

Historic Resources

Goals

The City will:

- Foster the preservation and rehabilitation of significant historic sites and structures.
- Incorporate the City's historic resources and cultural heritage into the creation of a unique identity and image for Chesapeake.
- Ensure that historic sites and structures are integrated into new development during the land development process.



Overview

The City of Chesapeake, Virginia is a new city; but its landmarks and communities have a long, varied, and interesting history that reaches back to the early days of the Colony of Virginia. It is important to protect resources of this past, as historic preservation preserves a sense of community; enhances economic development through reinvestment and tourism; stabilizes/increases property values, and makes better use of natural resources.

Past Plans

The City of Chesapeake has been active in promoting preservation as described in the following synopsis of recent plans, surveys, nominations, and guidelines. Conservation and Development Plan for the South Norfolk Conservation Area – As early as 1976, the Chesapeake Redevelopment and Housing Authority prepared a conservation plan that was adopted with the goal to achieve the elimination, through staged rehabilitation and limited clearance, of all blight and deterioration and blighting factors, and the refurbishing of a predominately residential community of good overall design.

Historic District Guidelines – In 1990, the South Norfolk Civic League Historic District Committee prepared the report, Historic District Design Guidelines: Building on the History of Chesapeake. It included a guide to architectural styles; guidelines for rehabilitation, new construction, moving buildings and demolishing buildings; as well as guidelines for street elements and streetscapes. These guidelines

were presented to City Council for consideration but were not adopted at that time. However, a revision of these guidelines by the City's Historic Preservation Commission in 2000, was approved.

The Report of the Chesapeake Historic Preservation Steering Committee – In 1990, a committee was appointed by City Council to make appropriate findings and recommendations concerning the recognition and preservation of historical places, buildings and other amenities of significance in the City of Chesapeake.

Historic Preservation Plan (adopted by City Council in 1996) -- This plan established a number of goals and objectives regarding preservation issues. A chief objective was the establishment of a seven member Historic Preservation Commission to advise City Council, the Planning Commission and City staff in regards to preservation issues.

Surveys/Assessments

In order to effectively plan for historic resources, a community needs to survey its resources to identify priorities and threats. Additionally as time passes and development occurs, it is essential to provide for necessary updates. The following are major survey projects conducted for the City:

1987 Reconnaissance Survey – This survey included approximately 800 structures within the South Norfolk Historic District and more than 700 in the remainder of the City. A successful recommendation of this survey was the listing of the South Norfolk Historic District on the National Register of Historic Places and the Virginia Landmarks Register.

1999 Reconnaissance and Intensive Survey Update – This survey included 200 reconnaissance level surveys and 20 intensive surveys within the most threatened suburban areas of the City, including Western Branch, Deep Creek, Indian River, Rivercrest, Greenbrier, and Great Bridge. Recommendations from this survey resulted in the listing of three additional communities to the National Register of Historic Places and the Virginia Landmarks Register.

1999 Archeological Assessment – This document represents an assessment of archaeological resources in the City. It is designed to provide the following:

- A user friendly reference for planners
- A summary of current knowledge
- A catalog of officially recorded sites
- Locations of officially recorded sites
- Discussion of relative site significance and rank
- Definitions and locations of sensitivity areas, and
- Recommendations for planning/management of these resources

Districts and Structures

When the City's Historic Preservation Plan was adopted in 1996, only four districts/sites were listed on the National Register of Historic Places and the Virginia Landmarks Register. Recently five additional districts/sites with a total of 173 resources were listed along with an additional individual site. The City's nine historic districts/sites are described as follows:

South Norfolk Historic District – The South Norfolk Historic District covers about ½ of a square mile at the northern end of the City of Chesapeake. Begun as a streetcar suburb and retaining its residential character, the district contained 795 buildings when listed with only 127 non-contributing structures. A majority of the Register district is now also a local historic district with design review by the City's Board of Historic and Architectural Review.

Dismal Swamp Canal and Associated Development – This 22 mile long district is located to the west of U.S. Route 17 between Deep Creek in Chesapeake and South Mills, North Carolina. Its origin was a charter in 1787 by the Virginia General Assembly, ratified by North Carolina in 1790. Insofar as is known, the Canal is the oldest operating canal in the United States.

Sunray Agricultural Historic District – The Sunray Agricultural Historic District retains its visual integrity and reflects an early 20th century immigrant farming community. Early 20th century vernacular farmhouses are located throughout the district and are simple in form and treatment. 97 of the 317 resources in the district are contributing.

Oaklette Historic District - The Oaklette Historic District is an example of an early 20th century planned, streetcar suburb. Oaklette is defined by large scale single family dwellings of frame construction dominating the waterfront and smaller Bungalow and Colonial Revival dwellings located on the landlocked parcels. 31 of the 63 resources are contributing.

Centerville-Fentress Historic District – The Centerville-Fentress Historic District is an example of a rural farming community that developed a small commercial core, which grew with the addition of a road linking the community to the Albemarle and Chesapeake Canal, and the Norfolk and Elizabeth City Railroad in the 1880's. Most dwellings and buildings are modest frame Colonial Revival and Craftsmen inspired buildings, reflecting the vernacular quality of the craftsmanship. 34 of the 67 resources are contributing.

Albemarle and Chesapeake Canal Historic District – This district was listed on the Virginia Landmarks Register on December 3, 2003 and is expected to be listed on the National Register in 2004. The Albemarle and Chesapeake Canal is significant on the state level in the areas of Transportation, Engineering and Military, with the period of significance being 1775-1953. There are 11 contributing resources in the District.

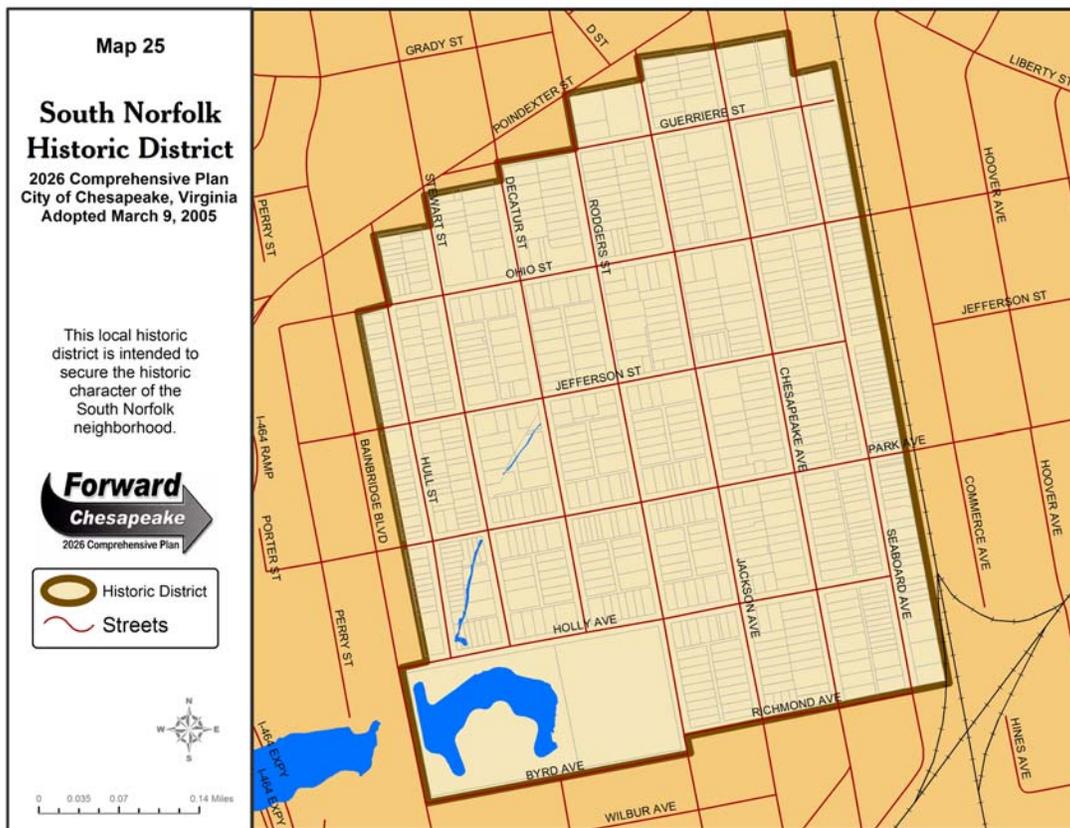
Battle of Great Bridge Site – The site of the Battle of Great Bridge is located on both sides of the Albemarle and Chesapeake Canal. Route 168 Business (Battlefield Boulevard) cuts through the area on the north-south axis and runs over the site of the colonial bridge and causeway in which the battle was named. The Great Bridge Battlefield site is significant as a landmark to Virginia's role in the American Revolution, for in this marshy location took place the first armed conflict between British soldiers and the colony's patriot forces.

Wallaceton – This house is located along the Dismal Swamp Canal and was built in 1855. The most outstanding feature of the home is the vertical hand hewn logs covered by the standard weatherboard siding.

Old Portlock School Number 5 - One of three early 20th Century schools in Chesapeake that have been put into adaptive re-use. This building is currently under consideration for use as an art studio and gallery.

Local Historic District

South Norfolk Historic District – In November, 2000, the South Norfolk Historic Preservation Overlay District was established. This district encompasses approximately 75% of the district listed on the National and State Register. A Historic and Architectural Review Board has been established to review exterior modification within the district as can be seen from the paved public right-of-way. The Board hears approximately 40-50 applications per calendar year and another 40-50 minor applications are approved by the Planning Department.



Heritage Tourism

The City has recently embarked upon several projects which highlight the City's heritage and encourages visitation from those outside of Chesapeake, as well as local residents.

Civil War Trail – This state-wide program contains over 100 sites and is divided into regional themes. Chesapeake currently hosts 5 sites associated with the Peninsula campaign. Three of these sites are located along Route 17 in the southern portion of the

City (Village of Deep Creek, Dismal Swamp Canal, and Glencoe). The other two include the Village of Great Bridge and the Pleasant Grove Baptist Church Monument to the Jackson Grays.

Rt. 17/Dismal Swamp Corridor Study – A study is underway to determine a land use plan for the area between the existing and future Route 17. This study also includes the conceptual design of a multi-use trail along the existing roadway, identification of other potential historic, recreational and environmental opportunities, and design guidelines along the new road. This project is being coordinated with the Great Dismal Swamp National Wildlife Refuge’s Public Use Plan. A key feature of this plan is a Visitor’s Center along Route 17.

Battle of Great Bridge Project – The Great Bridge Battlefield and Waterways History Foundation and the City are currently developing the design for a park and visitor center to commemorate the Battle of Great Bridge and the City’s Historic Canals.

Issue One: Loss of Historic Resources

The City continues to lose historic resources due to property owner neglect or demolition to make way for new development. A Planning Department survey in 2002 indicates that approximately 16% of the sites identified in the 1987 Reconnaissance Survey have been demolished. A majority of the demolished structures were in the City’s growth areas and thus, there has been a direct correlation between growth and loss of historic resources.

In order to curb the loss of important historic resources, the City should locate, designate, and protect the City’s most important historic sites.

Strategies:

- The City will continue to update its survey of historic resources and nominate new properties to the National Register and Virginia Landmarks Register. This can be achieved through continued use of cost-share grants between the Virginia Department of Historic Resources and the City of Chesapeake.
- Additional local historic districts will be created, as community support warrants, ensuring that the character of significant communities are preserved. To help residents/business owners comply with the design standards, local funding programs need to be established.
- The Historic Preservation Commission will provide assistance to homeowners/citizens with preservation-related issues. The City’s Historic Preservation Commission and the City’s Board of Historic and Architectural Review membership composition includes individuals with demonstrated knowledge, competence, and interest in preservation and architecture. The Virginia Department of Historic Resources (DHR) operates a Regional Office in Portsmouth and offers many valuable services, including administration of the State and Federal tax credit programs. The State Tax Credits allow owners of historic structures up to a 25% tax credit on renovations that follow the Secretary of the Interior standards for renovation. Owners must spend a total of 25% of the building’s assessed value to qualify. The Federal Tax Credit allows income producing property to up to an additional 25% tax credit.

- A Real Estate tax abatement program similar to the City's Enterprise zone should be developed for historic districts/sites.
- The advice of the Historic Preservation Commission will be sought in regards to impacts brought on by development activity and major governmental projects such as road construction.
- City-owned historic properties will be identified and used as examples of stewardship for historic resources.

Issue Two: Public Education

One of the reasons why some important historic resources have been lost is the lack of knowledge about such resources. There is a need to better educate and inform citizens about their heritage and its value to the community. The City created the Historic Preservation Commission to coordinate and promote educational programs throughout the City. Some progress has been made in this regard; however, improved coordination and resources from governmental and private sources are necessary to fully address this issue.

Efforts should continue to educate the public about the importance and significance of the City's historic resources.

Strategies:

- A central depository for historic information should be created. Currently, this role is being met by the Wallace Room in the Central Library. The Great Bridge Battlefield and Waterways Visitor Center should also be considered.
- Continue to support the work of the Great Bridge Battlefield and Waterways History Foundation.
- Organize programs to inform citizens about the history of Chesapeake and historic preservation activities. A good example is the City's current participation in the planning for the Jamestown 2007 celebration.

Issue Three: Community Character and Vitality

Historic preservation can be a tool to protect the integrity and character of the City of Chesapeake's neighborhoods. A neighborhood's history and heritage can be an important focus for revitalization and civic pride.

The City should utilize historic districts where possible to foster community vitality.

Strategies:

- The City should pursue nomination of new properties/districts to the National Register and Virginia Landmarks Register. This can be achieved through continued use of cost-share grants between the Virginia Department of Historic Resources and the City of Chesapeake.
- The creation of additional local historic districts can be used to help ensure that the character of significant communities is preserved. Strong local support will be

necessary for this implementation. To help residents/business owners comply with the design standards, local funding programs need to be established.

In many cases there are conflicts between the goals of various governmental entities and the private sector. A chief purpose of the City's Historic Preservation Commission was to coordinate preservation activities and recommend policy implementation to City Council. Some progress has been made, but resources continue to be lost as preservation priorities are often not weighed as heavily as other priorities.

All municipal actions should recognize the importance of historic preservation in the City of Chesapeake.

Strategies:

- A designated full-time City staff person responsible for historic preservation activities should be created and funded. To make this program more effective it will require a full-time staff person to spear-head and oversee the plan.
- Communication between public/private parties regarding decisions affecting historic resources should be improved.
- The Historic Preservation Commission through City staff should continue to make recommendations regarding development applications that impact historic structures and land. The City's Cluster Ordinance can be utilized as a tool for preserving historic sites while allowing appropriate development.

Issue Four: Heritage Tourism

The City has many exciting opportunities to capitalize on the draw of heritage tourism and has initiated several related projects. Continued coordination of the various departments/ agencies/ private sector and resources will help to address this issue.

The City should promote Economic Development through the promotion of historic resources and thus, encourage tourists to visit Chesapeake.

Strategies:

- The City should prepare a historic tourism package. This promotional program can be developed through the coordination of the City's new Tourism Office, the Historic Preservation Commission, and various other public/private groups.
- Support should continue for special projects capitalizing on the City's heritage like the Dismal Swamp Corridor Study, the plans for the Battle of Great Bridge and Waterways Visitor Center and planning activities of the Great Dismal Swamp Wildlife Refuge.
- The City will continue to coordinate the creation of history trails, greenways, and driving tours that connect historic resources.