that ensures safety but is within the context of their unique character. Lighting should be used where appropriate to improve visibility and perceptions of safety on sidewalks and roadways, as well as to improve the overall design of the community. In addition, the City should consider adopting a standard to address the placement and other design aspects of streetlights.

4. Consider Landscaped Median Treatments Where Feasible And Appropriate, Given Maintenance Considerations

Landscaping can greatly enhance highway corridors. Landscaped medians enhance the view of drivers along these roads, buffer them from oncoming traffic and even serve to screen traffic from surrounding land uses. Moreover, when native plants are used, landscaped medians are easier to maintain, more likely to survive the changing climate and reinforce community identity with familiar foliage. Rocky Mount should find ways to incorporate landscaped medians into major corridors. These efforts will require coordination with the North Carolina Department of Transportation, since many of these medians are owned, managed and maintained by that agency.

D. IMPROVE IMAGE OF MAJOR GATEWAYS

Gateways into the City create an important first and lasting impression. The visual appearance at key Gateways into Rocky Mount should be enhanced. This will require an understanding of the character of each of these entryways and developing an appropriate design response. The gateways should be considered more than gates. Gateways include the larger landscape and its views, incorporation of public art and signage (informational and directional). These strategies identify appropriate actions the City can take to improve these gateways.



1. Identify Key Gateways Along Major Corridors; Implement And Maintain Consistent Landscaping And Signage

The City should identify major gateways into the community. Gateways into the City should be studied to determine the key entry corridors and identify the actual and symbolic entries into the City. These gateways should be enhanced with landscaping, public art, signage, lighting and other amenities in a way that reflects that character of the adjacent neighborhoods. Examples of key gateways are entries along US 64 and US 301 at the City's corporate limits and the interchanges on US 64. Any efforts to improve right-of-ways on US 64, US 301, Sunset, US 42, US 48, etc., will require coordination with the North Carolina Department of Transportation, since many of these medians are owned, manage and maintained by that agency.

2. Undertake Enhancements Through The Tree Advisory Board And Tree Power

The Tree Advisory Board is to be created to protect and conserve plantings in right-of-ways and public property. Through its planning and maintenance efforts, the Board and City staff can beautify the City's right-of-ways, especially at gateways through comprehensive street tree planting and maintenance efforts. The positive impact that tree planting can have is illustrated by the Tree Power program, begun by the City in 1991. Since its inception, this program has provided for the planting of over 33,000 trees in the City. The American Public Power Association has recog-



nized this outstanding program nationally. Presentation of existing trees should be encouraged with clear cutting for new development recognized as a detriment to the community.

E. ENCOURAGE PROPERTY OWNERS TO PARTICIPATE IN ENHANCEMENT EFFORTS

Property owners are important stakeholders in community enhancements efforts. They offer valuable knowledge and experience regarding on-site and neighborhood conditions, and they are critical to the implementation stage. Once the Comprehensive Plan is complete, improvements should be undertaken on a priority basis. This will be partly defined by available funding, which should include partnerships with property owners and nearby businesses. These strategies outline ways for the City to engage property owners in enhancement efforts.

1. Support And Promote Stewardship Programs

Stewardship programs are excellent resources for enhancing community appearance. In addition to including specific tasks, these programs have an educational component that supports long-term enhancement activities. The City should continue to support and promote these programs and encourage these programs to prioritize projects identified in the Comprehensive Plan. Such projects include gateway and corridor enhancements, tree planting, adopt-a-street, neighborhood and vacant lot clean-ups, backyard habitat and stream buffer management activities.

2. Recruit Businesses To Participate In Enhancement Programs

Businesses are important partners in enhancement efforts. They provide employees as volunteers, funds to support programs, on-site knowledge of solutions, and places for enhancement to occur. Their contributions affect community design in the commercial and business districts where they are located. Business should be encouraged to make improvements to their buildings and sites as well as volunteer for community-based enhancement efforts. Some specific activities include façade improvement, street tree planting, litter removal, and adopt-a-highway programs.

F. REVIEW AND UPDATE LAND DEVELOPMENT CODE AND OTHER RELEVANT CODES TO ENHANCE PUBLIC AND PRIVATE PROPERTY

Regulations and codes are important tools for enhancing community design. The City should identify regulations that affect community design such as: zoning, subdivi-



sion, environmental regulations, housing standards, parking codes and street and building design guidelines. It should review these regulations to ensure that they are consistent and clear and also address the full range of recommendations in the Comprehensive Plan. These regulations should be updated, when necessary, to implement the plan. New codes, such as a "demolition by neglect" ordinance, also should be adopted when necessary to implement these recommendations.

The Land Development Code should incorporate the following Community Design Principles ¹:

- **Impact Is More Important Than Use**

Land-use regulations should permit a wide variety of uses with impact criteria to assist the Planning Board in determining whether to allow a use in a particular location. This maintains the local tradition that landowners have flexibility in land use as long as they do not negatively affect their neighbors or the community at large.

- **Density Is More Important Than Lot Size**

Although low densities are appropriate outside settlement centers, large minimum lot sizes consume the landscape faster than small lots. Therefore, land-use controls should separate density from lot size, allowing very small lots as long as overall density guidelines are maintained. This is often done through some form of clustering.



- **Design Is More Important Than Density**

The impact of development and its profitability for the landowner are not simply a “numbers game.” Attractive, well-planned low-density development may be more profitable than high density. Well-planned compact village developments fit in better with historic neighborhood character than low-density sprawl. Open space protection and good site design are often more important than density to both the landowner’s bottom line and a city’s attractiveness.

- **The Planning Board And Historic Preservation Commission Need Written Criteria**

Written, codified text enables review boards and commissions to say “yes” to what fits into the community and “no” to what does not while conditioning approvals to ensure that standards are implemented. Instead of applying rigid use and bulk requirements, boards and commissions

should have both clear design standards and flexibility to work with applicants and neighborhoods to come up with plans that fit the city. They also should have sufficient authority and resources to ensure that plans are properly implemented.

- **The Land Development Code Should Be Simple Enough To Understand, But Adequate Enough To Fulfill Its Objectives**

Regulations including design standards should be clear, flexible and understandable. They should be strict on important design principles but flexible on land use regulations, while imposing on land owners the minimum burden necessary to achieve community goals. Illustrations should show the development patterns and options allowed.

¹Adopted from “A New Generation of Rural Land-Use Laws” by Joel S. Russell, *Zoning News*, American Planning Association, Chicago, July 1996.

