CHAPTER 6: HIGH-QUALITY, LIVABLE PLACES



COMMUNITY CHARACTER

INTRODUCTION

One of the primary roles of the Comprehensive Plan is to define future land use planning policy. This subchapter expands that guidance by incorporating character – the aspects of a development's design that make it unique and gives it a sense of place. It outlines Character Categories that describe the type of characteristics that should be supported within different Future Land Use classifications. Building on this policy direction, a Design Guidelines Manual will provide more details for guiding the design of future proposed developments.

PLANNING TO SUPPORT HENRICO'S COMMUNITY CHARACTER

With the Plan's focus on infill and redevelopment, along with corresponding changes in the western and central areas of Henrico County, additional design and character guidance is needed. In Varina, similar guidance is needed for older commercial corridors, but should also have policies in place to ensure that development reinforces rural and agricultural features. This subsection draws upon and supports the existing fabric of the county and its unique areas that provide a distinctive sense of place. It also provides direction for how evolving areas may be designed in the future to achieve the vision of this plan.

LINKAGE TO COMMUNITY VISION

Community Character in the 2045 Comprehensive Plan acts as the design framework that translates Henrico County's community vision into tangible development guidance. While Future Land Use establishes where different types of development should occur, Community Character defines how that development should look, feel, and integrate with its surroundings.

Rooted in the theme of High-Quality, Livable Places, the Community Character framework promotes managed and sustainable growth by ensuring new development enhances rather than detracts from existing neighborhood character, while also supporting safe, connected spaces that encourage walkability, bicycling, and community interaction.

For Henrico County residents, development that creates a strong sense of place, maintains compatibility with surrounding areas, and contributes to the county's reputation of diverse, attractive neighborhoods that support household needs and attract workforce talent is essential to sustaining the county as a high-quality place to live. Community character advances this vision by providing design guidance for each character category. This includes

elements such as site design, building massing and orientation, open space integration, connections and transitions between uses.

The emphasis on compatibility throughout this subchapter ensures that new development strengthens the cohesive identity residents value while providing the flexibility needed for sustainable growth and evolving communities.

COMMUNITY ASPIRATIONS

As part of the HenricoNEXT public engagement, residents expressed clear satisfaction with the quality of life offered in the county. Community input from both 2022 and 2024 reflect that over 90% of residents rated their quality of life as "good," "great," or "superior." As the county continues to grow, residents would like to see the quality of life maintained for current and future community members.

The "High-Quality, Livable Places" vision statement received strong support from residents, with 77% of respondents endorsing it as important. In 2024, 74% of respondents supported the inclusion of the Community Character goal in this plan. Public input identified many important components of community design, including:

- 44% respondents ranked parks, recreation, and the natural environment as their top priority
- 53% of respondents identified preserving open space as a top planning priority
- 48% of respondents selected environmental quality as a top planning priority
- The top two responses when asked about the vision for the county included the terms “walkable” and “bike”
- 40% of respondents called for adding more sidewalks in older neighborhoods and commercial corridors

The community's vision demonstrates clear support for development patterns that prioritize connectivity, accessibility, and open space as essential components of high-quality, livable places.

COMMUNITY CHARACTER GOAL

Henrico County will encourage design that maintains and continues the unique identity that sets Henrico apart– an identity that values the distinctiveness of each neighborhood, understands and integrates deep historic roots, and emphasizes the importance of appealing, healthy, livable spaces.

IDENTIFYING CHARACTER

Since the design identity of an area is only partially determined by land use, this subchapter establishes Character Categories that provide design direction for each Future Land Use classification.

Given the comparative flexibility and fluidity of character area boundaries relative to the Future Land Use classifications, the following two policies are intended to assist decisionmakers in discerning the Character Category of a parcel.

Policy CC 1: Relationship to Surrounding Land Uses

Each Character Category includes Preferred and Supported Future Land Use classifications that are compatible within the area. Decisionmakers should only consider a given parcel or tract to have that character if:

- Most nearby parcels have a compatible Preferred or Supported classification, and
- A majority of nearby acreage is classified with a Preferred Future Land Use.

Policy CC 2: Consistency with Adjacent Properties

No parcel should be interpreted to have a given Character Category if the majority of surrounding properties fall under a different category.

CHARACTER GUIDANCE

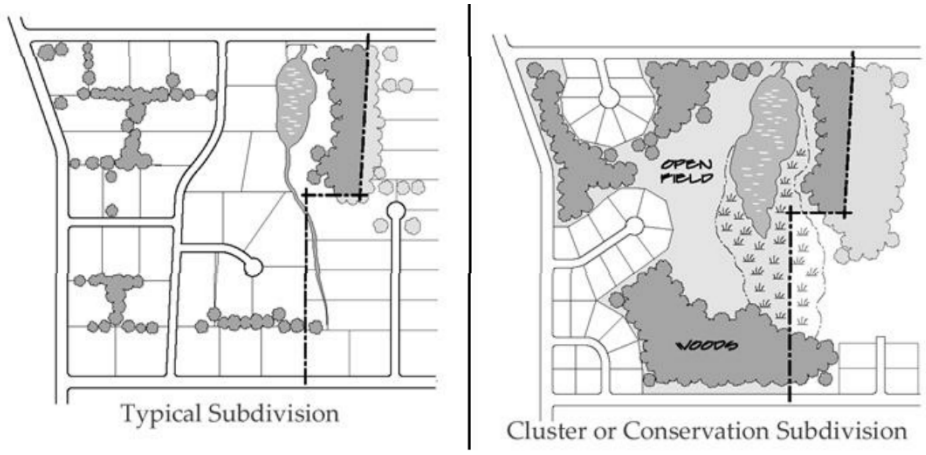
Policy guidance for Character Categories in Henrico is comprised of several key design elements outlined below.

ELEMENTS OF CHARACTER

Five elements of character are common to each Character Category: Development Pattern, Massing and Orientation, Open Space, Connections and Transitions, and Parking. Each Character Category emerges from the unique application of these five features. These character elements are described below.

DEVELOPMENT PATTERN

Development pattern refers to the general layout of streets, blocks, and buildings across an area in its entirety, rather than upon an individual parcel. This includes many different designs, including but not limited to clustered, uniformly distributed, gridded, wall-sharing, and topographically situated. While related, development pattern does not refer to density, which can be measured by comparing the built area to unimproved space using floor-area ratio, dwelling units per acre, or other metrics.



Development Patterns

MASSING AND ORIENTATION

Massing refers to the shape and size of buildings. It describes how a building fills space (height, width, geometry) and impacts the "feeling" within the nearby areas. Alterations to a building's facade (items such as windows, doors, and overall presentation) change the perception of its massing. Orientation refers to a building's placement on a site, and its relationship to streets (defined through setbacks) and neighboring buildings.

OPEN SPACE

Open space includes undeveloped, natural, and park spaces, as well as landscaping, yards, and permeable surfaces.

CONNECTIONS AND TRANSITIONS

Connections and transitions focus primarily on street and pathway design. This includes thoroughfares that allow for vehicles, as well as safe transit, pedestrian, bicycle, and other micromobility infrastructure. Successful connections and transitions foster transportation in such a way that supports the desired character of an area.

PARKING

Parking describes the design of the space(s) where automobiles are stored on a site and includes on-street, structured decks, and varied sized lots. The design of parking areas should reinforce the objectives of the Character Category.

CHARACTER CATEGORIES

PURPOSE AND INTENT

To guide design of developments in areas with a common sense of place, the county has identified 11 Character Categories that are defined by their unique combination of the five elements of character. They help to implement policy direction in Chapter 4: Managed and Sustained Growth's Policy 11: Ensure High-Quality Design and Compatibility.

The 11 Character Categories are as follows:

- Rural Vista
- Rural Village
- Suburban Community
- Traditional Suburban
- Traditional Main Street
- Planned Urbanism
- Urban Core
- Riverfront Destination
- Commercial Center
- Business Park
- Infrastructural and Industrial

CATEGORY 6-1: RURAL VISTA

Rural Vista areas are primarily natural in character: scenic, environmentally sensitive, or agricultural. If buildings are present, they are rare and exist to provide access to natural amenities or facilitate the use of working lands, or provide homes without compromising the character of the space. A scene from a Rural Vista area might include a creek-lined, dense forest giving way to the rolling fields of a cow pasture, with a farmhouse and associated barns as the only buildings in view.



Varina Farm

Typical Future Land Use (FLU) Classifications

PREFERRED FLU CLASSIFICATIONS:

- Environmental Protection Area (EPA), Prime Agriculture/Rural Conservation (PA/RC)

SUPPORTED FLU CLASSIFICATIONS:

- Open Space/Recreation (OS/R), Rural Residential (RR)

CATEGORY GUIDANCE 6-1-1: DEVELOPMENT PATTERN

Development, where it exists, should either be isolated or clustered; isolated development is designed through large lots where a given principal structure will, at a minimum, have no or limited sightlines to other principal structures on adjacent lands, and clustered development describes a grouping of individual structures, typically homes that share common open space and therefore maintain rural character. Within the Rural Vista category, no single cluster should have more than ten buildings.

CATEGORY GUIDANCE 6-1-2: MASSING AND ORIENTATION

Structures that support agricultural operations should be located near working lands and designed to reinforce the character of the area. Residential structures should use materials and design principles that complement the natural environment. Buildings should avoid interrupting scenic vistas and generally be no more than two stories in height.

CATEGORY GUIDANCE 6-1-3: OPEN SPACE

Open space preservation should be the primary characteristic of Rural Vista areas, with agricultural or natural areas maintained in their existing state wherever possible and all built structures supporting rather than competing with open space preservation.

Natural areas should be preserved with an emphasis on protecting water resources, wildlife habitat, and scenic corridors. Public access to open space should be managed to avoid conflicts with agricultural operations and environmentally sensitive lands.

CATEGORY GUIDANCE 6-1-4: CONNECTIONS AND TRANSITIONS

Rural Vista areas should include connections via shared-use paths and road corridors that maintain rural character while providing accessibility. These paths should follow creek corridors, field edges, overlooks, or other natural features that enhance the rural experience, potentially using boardwalks when appropriate, without disrupting the surrounding environment or agricultural operations.

Transportation access should rely primarily on collector and local roads. Arterial roads should be discouraged unless necessary for safety or agricultural needs. Where new road connections are required, they should be designed to minimize environmental impacts and preserve scenic character.

Sidewalks are generally uncommon in Rural Vista areas, though pedestrian access should be accommodated through natural surface trails where appropriate. Transitions between Rural Vista areas and adjacent Character Categories, such as Rural Village, should be carefully managed to maintain natural buffers while respecting development needs.

CATEGORY GUIDANCE 6-1-5: PARKING

Parking lots should be avoided whenever possible in Rural Vista areas to preserve natural beauty and environmental sensitivity. When necessary, it should be designed and located to minimize erosion and surface water flow disruption while occupying the least visually prominent areas of sites. For clustered development, shared parking should be prioritized to reduce impervious surface coverage.

Parking areas should be constructed as permeable surfaces that do not generate excess dust. Gravel or other natural surface materials are preferred over asphalt or concrete to maintain rural character.

CATEGORY 6-2: RURAL VILLAGE

Rural Village areas maintain the pastoral character of the Rural Vista category while supporting higher, more diverse, and pedestrian-oriented levels of activity. Meadows, fields, and forests make way for small nodes of daytime activity that broadly support local agricultural enterprises and rural living. A place of worship might sit adjacent to a neighborhood market and be surrounded by a few single-family homes with large yards. Local activity would be focused around gathering places such as a service club's meetinghouse or community centers.



Varina Village

Typical Future Land Use (FLU) Classifications

PREFERRED FLU CLASSIFICATIONS:

- Rural Residential (RR), Prime Agriculture (PA), Commercial Concentration (CC)

SUPPORTIVE FLU CLASSIFICATIONS:

- Open Space/Recreation (OS/R), Government (GOV), Semi-Public (SP)

CATEGORY GUIDANCE 6-2-1: DEVELOPMENT PATTERN

Homes and other buildings should be clustered together near activity centers to avoid development from encroaching into nearby Rural Vista areas. More intense uses should be closer to the center of the node. Areas of development within the Rural Village category should be limited (no more than ten non-residential buildings) to ensure rural character.

CATEGORY GUIDANCE 6-2-2: MASSING AND ORIENTATION

The front of buildings should generally be street-facing and no more than two stories (unless necessary for certain agricultural uses, such as grain siloes). Rural retail development should be located at crossroad intersections when possible.

Rural areas are generally able to support a variety of building styles, so while it remains important for buildings to have quality construction materials and design, the explicit architectural style of the buildings is less important. Nonetheless, non-residential buildings should be designed with engaging street-facing facades. Standalone strip mall developments should be strongly discouraged. Service features, such as gas station canopies and fuel tanks, should be designed or shielded in such a way that improves the visual appeal and general attractiveness of the use and maintains the rural character of the area. New buildings should use or complement the architectural designs of nearby historic structures.

CATEGORY GUIDANCE 6-2-3: OPEN SPACE

Much of the open space typically understood to be rural (wetlands, meadows, fields, forests) falls under the nature-predominant category of Rural Vista, while the Rural Village category provides sites for day-to-day living.

Open space in the Rural Village category serves as a transition between the developed nodes within this character area and those in the Rural Vista category. Since rural life requires the provision of certain services, preferred designs will consolidate services at nodes (Rural Villages) rather than allowing widespread development throughout undeveloped and agricultural areas (Rural Vistas). Since Rural Village character areas are typically surrounded by Rural Vista areas, it is important that new development in areas designated Rural Village be managed in such a way that it does not compromise the natural integrity of adjacent areas. This can include encouraging Rural Village-scale development at the center of the character area and discouraging it at its edges, where more restrictive landscape or tree canopy buffers provide transitions.

Open space should serve to improve and supplement the aesthetic quality of the structures within the character area and, when appropriate, provide spaces for recreational use, including playgrounds, gazebos, or other park equipment. It should also separate buildings sufficiently to allow nature to continue to dominate one's field of vision.

CATEGORY GUIDANCE 6-2-4: CONNECTIONS AND TRANSITIONS

Lands within the Rural Village category are accessed almost exclusively by car. These development nodes can support some pedestrian activity, so it is important to facilitate traffic calming measures both for the safety of residents and passing drivers, while simultaneously maintaining the low intensity character of the area. Bikeways and shared-use paths that connect Rural Village areas to each other and beyond are also encouraged.

CATEGORY GUIDANCE 6-2-5: PARKING

For the purpose of preserving green space and permeable surfaces, vehicular parking should be kept to the minimum necessary in the Rural Village category.

In rural activity nodes at crossroad intersections, parking lots should be designed to keep speeds low within the lot and discourage cut-through traffic that bypasses the main intersection. They should be landscaped appropriately and provide shade. Benches, picnic tables, or other small amenities can be appropriate additions between the lot and buildings and inside yards when applicable.

CATEGORY 6-3: SUBURBAN COMMUNITY

Suburban Community areas were primarily built between the 1980s and early 2000s consisting of residential neighborhoods accessed by a combination of automobile and some alternative transportation modes, such as transit and bikes. Streets are typically curvilinear with cul-de-sacs. In contrast to older neighborhoods, Suburban Community areas may have strong neighborhood associations that manage aesthetic concerns. These communities are often master planned and may incorporate different housing types into one development but are predominantly comprised of single-family detached housing separated from other uses.



CrossRidge, Glen Allen

Typical Future Land Use Classifications

PREFERRED FLU CLASSIFICATIONS:

- Suburban Residential 1 (SR1), Suburban Residential 2 (SR2)

SUPPORTIVE FLU CLASSIFICATIONS:

- Suburban Mixed Use (SMX), Open Space/Recreation (OS/R)

CATEGORY GUIDANCE 6-3-1: DEVELOPMENT PATTERN

Buildings within the Suburban Community category should be uniformly distributed within developments and may use small to moderate length blocks. Buildings may be obscured by the use of curvilinear streets and topographical or natural features (hills, forested areas, lakes and other water features, etc.)

CATEGORY GUIDANCE 6-3-2: MASSING AND ORIENTATION

Homes in Suburban Community areas should be primarily residential single-family detached with some housing diversity that maintains aesthetic uniformity across the development. Buildings should be oriented to face streets with consistent setbacks that accommodate front yards and landscaping. Homes should generally be one to two stories to maintain neighborhood scale and character. Neighborhood streets should provide ease of use for vehicles with housing set further back from the street. Garages are located to the side of houses and are preferably set back from the front plane of the house.

CATEGORY GUIDANCE 6-3-3: OPEN SPACE

Open space in Suburban Community areas should support the aesthetic quality of the neighborhood while providing a space for recreation and gathering. Common open space should be integrated throughout developments, including both passive (landscaped medians, entrance features) and active recreational spaces (playgrounds, racquet courts, community centers). Larger community parks should be strategically located to serve multiple neighborhoods. Private open space in the form of front and back yards should be preserved to maintain suburban character and provide space for individual household activities.

CATEGORY GUIDANCE 6-3-4: CONNECTIONS AND TRANSITIONS

Internal connectivity should be provided by local streets designed for vehicle circulation, with sidewalks provided on both sides of the street where appropriate for pedestrian safety and neighborhood walkability. Pedestrian access should especially be incorporated into street design when adjacent to destinations, such as neighborhood clubs, swimming pools and neighboring communities. Designs will typically be curvilinear, include appropriate intersection spacing, and possess landscaping to maintain safe speeds. These developments should include sidewalk access to transit stops and bike lanes or sharrows to support active transportation.

CATEGORY GUIDANCE 6-3-5: PARKING

Parking in the Suburban Community areas should be accommodated primarily through private driveways and garages attached to or integrated with individual homes. For new development, alley entrances may be appropriate to reduce the visual impact of driveways and garage doors facing the street. Street parking should be minimized to limit vehicle congestion and maintain traffic flow.

CATEGORY 6-4: TRADITIONAL SUBURBAN

Traditional Suburban areas include historic streetcar-centered communities that connected to the City of Richmond – a development pattern common in the early to mid-1900s. This area has many of the desired outcomes of the Suburban Community type, but does not place the same emphasis on homogeneity (property aesthetics are maintained predominantly by individuals) and are not as automobile dependent. Traditional Suburban areas, when coupled with effective public transit, can allow for households to utilize various modes of transportation rather than relying solely on automobiles.



Crestview

Typical Future Land Use Classifications

PREFERRED FLU CLASSIFICATIONS:

- Traditional Neighborhood Development (TND), Urban Residential (UR), Multi-Family Residential (MFR)

SUPPORTED FLU CLASSIFICATIONS:

- Suburban Mixed Use (SMX)

CATEGORY GUIDANCE 6-4-1: DEVELOPMENT PATTERN

Traditional Suburban structures should be developed in a gridded pattern, having approximately the same number of buildings per block except for situations where an amenity (like a park or community center) anchors a section of a neighborhood and thus requires a greater proportion of the area. Residential buildings should be evenly distributed, while commercial and mixed-use buildings may be located at the corners of a street.

CATEGORY GUIDANCE 6-4-2: MASSING AND ORIENTATION

Buildings should be oriented toward the street with minimal setbacks to create an engaging pedestrian environment. Front porches, stoops, and other transitional design elements between public and private spaces should be encouraged to enhance neighborhood interaction. Buildings should generally be one to three stories to maintain human scale while supporting medium density. Block patterns should be compact and walkable, with buildings defining the break from public streets to private spaces. Garages should be pulled back from the street whether attached or detached, located behind the building and accessed from rear alleys or side streets when possible.

CATEGORY GUIDANCE 6-4-3: OPEN SPACE

Open space in Traditional Suburban areas should prioritize community spaces that strengthen neighborhood identity and character. Small neighborhood parks, trails, and natural areas incorporated into larger community sites should be integrated throughout developments to provide recreation and community gathering spaces. Open space should be designed to enhance walkability by providing pedestrian routes and rest areas (e.g., benches) along key corridors. Private open space in the form of front yards should be minimal to support street-oriented character; however, back yards and courtyards can provide private outdoor space for residents.

CATEGORY GUIDANCE 6-4-4: CONNECTIONS AND TRANSITIONS

Traditional Suburban areas should prioritize pedestrian and bicycle connectivity both within neighborhoods and to adjacent areas. Sidewalks should border both sides of the streets. Street networks should follow a grid pattern that supports walkability while accommodating existing development patterns and vehicle use. Alleys should be designed as attractive, pedestrian-friendly spaces that provide access to parking while maintaining the prevalence of front-facing streets.

Bicycle infrastructure can be integrated through designated preferred bike routes with low speed limits and dedicated crossings when intersecting collector and arterial streets. Public transportation access should be supported through accessible stop locations and pedestrian connections. Multimodal traffic calming measures should be employed to maintain safety for all road users.

CATEGORY GUIDANCE 6-4-5: PARKING

Parking in Traditional Suburban areas should be designed to support pedestrian-oriented character while meeting resident needs. Access to parking should primarily be from alleys or side streets. Shared driveways with tandem parking or shared garages should be encouraged.

On-street parking should be clearly designated and primarily reserved for residents, guests, and short-term needs such as delivery vehicles. Off-street parking should be located to the side or rear of buildings.

CATEGORY 6-5: TRADITIONAL MAIN STREET

Traditional Main Street areas are often historically developed as retail and entertainment activity hubs in walking distance of traditional suburbs. They often act as town centers, defining an area's local culture, particularly for residents who live nearby. Traditional Main Streets might see office workers during the day, then transition to bar and restaurant nightlife in the evenings, and on weekends occasionally host a parade, farmers market, or festival.



East Nine Mile Road – Highland Springs

Typical Future Land Use Classifications

PREFERRED FLU CLASSIFICATIONS:

- Commercial Concentration (CC), Redevelopment Corridor (RC), Traditional Neighborhood Development (TND)

SUPPORTED FLU CLASSIFICATIONS:

- Urban Residential (UR), Urban Mixed Use (UMU)

CATEGORY GUIDANCE 6-5-1: DEVELOPMENT PATTERN

Traditional Main Street areas are gridded and may serve as an activity/cultural anchor for surrounding Traditional Suburban areas. The majority of Traditional Main Street structures on the same block should share a wall with neighboring buildings, except to allow for pedestrian pathways to rear parking areas/structures or for well-curated civic spaces, like pocket parks or reimagined alleyways. For Traditional Main Street areas that span multiple parallel corridors, interiors of blocks that are not fully enclosed or split by parallel alleys should be outfitted as vibrant semi-public and private community spaces. These

can include business patios and biergartens, shared apartment and condominium porches with well-landscaped areas, or other similar mixed-use backyard amenities.

CATEGORY GUIDANCE 6-5-2: MASSING AND ORIENTATION

Buildings should be street facing with minimal or no setbacks to create continuous street walls that shape the public realm. Ground floor facades should be transparent and engaging with large windows and front stoops to encourage pedestrian activity and window shopping. Buildings should generally be two to five stories to maintain human scale while supporting potential mixed-use development.

New buildings should incorporate elements and styles from adjacent structures, complementing existing street character with room for contemporary interpretation. Open facades that provide connected indoor and outdoor spaces may also be desirable. Corner buildings should be designed to address both street frontages.

CATEGORY GUIDANCE 6-5-3: OPEN SPACE

Open space in Traditional Main Street areas should enhance the pedestrian experience and provide places for community and civic gatherings. Pocket parks and landscaped plazas should be strategically placed to accommodate informal community space, small events, and outdoor dining. Street trees, street furniture and landscaping should provide shade and visual appeal for pedestrians and businesses. Roofs should also be considered as an option for open space, whether as a simple green roof or as shaded rooftop terraces for businesses or residences.

CATEGORY GUIDANCE 6-5-4: CONNECTIONS AND TRANSITIONS

Traditional Main Street areas should prioritize pedestrian and bicycle access while carefully managing vehicle activity.

Pedestrian crossings should be frequent and well-marked, with enhanced crosswalk measures at key intersections. Public transportation should be integrated into the streetscape design and provide convenient access to main street businesses. Connections to adjacent Traditional Suburban neighborhoods should be clear and inviting, encouraging walking and cycling access to main street amenities and businesses.

CATEGORY GUIDANCE 6-5-5: PARKING

Parking in Traditional Main Street areas should be managed to support businesses while maintaining pedestrian character. Structured and shared parking are preferred over individual business lots. Surface lots, if present, should be exclusively behind buildings and on street parking should shield pedestrians from traffic.

Appropriate space should also be allocated to accommodate deliveries, preferably via loading docks located behind the main row of buildings in a service alley. For a multi-street area, it may be necessary to designate loading spaces at the beginning or end of streets to accommodate both customers and delivery drivers.

CATEGORY 6-6: PLANNED URBANISM

Planned Urbanism areas seek to integrate Traditional Suburban and Traditional Main Street character in a single planned development. This character type prioritizes walkable lifestyles and human-scale development. They are often more compact than their traditional counterparts, seeking to reach unit counts that facilitate vibrant, dense, urban environments. Planned Urbanism developments are typically intended to facilitate daily life and be able to exist as comprehensive "villages" unto themselves.



West Broad Village

Typical Future Land Use Classifications

PREFERRED FLU CLASSIFICATIONS:

- Urban Mixed Use (UMU), Urban Residential (UR), Commercial Concentration (CC), Redevelopment Area (RA)

SUPPORTED FLU CLASSIFICATIONS:

- Traditional Neighborhood Development (TND), Multi-Family Residential (MFR), Semi-Public (SP)

CATEGORY GUIDANCE 6-6-1: DEVELOPMENT PATTERN

The residential portions of Planned Urbanism developments should have the same gridded pattern as Traditional Suburban areas, while mixed-use or commercial areas should emulate Traditional Main Street layouts. Transitions from higher intensity mixed-use and commercial areas to lower intensity residential areas should be made through the introduction of ground floor retail, architectural designs, use of topographical conditions, or natural buffers.

CATEGORY GUIDANCE 6-6-2: MASSING AND ORIENTATION

Buildings should be oriented to create well-defined public spaces and street environments similar to Traditional Main Street areas, with structures pulled close to sidewalks and transparent ground floors. Since Planned Urbanism areas are typically new construction, special attention should be paid to creating an authentic sense of place through varied building heights and articulated building frontages.

Buildings should be designed to address all directions, with sides and backs of buildings having the same façade materials as the fronts, or trompe l'oeil elements or murals to create visual interest. Building heights should vary, typically ranging from three to six stories within the development, to reduce monotonous designs while maintaining overall human scale.

CATEGORY GUIDANCE 6-6-3: OPEN SPACE

Open space in Planned Urbanism areas should create a network of public places that serve the daily needs of residents while providing venues for community interaction and events. Pocket parks and landscaped plazas should be strategically distributed throughout the development to ensure all residents have convenient access to outdoor space.

Street trees should be varied in size and species, with larger trees prioritized to create a feeling of an established neighborhood. Public spaces, similar to Traditional Main Street areas, should be designed to accommodate special events such as farmers markets or outdoor performances, while also being available for use at all times.

CATEGORY GUIDANCE 6-6-4: CONNECTIONS AND TRANSITIONS

Planned Urbanism areas should be designed as walkable, connected, transit supported communities while providing smooth transitions to adjacent character areas. Internal connectivity should prioritize pedestrian and bicycle movement through a network of sidewalks, trails, and low-speed streets designed to be natural to navigate on foot and for multiple modes of transportation.

Approaching the edge of Planned Urbanism developments, building heights and densities should transition gradually to enhance compatibility with adjacent areas. If connecting to existing development, new streets and pathways should align with established pedestrian networks, sidewalks, and trails. Stub streets and sidewalks should be provided on edges where new, compatible development is planned or could be accommodated in the future.

CATEGORY GUIDANCE 6-6-5: PARKING

Parking in Planned Urbanism areas should be comprehensively planned to meet resident and visitor needs while maintaining its walkable and human-scale character. Structured parking is strongly preferred and should ideally be wrapped by mixed-use development so that they are not visible from the street.

On-street parking should be managed according to the specific context within the development, following Traditional Main Street or Downtown Core guidelines.

CATEGORY 6-7: URBAN CORE

This character category corresponds to highly developed satellite business districts that serve as significant regional economic centers with opportunities to take advantage of non-office-based activities. Urban Cores generally develop over time, rather than all at once, and are the result of multiple rounds of infill and redevelopment. These areas may serve as key commuter destinations and may undergo significant population fluctuation over the course of a workday.

In 2025, Henrico does not have any areas that have this character type at its full intensity, but some developments could evolve over the lifetime of the Plan. The following guidelines are intended to direct that growth should this character type fully arise.



Libbie Mill

Typical Future Land Use Classifications

PREFERRED FLU CLASSIFICATIONS:

- Urban Mixed Use (UMU), Office (OF), Redevelopment Area (RA)

SUPPORTED FLU CLASSIFICATIONS:

- Commercial Concentration (CC), Urban Residential (UR), Multi-Family Residential (MFR)

CATEGORY GUIDANCE 6-7-1: DEVELOPMENT PATTERN

Urban Core areas typically arise when gridded blocks become fully enclosed or entirely taken up by buildings along three or more rows of blocks in multiple directions. While single buildings that cover the majority of a block may be appropriate under specific

circumstances (such as when the block also hosts considerable public space, like a park or plaza), these buildings should not dominate, as it can easily overwhelm human-scale sensibilities.

CATEGORY GUIDANCE 6-7-2: MASSING AND ORIENTATION

Buildings should be taller and more closely spaced than in other character areas but clearly defined and setback to avoid urban canyon effects with a wide variety of building types. Buildings should be oriented to create active street frontages with transparent ground floors and frequent entrances, maintaining a human-scale environment. Upper floors should be varied in height to maintain light and air circulation. Corner buildings should address both street frontages and serve as focal points for pedestrian activity.

CATEGORY GUIDANCE 6-7-3: OPEN SPACE

Open space in Urban Core areas should include pocket parks, landscaped plazas, and street trees. Public spaces should be designed to accommodate special events while also maintaining elements to attract use at all times. Street trees and passive amenities should be selected for urban conditions and provide shade and visual appeal along pedestrian corridors to provide a pleasant pedestrian and cyclist experience.

CATEGORY GUIDANCE 6-7-4: CONNECTIONS AND TRANSITIONS

Urban Core areas should prioritize pedestrian, bicycle, and transit connections over vehicle access. Streets should be designed to accommodate high pedestrian volumes with wide sidewalks, frequent and accentuated crosswalks, sufficient lighting, and traffic calming measures such as neckdowns and pedestrian bulb-outs. Alleys may be used for loading and deliveries. Transit stops should be integrated into the streetscape design and provide convenient access to regional destinations along with bicycle infrastructure provided through dedicated lanes or shared street configurations where appropriate.

CATEGORY GUIDANCE 6-7-5: PARKING

Parking should be divided entirely between structured parking garages and street parking, where the latter is occasionally broken up by neckdowns at pedestrian crosswalks and primarily managed to serve short-term business needs. For areas with regular, frequent transit connections, public parking may be forgone entirely.

CATEGORY 6-8: RIVERFRONT DESTINATION

Riverfront Destination character areas connect the community to its waterways and their banks, typically through activities that place the waterway as either a recreational or scenic destination. This character type is similar to Traditional Main Street areas in terms of its purpose– a hub for community, but is often created as part of a singular development, like Planned Urbanism. Riverfront Destinations often emphasize adaptive reuse of public spaces woven into the broader development.



Rocketts Landing

Typical Future Land Use Classifications

PREFERRED FLU CLASSIFICATIONS:

- Urban Mixed Use (UMU), Urban Residential (UR), Environmental Protection Area (EPA)

SUPPORTED FLU CLASSIFICATIONS:

- Traditional Neighborhood Development (TND), Suburban Mixed Use (SMX), Open Space/Recreation (OS/R)

CATEGORY GUIDANCE 6-8-1: DEVELOPMENT PATTERN

The Riverfront Destination area is focused primarily on the James River but otherwise emulates the Traditional Main Street and Planned Urbanism character categories. Commercial uses within Riverfront Destination may diverge from Traditional Main Street corridors in that the river side of businesses should be treated as another front side of the building, rather than as a back yard.

The "main street" portion of Riverfront Destinations, while still acting as the anchor of the neighborhood, should be located on the river, rather than in the center of the neighborhood typically along road frontages.

CATEGORY GUIDANCE 6-8-2: MASSING AND ORIENTATION

Buildings should provide uninterrupted river views, have frequent porches and patios, and otherwise direct attention to the James River. Auxiliary structures that do not facilitate interaction with the waterfront should be located farthest from it. Building masses should occasionally split to provide openings for the river to be viewable from the street. Ground floor uses should emphasize transparency and indoor-outdoor connections through large windows and outdoor seating areas.

Building heights should be carefully managed to preserve river views from multiple vantage points while allowing for appropriate development density. Adaptive reuse of existing waterfront structures should be prioritized to help maintain historic character while allowing access to new uses.

CATEGORY GUIDANCE 6-8-3: OPEN SPACE

Open space in Riverfront Destination areas should prioritize public access to and enjoyment of the waterfront. A continuous riverwalk park should be provided to connect different areas of the development and provide public access along the water. This pathway should be designed with appropriate lighting, seating, and landscape features to create a highly desired public amenity.

Riverside parks and plazas should be integrated into the development to provide venues for both active and passive recreation. These spaces should be designed to accommodate waterfront activities such as fishing, boating, and other water-related events. Public spaces should be designed to accommodate special events such as concerts and markets that take advantage of the scenic waterfront

Landscape design should complement the natural waterfront environment. Native plantings and sustainable stormwater management should be incorporated where appropriate.

CATEGORY GUIDANCE 6-8-4: CONNECTIONS AND TRANSITIONS

Riverfront Destination areas should be designed as integral parts of the broader pedestrian and bicycle network, with particular emphasis on high-quality waterfront connections. Multi-use paths and trails should be of the highest quality, using boardwalks, overlooks, and other specialized features that enhance the waterfront experience.

Where connections to existing trail systems are not available, new developments should include stub-outs and design features for future connections. Transitions between the waterfront and adjacent character categories should be carefully managed to maintain public access to the water while balancing development needs.

CATEGORY GUIDANCE 6-8-5: PARKING

Parking in Riverfront Destination areas should preserve waterfront access and views while accommodating the needs of visitors. Surface parking should never be located between

buildings and the waterfront, and shared parking should be prioritized to accommodate commercial and recreational demands. Parking areas should be appropriately landscaped to minimize visual impact on the waterfront.

CATEGORY 6-9: COMMERCIAL CENTER

Commercial Center areas are conventionally auto-oriented style developments that provide key retail and other activities to Suburban Community and Traditional Suburban areas. At their best, Commercial Centers avoid vacancies, emphasize amenities instead of parking, and allow for human-scale interaction without generating enclosures that separate Commercial Center services from the rest of the built environment. Areas with this character should, when possible, redevelop to other, less auto-centric character categories that incorporate a variety of residential and commercial uses.



Willow Lawn on W. Broad Street

Typical Future Land Use Classifications

PREFERRED FLU CLASSIFICATIONS:

- Commercial Arterial (CA), Commercial Concentration (CC), Urban Mixed Use (UMU)

SUPPORTED FLU CLASSIFICATIONS:

- Office/Service (O/S), Government (GOV), Semi-Public (SP)

CATEGORY GUIDANCE 6-9-1: DEVELOPMENT PATTERN

Development in this category is auto-centric, and its layout is generally use-determined. While structures should accommodate and be appealing to pedestrians, they should be easily accessible to vehicles and easily viewed from roadways in order to attract a large customer base. This category should not have sightlines into a residential development or vice versa.

CATEGORY GUIDANCE 6-9-2: MASSING AND ORIENTATION

Buildings should be arranged around common areas and pedestrian spaces rather than parking lots, when possible, with covered walkways or corridors connecting buildings to parking areas. While buildings typically have large footprints, facades should be inviting and possess transparency to avoid unbroken walls. Buildings should be oriented to face primary streets, with service areas and loading docks located away from main pedestrian and private vehicle areas.

CATEGORY GUIDANCE 6-9-3: OPEN SPACE

Open space in Commercial Center areas should focus on improving the visual quality and adding an environmental component to auto-oriented development. Appropriately sized trees in landscape islands should be integrated into parking areas to provide shade and visual relief from paved surfaces. Pollinator corridors, amenity spaces, and parking lot landscaping should be incorporated along property edges and underutilized areas.

CATEGORY GUIDANCE 6-9-4: CONNECTIONS AND TRANSITIONS

Commercial Center areas should provide appropriate transitions to adjacent residential neighborhoods by way of landscaped buffers, bike and pedestrian paths and sidewalks. Small collector streets should provide access to arterial and collector roads with a focus on interconnectivity.

CATEGORY GUIDANCE 6-9-5: PARKING

Parking should be managed to reduce visual impact while maintaining the functionality needed for auto-oriented retail. For developments where building entrances all face the same direction, surface parking should be located behind or to the side of buildings rather than between buildings and primary streets. Buildings should be close to the street when possible. Shared parking should be encouraged and prioritized, and drive-through restaurants should have creative stacking solutions to minimize spillover traffic.

CATEGORY 6-10: BUSINESS PARK

Business Park areas generally exist as independent developments that generate significant economic value for the region. Historically, this character type has typically only been active during work hours, but redevelopment can provide more diversified activity. As the role of offices in residents' lives adapt due to technological and social changes, Business Park character areas will have the opportunity to reconfigure themselves in new ways to foster a more holistic relationship with the community.



Innsbrook

Typical Future Land Use Classifications

PREFERRED FLU CLASSIFICATIONS:

- Office (OF), Government (GOV), Redevelopment Area (RA)

SUPPORTED FLU CLASSIFICATIONS:

- Office/Service (O/S), Light Industrial (LI), Urban Mixed-Use (UMU), Semi-Public (SP)

CATEGORY GUIDANCE 6-10-1: DEVELOPMENT PATTERN

Single-use business parks separated by large open spaces that focus primarily on automobile access should be transformed into more walkable, bikeable, and transit-friendly development that support the daily needs of workers and allow them the option to live in close proximity to the office and find recreational and service destinations nearby. Over time, the open spaces that separated uses can be transformed through innovative infill development to provide retail and housing options for workers and provide a more compact urban form.

CATEGORY GUIDANCE 6-10-2: MASSING AND ORIENTATION

Buildings should be designed for efficiency and future adaptability, while minimizing overall land consumption. When necessary, buildings should aim for the minimum possible floor area to accommodate relevant uses, especially for storage. Portions of buildings with offices should be located near each other, use shared parking, and generally be on the edges of the character area. Sculptures, murals, and other public art, in addition to architectural embellishment, should be used to offset the lack of visual interest typical to this character category.

Business Parks may additionally include smaller amenities geared predominantly to daily office workers but also surrounding residents. These structures should be pedestrian-scale and offer visual distinction from surrounding structures.

CATEGORY GUIDANCE 6-10-3: OPEN SPACE

Open space in Business Park areas should provide amenities for workers while recognizing the potential for future mixed-use redevelopment. Large scale trees should be integrated throughout the parking areas and building sites to provide shade and reduce the urban heat island effect. Pollinator corridors and landscaping should be incorporated along property edges and underutilized areas. Outdoor common spaces should be landscaped, shaded, and shielded from loading docks or parking lots to provide gathering spaces for employees and accommodate potential community uses as the areas evolve.

CATEGORY GUIDANCE 6-10-4: CONNECTIONS AND TRANSITIONS

Landscaped buffers should separate business park activities from surrounding residential areas. Alternative transportation options such as carpools and buses with stops in residential areas are highly encouraged. Partnerships with developers to earmark areas for employee housing are also encouraged. Pedestrian and bicycle connections should be provided to connect within the park and to broader transportation networks.

CATEGORY GUIDANCE 6-10-5: PARKING

Shared and structured parking should be encouraged to minimize the total land area taken up by this land use. Parking areas should be landscaped and provide safe and attractive connections between the lots and the buildings they serve. Areas with high levels of human interaction should be buffered from parking. Parking areas should be designed to accommodate potential future conversion to alternative uses as transportation and work patterns change over time.

CATEGORY 6-11: INFRASTRUCTURE AND INDUSTRIAL

Infrastructure and Industrial areas are intended to support the county's essential employment, service, and utility functions. While these areas accommodate more intensive activities, thoughtful design can ensure they contribute positively to the broader community context.

Where employees, visitors, or the public regularly experience these sites, development should incorporate high-quality design elements that create welcoming, functional spaces for office, service, or recreational needs. These areas should be clearly distinguished from the more operational portions of a site through landscaping, building orientation, pedestrian amenities, and other human-scaled design features. This approach allows necessary industrial and infrastructure functions to operate efficiently while maintaining a positive interface with surrounding neighborhoods.



Henrico Water Reclamation Facility

Typical Future Land Use Classifications

PREFERRED FLU CLASSIFICATIONS:

- Heavy Industrial (HI), Planned Industrial (PI)

SUPPORTED FLU CLASSIFICATIONS:

- Office/Service (O/S), Light Industrial (LI), Government (GOV), Semi-Public (SP)

CATEGORY GUIDANCE 6-11-1: DEVELOPMENT PATTERN

Patterns within Infrastructure and Industrial areas are heavily use-dependent, as structures are typically custom-built to efficiently achieve their productive purpose. Generally, these

areas are designed as larger industrial parks with individual and separate business sites connected by collector streets. Development patterns should prioritize safety, mitigate environmental impact, and visual/auditory and geographic separation from all other character areas. Infrastructural and Industrial areas should be surrounded by considerable buffers and open space.

CATEGORY GUIDANCE 6-11-2: MASSING AND ORIENTATION

Buildings in Infrastructural and Industrial areas will typically have large footprints and monolithic exteriors due to functional requirements. Structures should optimize building space for efficiency. These buildings should have a large setback from the street to minimize impact on surrounding areas. Portions of the building which are loud and operationally intensive (loading docks, stacks, conveyors, etc.) should be located toward the center of the site and strategies should be employed to address sound suppression and control.

Employee or visitor facilities should incorporate more human-scale elements such as landscaping and buildings closer to street frontages. Administrative buildings and visitor centers should serve as a buffer between public areas and high-intensity operations.

CATEGORY GUIDANCE 6-11-3: OPEN SPACE

Open space in this category should limit negative environmental impact and serve as a barrier between industrial activity and surrounding communities. Landscape buffers should be designed to screen industrial activities from adjacent areas and public view while potentially providing environmental benefits such as rainwater harvesting and irrigation maintenance. When possible, protective fencing should be employed to support landscaping buffers and provide security and privacy.

Functional outdoor spaces should be incorporated into areas away from industrial operations to provide employees with spaces to relax and socialize. These spaces should include walking paths and picnic tables for informal meetings and employee lunch breaks. Gazebos and pergolas can also be integrated into these areas to ensure year-round access.

CATEGORY GUIDANCE 6-11-4: CONNECTIONS AND TRANSITIONS

Infrastructure and Industrial areas can generate significant employee traffic while serving limited public access. These areas should have efficient connections to major roadways while limiting impact on local residential streets. Employee transportation alternatives such as carpools and private shuttle buses with stops in residential areas should be highly encouraged.

Delivery and logistical service access should be designed to separate truck traffic from employee and visitor vehicle areas. Individual entrances for different user types should be encouraged to improve safety and operational efficiency.

CATEGORY GUIDANCE 6-11-5: PARKING

Parking in Infrastructure and Industrial areas should balance operational efficiency, safety, and environmental impact. For sites requiring large amounts of parking, structured parking should be encouraged to minimize the total land used.

Visitor parking should be completely separated from operational areas and located near public facing and administrative buildings. Landscaping should be used to create buffers between parking, pedestrian, and operational areas.

GENERAL CHARACTER POLICIES

The following general character policies apply to all lands throughout the county and are intended to facilitate county-wide cohesiveness and enhance quality of life in ways that are universal to all areas. Guidance for general character policies does not specifically apply to any particular category due to variations in the application across different areas of the county. Staff and decision-makers may interpret the specific execution of these general policies differently depending on a site's unique context.

Policy CC 3: Placemaking

Enhancements to the built environment should help reinforce a unique sense of place. This can be achieved by incorporating recognizable design elements and features that give the neighborhood its own distinct identity.

STRATEGY CC 3-1: PUBLIC ART AND LANDMARKS

Public art should be incorporated throughout the county at locations that are meaningful and accessible. Institutional and semi-public uses—including parks and other civic spaces—should feature distinctive architectural and landscape design, providing opportunities to showcase public art and create memorable community landmarks. These features help strengthen community identity and foster local pride.

STRATEGY CC 3-2: LANDSCAPING

Landscaping should prioritize preservation of notable natural features, like large trees or rock outcrops. Developers should make a special effort to protect these features and shape developments around them. On a smaller scale, having similar species and landscaping techniques throughout an area, with one or two unique species that are uniquely prolific within that area, can additionally develop unique character. Where notable natural features exist—such as rock outcroppings, significant trees, prominent views, ponds, marshes, or riverside areas—efforts should be made to preserve and highlight them as integral elements of the community's sense of place. Native plantings are especially encouraged.

STRATEGY CC 3-3: STREET FURNITURE

Street furniture should be designed for each development. Customization can relate to material (metal, wood, concrete), design (modern, contemporary, traditional), paint, signage, or other features. Common design themes that apply to all street furniture, from bike racks to benches to streetside play equipment to shade structures, can help to reinforce a sense of place.

STRATEGY CC 3-4: PAVING MATERIALS

Unique paving materials for roads, crosswalks, and sidewalks can provide similar levels of sense of place that solid landmarks and public art can provide. In addition to consistent, unique paving materials, the quality of the paving materials can also assist in developing different character. For instance, a brick sidewalk in one part of the community can feel more impactful than a standard concrete one, and cobbled (or even printed) crosswalks

can improve the sense of place. Areas slated for investment or redevelopment may benefit from non-asphalt road paving, such as concrete or brick.

Policy CC 4: Wayfinding

Signposts, road signs, interpretative signs, road and path markings, kiosks, public art, and other elements of the built environment should be located throughout the county to give residents an improved understanding of their whereabouts and allow them to navigate easily without using digital assistants.

STRATEGY CC 4-1: TIME-BASED MEASUREMENTS

Wayfinding tools should express distances by how long it will take to arrive at a measured distance.

STRATEGY CC 4-2: LANDMARKS AND WAYPOINTS

Pedestrian, micromobility, and auto thoroughfares, should use landmarks as nodes along those routes. Where distinctive landmarks are not available, routes should be marked with signs stating the direction and duration of prominent amenities or neighborhoods.

STRATEGY CC 4-3: USER-FRIENDLINESS

Routes should be easy to use, both via clear signage but also through adequate upkeep. Debris should be cleared and areas should be maintained in an attractive manner.

Policy CC 5: Crime Prevention Through Environmental Design (CPTED)

Crime Prevention Through Environmental Design (CPTED) refers to elements within the built environment (strategic lighting, clear sightlines, etc.) that deter criminal activity and enhance personal safety. Character should incorporate CPTED principles to focus on creating spaces that provide natural surveillance and control access through thoughtful design choices that reduce the potential for criminal activity and increase the likelihood of intervention.

STRATEGY CC 5-1: NATURAL SURVEILLANCE

Lighting, landscaping, and architectural design, in addition to supporting the general character of an area, should reduce blind spots and improve safety. Attention should be paid to the placement of opaque fencing and walls to avoid blind spots when possible. Landscaping, lighting, structures and physical features should be well designed that allow for natural surveillance.

STRATEGY CC 5-2: NATURAL ACCESS CONTROL

Fences, walls, landscape buffers, water features, buildings, berms, and other guiding features should serve to both prevent inappropriate access and guide passersby and users of space away from private areas.

STRATEGY CC 5-3: TERRITORIAL REINFORCEMENT

Design decisions for the edges of private spaces that are readily accessible for members of the public (like retail centers), and publicly owned properties, should accurately communicate the ownership and access privileges of a space. This communication can be both direct, via signage or gates, or indirect, via decor, building transparency,

landscaping, lighting, and other design elements. Properties that change their access privileges (such as parks at night or a restaurant/bar that transitions to a 21+ space after a certain time) should communicate through explicit mechanisms the rules governing that space.

STRATEGY CC 5-4: MAINTENANCE

Property upkeep, waste management, and infrastructure repairs, in addition to supporting the general character of an area, should reduce signs of neglect and improve safety. Attention should be paid to the immediate removal of litter, graffiti and fixing of broken fixtures to avoid the appearance of mismanagement, neglect or physical blight when possible.

STRATEGY CC 5-5: LEGITIMATE ACTIVITY SUPPORT

Encourage the intended use of a space and increase the presence of legitimate users. Cultivate safe, vibrant, and resilient public environments by maximizing community activation and natural surveillance within the built environment.