

---



# Preserving & Improving Places

## Planning for the Byway's Townscapes & Landscapes

Promoting strategies for the preservation and improvement of resources and places along the Byway is the second area of focus for the Alliance. This chapter introduces strategies in the following categories:

- Conserving Rural Lands.
- Preserving Historic Sites and Districts.
- Improving Town Centers, Gateways and Entries.
- Managing Commercial Signs and Outdoor Advertising.

### Conserving Rural Lands

Farming remains one of the region's primary economic engines, providing employment and income while demanding little in the

way of public services. Farmland is also important to the region's economy for less tangible reasons—it serves as an important scenic asset, contributing to the region's overall quality of life and reputation as a good place to visit. The region's farmsteads, fields, produce stands, equipment sales yards, and product processing and storage facilities are at the root of what distinguishes Chesapeake Country from communities on the Western Shore, along the I-95 corridor and across the state line in Delaware.

Counties along the Byway, with assistance from state agencies and non-profit conservation groups, are actively engaged in efforts to conserve agricultural lands and rural character. Using a balance of restrictions, investments, and incentives, an impressive amount of prime farmland has been protected from future development. In addition, the Counties have had some success in guiding development in ways that protect important views.

Though people tend to agree that protection of rural character is important, an exact definition of the term is difficult to come by. While it is neither possible, nor desirable to freeze the corridor in place as it is today, it is possible to better understand the qualities that make a drive along rural stretches of the Byway attractive and interesting. It is also possible to develop conservation strategies appropriate to the community through partnerships with local property owners and conservation groups. Supporting existing

**The Byway's beauty is built on the region's agricultural landscapes.**



---

conservation efforts and helping to sustain local enterprise are important goals of the Alliance.

### **Establish Viewshed Conservation Priorities**

Counties should consider incorporating goals and objectives related to the preservation of scenic quality and rural character in their comprehensive plans. Plan language could encourage developers and planners to consider the “view from the road” in the drafting of plans for projects along the Byway. Incorporation of such provisions is the first step towards the development of guidelines and standards that recognize the important role scenic quality plays in supporting community livability and economic vitality.

The Alliance should encourage existing agencies and organizations to target agricultural lands within the Byway’s viewshed for conservation. Specifically, the Alliance should work with local land trusts and agencies to determine where priorities for viewshed protection and agricultural land conservation overlap, and explore the appropriateness of using Byway funds to support on-going agricultural land preservation efforts. The Alliance should also consider advocating for the expansion of existing Rural Legacy districts or the creation of new districts for the conservation of agricultural lands along the Byway.

In the context of comprehensive plan updates, the counties should conduct a review of the existing agricultural zoning, subdivision regulations, rural cluster development, and transfer of development rights programs to determine effectiveness in protecting agricultural lands and scenic resources along the Byway.

### **Encourage View-Sensitive Design**

In reviewing proposals for public and private development in rural areas along the Byway, planners should assess the potential impact of projects on the scenic quality of the Byway and identify strategies to avoid, minimize or mitigate the anticipated impacts. Specifically, county planners should encourage projects that preserve open lands for agricultural use, protect important landscape features, and are designed in a manner sensitive to the scale and character of the area.

Should the preservation of a hedgerow, forest stand or allee of trees not prove feasible, alternative methods of screening and buffering—tree planting and fencing—should be explored. As an example, Kent County has requested several actions to protect views in rural areas. The County was successful in encouraging the placement of a communication tower outside the Byway’s viewshed and has encouraged a farmer/property owner to plant landscape buffers to protect views from a historic church.

The preparation of design guidelines for development in rural areas is another tool the counties could use to help owners make decisions consistent with the goals and objectives of the Plan. Though not as effective as zoning or subdivision regulation in guiding development in rural areas, guidelines can prove useful as a tool to raise awareness and encourage the sensitive treatment of lands along the Byway.

A simple set of guidelines for rural residential and commercial development, showing examples of ways to build in a manner sensitive to the rural context, could be developed and broadly disseminated among the local land planning and civil engineering community. Guidelines could be developed to address the following:

---

**Access Control.** Encourage the consolidation of access from the Scenic Byway through the use of shared driveways and single access roads.

**Home Sites.** Encourage house locations away from the road; preferably screened from view by hedgerows, topography (behind hills or ridge lines) or existing tree stands. Encourage houses to be sited along the tree lines rather than in the center of open fields. Preserve existing tree stands along the Byway.

**Cluster Development.** Encourage the clustering of home sites to preserve priority views, important tree stands, or productive agricultural lands.

**Landscape Conservation.** Communities should explore the feasibility of creating incentives for the protection of forest edges, allees, and hedgerows that define the Byway's viewshed and contribute to its overall character.

**Native & Traditional Planting.** To help new development blend in with its landscape setting, encourage the use of native tree and shrub species. Consideration should also be given to the use of native grasses and meadow planting as alternatives to lawns.

**Fencing & Screening.** Encourage the use of wood fencing and shrubs to screen views to parking spaces, play equipment, and above ground pools.

### **Celebrate Private Enterprise & Stewardship**

Local and regional programs that recognize and celebrate the agricultural heritage of the region also help build awareness among owners. Maryland's Century Farms Program provides an effective model. The program honors families who have owned and farmed

the same land for a hundred or more years. Creating a program of farm tours or "Harvest Festivals" can also help raise awareness and build bridges between owners and landscape preservation advocates.

The Alliance could also support efforts to educate residents and visitors on the value of farming and the contributions the farm community has made to the region over time. Byway communications should incorporate information concerning agricultural heritage and current practices. The Alliance could also support research to document the history and significance of historic resources and landscapes in rural areas and the preparation of National Register of Historic Places nominations.

In partnership with the local farm community and Natural Resource Conservation Service offices, the Alliance should support the development of a "Living on the Land" sensitivity program. The program could include the creation of handbooks for new residents, agricultural heritage brochures, "Farm Equipment on the Byway" brochures and signs, and information regarding farm tours, produce stands, and local farm products.

## **Preserving Historic Sites & Districts**

For well over two centuries the Byway has provided a critical connection between the region's manor homes, farmsteads, rural villages, market towns, and county seats. Today, the Chesapeake Country Scenic Byway includes a collection of national, state, and locally significant resources distributed throughout the corridor and surrounding areas. The seventy-one properties listed on the National Register of

---

Historic Places and four historic districts are evidence of the historical significance of Chesapeake Country. These historic resources include town centers, plantation homes, churches, farmhouses, boats, and archaeological sites.

Strategies to preserve historic resources are organized under the following categories:

- Encourage On-going Identification & Documentation.
- Support the Stabilization of Sensitive Sites.
- Strengthen Local Preservation Efforts.
- Expand Recognition & Education Programs.

### **Encourage On-going Identification & Documentation**

The Alliance supports the on-going efforts to document historic resources along the Byway. Through the partnership of local preservationists with the Maryland Historical Trust, many of the historic architectural resources along the corridor have been surveyed and recognized at the state and national levels as significant and worthy of protection. The Maryland Historical Trust also partners with county or municipal planning offices, private non-profit groups, and local universities to document archaeological resources.

The Maryland Inventory of Historic Properties contains all of the documented information on districts, buildings, sites, and structures of known or potential value to the prehistory, history, archaeology, architecture and culture of Maryland. The inventory includes data on more than 8,000 archaeological sites and 80,000 historic and architectural resources for the state. The identification of these historic resources and their condition is necessary to target and set priorities for preservation activities.



According to Section 106 of the National Historic Preservation Act, historical and cultural resources must be identified and the impact of federally assisted undertakings (such as a road widening) on these resources assessed before federal funds can be released for the project. For resources affected by the undertaking, opportunities to avoid or mitigate any adverse effects to the resources must be identified. This process ties into the National Environmental Policy Act (NEPA), which requires that a similar assessment take place as part of any federal project affecting historical, cultural and environmental resources. Identifying those resources now would provide the baseline information to create an overall preservation strategy, and could prove useful in the future should Section 106 and NEPA-related assessments be required.

**Mount Harmon in Cecil County is among the most significant colonial era manor houses along the Byway.**

Recognition carries with it certain benefits. Listing on the National Register of Historic Places increases local understanding and pride in addition to making a property eligible for state and federal grant funding. Certain capital investments in recognized properties may be eligible for a federal income tax credit under the federal Historic Rehabilitation Tax Credit Program. Furthermore, listing on the National Register does not restrict what the owner

---

may do to the property, unless the owner receives a federal grant or tax benefits.

### **Support the Stabilization of Sensitive Sites**

After historic buildings have been identified, steps should be taken to properly stabilize the historic structures to ensure that these community resources are available in the future. While there may not be immediate plans to cultivate these buildings, such as the African American Schoolhouse, within the Byway system, they may be used in the future to enhance the overall experience. A small investment now to limit deterioration will mitigate the need to make larger investments in the future, when more time and energy may be available to bring these resources into the larger byway program.

### **Strengthen Local Preservation Efforts**

There are a variety of local preservation tools that the Alliance should support. Preservation needs to become a more conscious community value, underlying how communities go about accommodating development. Preservation is a grassroots movement, with program success relative to community interest. Counties and towns have the option to prepare historic preservation ordinances which could be used to establish local historic districts and to regulate the construction, repair, alteration, rehabilitation, relocation, and demolition of buildings within such districts.

The Alliance should encourage Chestertown's involvement in the National Park Service's (NPS) Certified Local Government (CLG) Program. The CLG Program is jointly administered by the NPS in partnership with State Preservation Offices. As members of the program, local governments are required to enforce State or

local legislation for the designation and protection of historic properties, establish and maintain a qualified historic preservation commission, and maintain a system for survey and public participation. The CLG program promotes the development and maintenance of local historic preservation programs that influence the zoning and permit decisions critical to preserving historic properties. In return, CLGs are eligible to receive grants and technical assistance to support local preservation efforts.

Preservation planning may be carried out at the federal, state or local level. It is based on the careful identification and assessment of historical and cultural resources within the context of other public policy goals. Historic preservation planning builds a consensus toward a shared vision of the preservation future and establishes a course of action to ensure future preservation of valued historic and cultural resources. The planning may identify the future need for Historic District Commissions, Architectural Review Boards, or Historic Preservation Commissions to oversee zoning, and design issues related to locally designated historic properties or districts.

Revolving loan funds are another useful preservation tool that demonstrates to the community the economic and social benefits of historic preservation while forming valuable partnerships. They are a very visible and highly aggressive way for a preservation organization to save endangered properties, and/or initiate the revitalization of an entire historic neighborhood or commercial area.

Easements are a voluntary method to preserve valuable resources including scenic vistas, agricultural lands, and historic sites (including buildings and archaeological sites). Under the terms of an easement,

---

property owners donate a portion of their rights in perpetuity to a non-profit or government agency whose mission it is to protect those resources. The easement can be tailored to fit an owner's needs and assures the owner that their property will be cared for even after a transfer of ownership. In exchange for giving away a portion of their property rights an owner may be eligible for tax benefits including reduced federal income, estate, and gift taxes. Facade easements—easements that protect only the facade of a building—have been a successful tool in protecting historic buildings in other communities.

### **Expand Recognition & Education Programs**

The Byway has a strong, rich history reflected in a variety of resources, yet there is a lack of awareness concerning the value of historic and archaeological resources in Chesapeake Country. It is often difficult to appreciate the logic for saving old buildings or protecting archaeological sites. There is a need to not only preserve the "museum quality" buildings, but also the more commonplace structures that are the foundation of Chesapeake's identity. Programs and initiatives designed to educate people about the significance and sensitivity of resources and to promote voluntary preservation are needed. There are national, state and local preservation organizations offering valuable preservation services, such as the National Trust for Historic Preservation, the Maryland Historical Trust, and local historical societies.

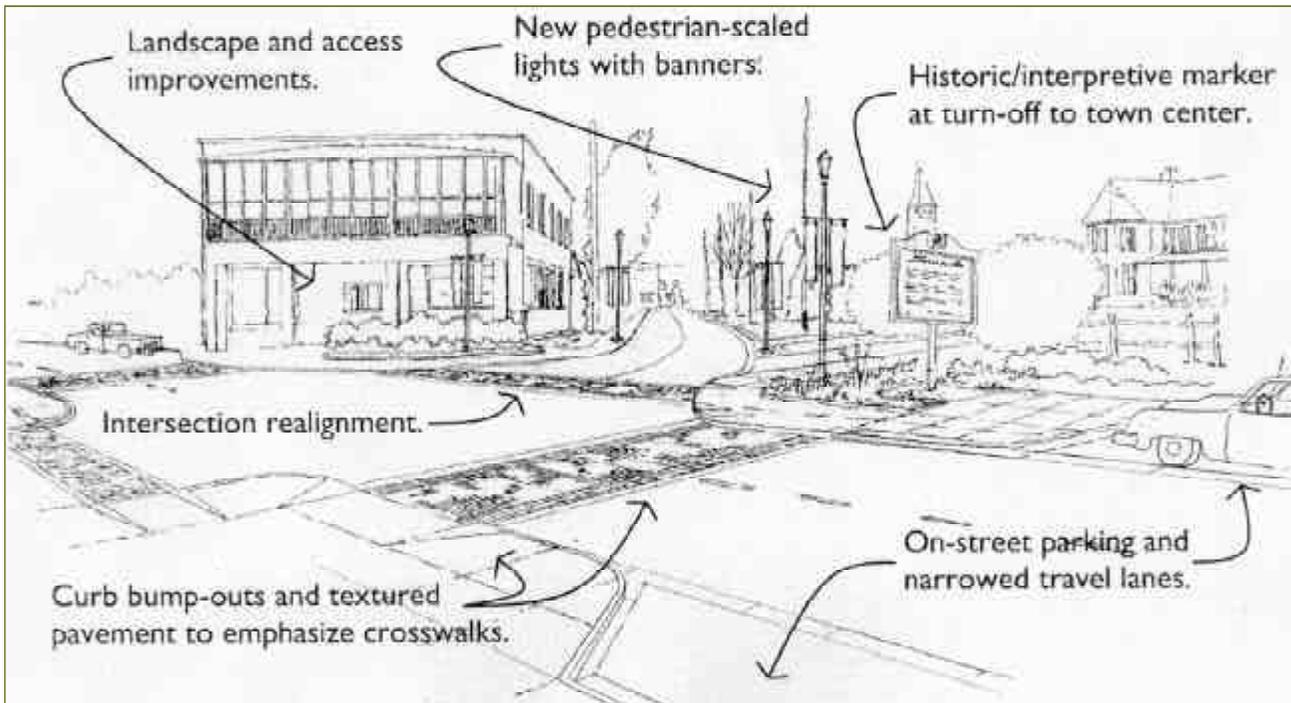
The Alliance should advocate for the communities to develop a Byway preservation awards program to recognize small and large-scale efforts to preserve important resources. The program should be designed to heighten community awareness

of the unique character of Byway towns and villages. The program may honor people, places, or organizations that make significant contributions to the quality of life. Driving and walking tours are another way of highlighting resources. Successful tours promote an appreciation of architectural heritage, increase community pride, unite volunteers and improve the livability of older neighborhoods. Additional local educational programs that the Alliance could support include, "What style is it?" booklets on community architecture and short courses for residents on old house restoration.

## **Improving Town Centers, Gateways & Entries**

The stories of life on the Upper Eastern Shore, especially of the close connection between the people and the region's land and water resources, are best told in the context of the Byway's historic settlements. The physical fabric of these places—the historic houses, turn-of-the-century commercial buildings, public parks and squares—combined with the concentrations of visitor services make these places the logical settings for the celebration of the region's rich history.

Unfortunately, making your way to the center of the Byway's towns and villages is not always the most pleasant experience. Commercial strip development is the predominant land use at gateways and along entries. These stretches of the Byway, where the transition occurs between the region's traditional agricultural landscapes and historic town centers, strongly influence local and visitor perceptions of the region. While these areas comprise only a small portion of the Byway's frontage, and are by



**Gateway improvements to Stevensville town center.**

no means the worst examples of commercial strips in the region, their effect on the Byway's image is considerable.

Local officials along the Byway have expressed strong interest in working with the Alliance to make their communities more attractive and economically vital. Improvement strategies in this section of the Plan are organized under the following categories:

- Strengthen Town Centers.
- Enhance Gateways to Towns & Villages.
- Improve Commercial Strips.

**Strengthen Town Centers**

Using a version of the highly successful Main Street Program, communities along the corridor can revitalize and strengthen their downtowns by following four basic strategies: design, promotion, economic restructuring, and organization. Working concurrently, these strategies can help make Byway communities more livable, attractive, and economically vital. The traditional design, scale and character of communities along the corridor should be emphasized through all improvement efforts. Towns along the Byway should consider participation in the Main Street Maryland program, a comprehensive downtown revitalization program created by the Department of Housing and Community Development.

Building on the idea of taking a regional approach to support local revitalization efforts, the Alliance could support local efforts to:

- Explore the creation of a revolving loan program to support commercial building renovation, facade improvements, sign improvements, and landscaping.
- Complete a market study to better understand the full market potential of the Byway's traditional main streets.
- Focus on strategies to attract new businesses and merchants, increase competitiveness, and stimulate consumer spending.
- Establish a circuit-riding main street manager to help advance local revitalization efforts.
- Support the organization of a Byway merchants association or advocacy group to address improvements and encourage partnerships.

## Enhance Gateways to Towns & Villages

Consolidating community entrance signs and reinforcing their visibility with attractive landscaping is the most direct way to signal to drivers that they are making the transition from a rural stretch of road to entering a settled place. In most towns along the Byway, entrance signs are either non-existent, too small to distinguish from nearby commercial signs, or scattered in several locations. Some towns have two or more entry signs, with at least one indicating the town's corporate limits and another announcing the community's civic groups. Gateways to other places, like Grasonville, are not well articulated. In still other locations along the Byway, existing signs are simply too small or too similar to highway directional signs to have any significant impact.

Gateway signs should provide a clear demarcation between settled areas and rural areas, signaling to drivers the need to be alert, adjust driving habits, and if interested, start

searching for heritage-related destinations. Communities along the corridor, with the Alliance's assistance, should plan gateway improvements that attract attention, tie into their surroundings, and reinforce the feeling of entry among Byway travelers.

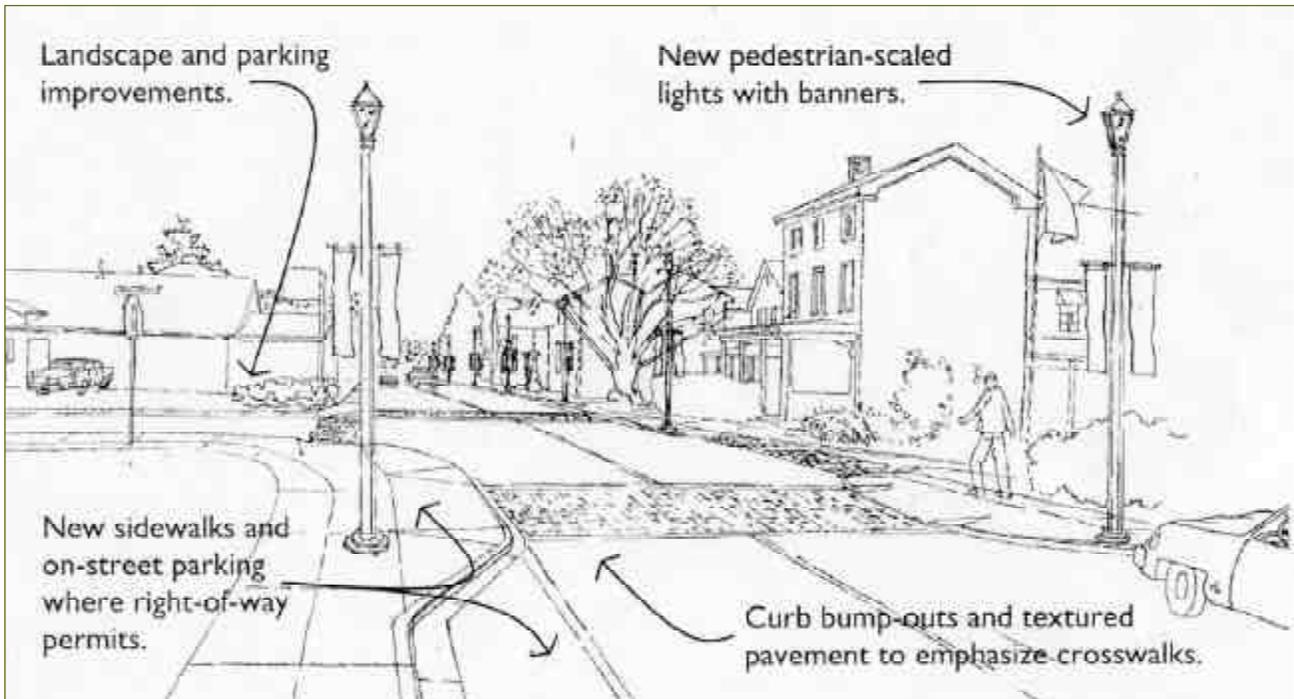
## Improve Commercial Strips

Improving conditions in the auto-oriented commercial areas of the Byway presents a difficult challenge. Commercial strip centers are the pre-dominant land use along entries to the Byway's larger towns and villages. Generally, the commercial strips along the Byway share the following characteristics:

- Large expanses of parking and paved surfaces.
- Minimal accommodations for pedestrians and bicyclists.
- Wide travel lanes and high travel speeds.
- Minimal landscaping on private lots and infrequent street trees and plantings along rights-of-way.
- Multiple entries to individual properties with few cross-parcel connections.
- Commercial signs and brightly lit franchise buildings.
- Loading docks, storage yards and trash receptacles visible from public ways.
- Building designs with little relation to regional styles.

Because the least attractive areas along the Byway shape local and visitor perceptions as strongly as the most attractive areas, the Alliance has prepared several strategies to improve conditions in the Byway's commercial areas.

Addressing conditions in these areas requires attention to a range of issues, with success hinging largely on the actions of private landowners and the MD SHA. To encourage sensitive, safe, and aesthetically pleasing



**Illustration of street-scape and traffic calming improvements in Kennedyville.**

improvements, the Alliance should focus energies in two areas: 1) working with MD SHA and localities to prepare byway-sensitive improvement plans, and 2) encouraging private owners to invest in improvements consistent with the overall vision and goals for the Byway.

To guide the Alliance's work, and influence the actions of private owners and MD SHA, a set of guidelines addressing conditions in commercial areas should be prepared. The Alliance's work with MD SHA would revolve around projects planned under the

Neighborhood Conservation Program and the agency's on-going transportation improvement program. The Alliance should participate in workshops for each Neighborhood Conservation project along the Byway, and offer suggestions for projects to incorporate in the District's work program.

General strategies to improve conditions in the Byway's commercial areas follow.

#### **Accommodating Pedestrians**

The newer commercial areas along the Byway do a poor job accommodating pedestrians, especially between adjacent uses. A number of recommendations are offered to improve conditions:

- Locate entrances and exits at an appropriate distance from intersections and minimize their width to promote safe pedestrian crossings.
- Clearly define building entrances, pedestrian ways and crosswalks.
- Consolidate site entrances and lessen curb cuts onto the main roadway to improve safety.

- Create clearly marked points of entry and exit.
- Consolidate access points in existing strip commercial areas to promote safety and limit potential conflicts.

### Landscaping & Screening

Landscaping and fencing are two of the most effective and least expensive ways to increase the attractiveness of commercial buildings and help them blend in with their surroundings. Landscaping provides numerous benefits. Beside screening less attractive views—for example, views to mechanical equipment or outdoor storage yards—trees and shrubs can be used effectively to mark site entrances, shade parking and pedestrian areas, and provide a sense of enclosure in otherwise open areas. Meadows of wildflowers or native grasses, and flowerbeds in special places help signal to the traveling public that people have pride in the appearance of their communities.

### Contextual Building & Site Design

The region's unique identity is built directly on the quality, scale and character of traditional buildings along the corridor—the farm buildings, the historic manor houses, and the residences and shops clustered in towns, villages and crossroads. Building on this important heritage is among the central goals of the Plan.

The visual character of buildings and their relationship with the Scenic Byway and adjacent structures are important concerns, not only for the appearance of the individual site, but also for the overall appearance of the route. In the design of new buildings or the redesign of existing buildings, thought should be given to the way the building will fit within its context.

Owners, architects, builders and contractors should take a look at the region's traditional buildings before making their design



**Examples of a sensitively-designed gas station and car wash.**

decisions. How does size, form, and look relate to what is around it? This is not to suggest that new buildings should mimic the region's historic buildings, but there are ways to ensure compatibility. A look at the region's vernacular residential buildings may lead one to consider the use of wood siding or a porch to shelter the entry.

### Access Improvements

Providing clear, convenient, and safe access to development sites for motorists is a basic objective of the Plan. Many commercial parking lots along the Byway extend to the edge of the roadway. Without curbs, curb cuts or planted areas, it can be unclear where the road ends and the parking area begins. When cars are parked close to the edge of the road or are lined up side-by-side waiting

to enter traffic, visibility becomes an important concern. Consolidating access points and clearly marking the places to turn into a site greatly simplifies vehicle movements, making the experience of driving the Byway and navigating through commercial sites much safer. Consolidating access points also creates land for landscaping and improves the safety and ease of pedestrian circulation.

### Inter-parcel Connections

Providing ways to travel between sites, whether by foot or car, also helps improve conditions on the main road. Rather than re-enter the road to drive from one site to the next, patrons could walk from business to business or drive between them without entering the main stream of traffic. This could greatly improve driving conditions for those unfamiliar with local conditions. Tourists also tend to be more likely to use sidewalks in these circumstances, so it could prove beneficial for both residents and visitors, and for neighboring businesses to provide these connections.

Commercial signs along MD Route 213 in Chestertown.



## Managing Commercial Signs & Outdoor Advertising

The quality and effectiveness of commercial signs are an issue along virtually all scenic byways. Scenic quality advocates tend to argue that a ban on all but the smallest and least visible commercial signs is appropriate, and shop owners tend to argue for more signs to attract business. Finding a reasonable middle ground between these positions is critical if the goals of the Byway are to be realized.

### Improve Commercial Signs

On-premise signs—commercial signs located on the same property as the business or enterprise advertised—strongly influence the scenic character of the road. These signs take many forms—from wall and window signs to reader boards or pole signs—and typically employ text and graphics to announce the name of a business and advertise the products or services offered.

Communities along the Byway require businesses to comply with certain basic sign design standards and guidelines. Each county along the Byway regulates signage slightly differently, with variations in permitted size, location, type and design of signs. Consequently, a wide-range of signs are permitted along the Byway, with no guidance regarding their relationship to their immediate physical context, the width of adjacent rights-of-way or the permitted travel speed on adjacent roads.

To improve the look and effectiveness of commercial signs, the Alliance supports an effort to prepare some basic design guidelines. Many communities, through a variety of means—education, persuasion,

and regulations—have found ways to ensure that signs meet the needs of businesses and the public without degrading community appearance. As communities evaluate the feasibility of various approaches, the following options or guidelines should be considered:

- Encourage the use of monument signs—signs mounted on low pedestals or foundations—as alternatives to pole signs.
- Limit the total sign area—the sum of all wall, window, pole, and monument signs—permitted.
- Ensure that lettering is clear—large white lettering on a dark background works well.
- Encourage the use of international symbols for businesses offering tourist services and facilities.
- Prohibit or strictly limit the use of temporary signs, portable signs, pennants, banners, streamers, and those with flashing or intermittent lights.
- Limit shopping centers to one group identity sign or directory, with no freestanding signs for individual businesses.

## Develop Models for Franchise Signs

As traffic volumes have increased along the Byway, national fast food and gas chains have been attracted to the area. For the traveling public this has been a mixed blessing. While franchise operations have improved the variety of offerings and introduced a certain level of predictability—an important quality for travelers reluctant to jump feet first into the local culture—their “cookie cutter” design approach has degraded the region’s visual character. Certain stretches of the Byway, particularly along town approaches, are starting to look increasingly like other places in the region.



Local examples of well-designed commercial signs along the Byway.

Persuasion has been reported as among the best ways to achieve high quality, contextual sign design for franchise operations. According to a recent study sponsored by the American Institute of Certified Planners, most national fast food companies are willing to forgo plastic, one-size-fits-all designs in favor of those more sympathetic to their surroundings. If communities approach franchise operators early in the development decision-making cycle and present clear guidelines and successful examples, the likelihood of finding a “win-win” solution is greatly increased.



Examples of context-sensitive franchise signs.

## Restrict Outdoor Advertising

Title 23 of the United States Code provides that no new forms of outdoor advertising may be erected along any highway on the Interstate System or Federal-aid primary system that has been designated a scenic byway. Sections of the Chesapeake Country Scenic Byway affected by this are Routes 213 and 20. Prohibited forms of outdoor advertising are broadly defined as sign structures or combinations of sign structures or messages advertising a business located in another location that are visible from a designated portion of the route. The definition includes all sorts of outdoor signs, displays, devices, figures, paintings, billboards, and advertising structures. On-premise commercial signs, official traffic

control or directional signs, and signs installed under the recommended Tourist Oriented Destinations (TODs) program are not subject to the prohibition.

The prohibition, however, is not absolute. The law permits the construction of new billboards under two conditions—new billboards may be constructed 1) anywhere along the route to advertise an on-site business and 2) in commercial or industrial areas deemed not scenic by the state. While restrictions would apply to rural areas, commercial and industrial areas remain vulnerable.

Adopting local ordinances prohibiting the construction of new billboards is the most straightforward approach to the control of off-site signs. Kent County prohibits the construction of billboards, therefore protecting Route 445 from Rock Hall down to Eastern Neck Island. Queen Anne's County prohibits off-premise signs (including billboards) but does permit off-site directional signs.

In summary, the majority of the Chesapeake Country Scenic Byway is protected through a combination of federal, state, and local laws. Routes 213 and 20 are protected at the state and federal level, while Route 445 is protected at the county level. Route 18 in Queen Anne's County is the only potentially threatened section of the Byway.

Developing a program to purchase and remove the existing billboards along the Byway is also an option that should be explored, but only after local controls are in place. Allocating funds to purchase and remove the few signs that exist could only be justified if billboards were banned along the Byway and programs were in place to guide visitors to important destinations and services off the corridor.