



## Principle 3: Build Livable Communities

'Build Livable Communities' addresses the *how* of development. Villages, towns, and cities can absorb most of the growth in the Valley. Attractive and livable communities are part of the answer to protecting the rural areas of the region. 'Growing in, not out' means rejuvenating downtowns and existing neighborhoods and carefully extending the community. High-quality, close-in development, combined with amenities like parks and trails, can offer an attractive alternative to sprawl.

Concepts for building livable communities include mixing uses and buildings types, hiding the car, providing parks and open space, applying good design, using the Main Street model, encouraging infill, making an inviting streetscape, and reworking the strip. No statistics effectively address these qualitative principles and exhaustive research for examples in each community was not feasible. However, this chapter does show which communities participate in identifiable programs that encourage a focus on livable communities and includes some recent examples of projects that demonstrate these concepts.

### *In This Chapter*

- *Extend Villages and Towns*
- *Make True Neighborhoods*
- *Rework the Strip*

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### *What's Good or Getting Better*

- 5 localities in the region are designated Main Street communities.
- 15 more localities participate in the Main Street program through "affiliate" or "start-up" status.
- Main Street programs bring financial success: 673 businesses created, 1,969 jobs created, 614 buildings rehabilitated, and \$59 million invested by private citizens in the region's 5 Main Street communities between 1985 and 2002.
- Most cities and counties have districts that allow a mixture of residential and compatible business uses.
- Many trails are planned or under construction, some of them quite ambitious.
- A number of communities have adopted Corridor Overlay districts or are considering applying them.
- Rockingham County worked with a smart growth task force, which had a positive influence on the comprehensive plan update and zoning review; Harrisonburg plans to request similar input as it begins its comp plan review.

## Principle 3: Build Livable Communities Extend Villages and Towns



### *Causes for Concern*

- Growth continues to bypass incorporated communities.
- There are not concerted growth management measures across the region.
- County growth patterns of scattered individual home sites or single-focus subdivisions remain the norm, and these do not offer opportunity for building communities.
- The concept of walkable, compact development using high-quality design and offering amenities and a mixture of uses, remains largely unrecognized and untried in the region.
- Most new business development occurs in the “strip” zones surrounding cities or on main corridors. Yet only 2 counties and 2 cities have corridor overlay districts to address their function and appearance.

### *Extend Villages and Towns*

The concept of extending villages and towns does not lend itself to statistics and so there is no data to present. However, as is clear from the previous chapter, the recent pattern of growth has not at all extended villages and towns, but rather has been filling in the road spaces between them. The growth rate in incorporated towns and cities lagged far behind the counties, with the exception of Harrisonburg.

The coming decade, with no potential for annexation, will see an even greater percentage of new residents in the counties. Other factors make it even more likely that new houses will be scattered farther afield rather than integrated into an existing community.

The jurisdictional separation of cities and counties gives little incentive for the kind of cooperation required to develop close-in subdivisions in a coherent way.

Another obstacle is that modern zoning codes generally make it difficult to build a new subdivision in a traditional pattern of development. Even within cities and towns, subdivisions tend to be car-oriented and separated from adjoining land uses.

Finally, development tends to “leap-frogs” to new hot spots farther out, such as interchanges or large projects such as a “big box” commercial development.



# Principle 3: Build Livable Communities Make True Neighborhoods

## Make True Neighborhoods

### Mix Uses and Building Types

“Mix Uses and Building Types” means having residential and non-residential uses in close proximity so that people can walk to work or shopping or services or entertainment. Mixing building types means, for example, having different scales of homes in the same neighborhood, rather than the more typical development where all of the houses are approximately the same size, design, and price.

A mixture of housing options can enable, for example, a person to live in the same neighborhood through all of life’s different phases. This would include apartments for single adults, larger houses for couples and for those raising children, and smaller scale units for empty-nesters or the elderly.

Isolated examples of mixed use developments have appeared in the region. A number of counties have “planned unit development” or PUD zoning district categories (see Figure 3-1). Generally for larger projects, PUDs can be more difficult to get approved because of their complexity. Many PUD ordinances limit the nonresidential portion.

Botetourt County, in addition to the PUD option, has a TND (traditional neighborhood development) district, which presumably would serve many of the concepts of building livable communities, such as a compact form that encourages walking, and compati-

Figure 3-1.  
**Mixed Use Zoning in VCC Communities**

Counties	Mix Use Allowed?	Zoning District
Alleghany	No	
Augusta	Limited	PUD only
Bath	Limited	PUD only
Botetourt	Yes	PUD & TND (traditional neighborhood development)
Frederick	Limited	PUD only
Highland	No	
Page	No	
Rockbridge	No	
Rockingham	Limited	PUDs & RS-1
Shenandoah	Yes	
Warren	Yes	
<b>Cities</b>		
Buena Vista	Yes	Institutional, Mixed Business and Mixed Residential
Covington	Yes	C-1 Office and Institutional, C-2 Neighborhood Business
Harrisonburg	Yes	R-4 Planned Unit Residential, R-3 Multiple Dwelling, R-P Residential Professional Overlay, B-1 CBD
Lexington	Yes	C-1, Residential/Light Commercial, Professional Service/Residential
Staunton	Yes	P-1 Professional, B-1 Local Business, B-2 General Business, B-3 Planned Business
Waynesboro	Yes	C-3 Central Business District
Winchester	Yes	B-1, RB-1, RO-1
Total	14	

Source: VCC research, March 2003

ble non-residential uses. Rockingham County has several districts that allow a mixture of residential and service, including RS-1, which applies to areas near existing small villages.

By contrast, all seven cities have multiple zoning districts that allow a mixture of uses. These districts recognize the existing pattern, practiced for centuries, of intermingling uses.

## Principle 3: Build Livable Communities

### Provide Parks and Open Space



#### *Hide the Car*

“Hide the Car” promotes building and streetscape designs that reduce the visibility of cars. This means making sure that garages are not the most prominent feature on the facade and that driveways and parking areas are placed to the side and rear when possible. No research was undertaken on this topic.

#### *Provide Parks and Open Space*

As areas develop more fully, it becomes increasingly important to provide parks and open spaces. Small pocket parks and other open spaces draw people outdoors and become shared community landmarks. Greenways and trails maintain natural areas as well as offer the opportunity for recreation and even commuting. “Plant and preserve trees” is included in this section because it complements efforts to improve outdoor spaces and make an attractive environment in our developed areas.



*Blacks Run Pocket Park in Harrisonburg offers a calm oasis in the downtown.*

#### *Local Parks*

Many localities in the region, particularly the cities, have excellent full-spectrum older parks. There are few instances, however, of new or retrofitted parks. Most new subdivisions have little if any common space and county parks tend toward large athletic complexes. It is even rarer to have such space designed to be an attractive and integral part of the community. Some examples include the Blacks Run Pocket Park in Harrisonburg and Waynesboro’s plan to turn its former landfill into a park.

#### *Greenways and Trails*

Walking for pleasure is the single most popular form of recreation in America today (and by reports on the growing obesity epidemic, a needed one). Yet in many communities, there is no place to walk. Convenient sites for passive recreation, such as greenways or natural areas, also are rare. See Chapter 6 for information on trails and greenways in the region.

#### *Plant and Preserve Trees*

A number of localities have tree preservation and tree planting requirements. See the discussion of landscaping regulations in Chapter 5 for more information.

One program that promotes the inclusion of trees as part of the community landscape is the Tree Cities program, administered by the Virginia Department of Forestry. Tree Cities meet the following standards: 1) establishment of a tree board or department, 2) a tree care ordinance, 3) a



## Principle 3: Build Livable Communities Provide Parks and Open Spaces

community forestry program with an annual budget of at least \$2 per capita, and 4) an arbor day observance and proclamation.

There are 38 Tree City communities in Virginia (6 of them are military bases). Urbanizing counties also can qualify. Of the 35 cities and towns in the VCC region, 6 are tree cities (see Figure 3-2).

**Figure 3-2.**  
**Tree Cities in the  
VCC Region**

- Town of Front Royal
- Town of Luray
- City of Lexington
- City of Staunton
- City of Waynesboro
- City of Winchester

*Source: Virginia Dept. of Forestry*

### *Use Good Design*

Good design of buildings, yards, and public streetscape can help make a neighborhood livable. The architecture can use materials and elements that are attractive as well as functional and that ideally reflect local character.

Good design can ease conflicts, such as using commercial designs that blend with nearby residential or placing entrances or utility areas away from neighbors. Good design does not have to cost more, but it can make a huge difference in the appeal and acceptance of new development. No research is presented on this topic.



*In MeadowPointe subdivision in Harrisonburg, many existing trees are being saved during construction.*

### *Rockingham County Smart Growth*

The Rockingham Community Partnership Smart Growth Task Force, a joint effort between Valley Conservation Council and the Shenandoah Valley Builders Association, worked with the county as it updated its comprehensive plan. The Task Force developed a joint statement on Smart Growth Principles that was submitted to the county for consideration. Similarly, this task force plans to work with the City of Harrisonburg as it updates its Comp Plan.

In September 2002, the Rockingham County Board of Supervisors passed a series of zoning text amendments that essentially set up a new zoning classification for Planned Commercial Development (PCD) in the County. This special classification, which developers must apply for, allows numerous “smart growth” development options in the County that were previously unavailable.

The new amendments will encourage mixed use, neighborhood-friendly development. Requirements include a master plan approved by the Planning Commission, a percentage of permanently protected, usable open space, connected pedestrian walkways, and location in areas served by water and sewer.

## Principle 3: Build Livable Communities Use the Main Street Model



### Strengthen Community Cores

Economic and social vitality in the core of a community, typically its downtown, has a positive impact on the entire community. Ongoing reinvestment in the core area raises property values and uses infrastructure efficiently. Conversely, the stakes are high, because the alternative is a hollow core. The region is dotted with many small cities and towns, all with distinctive downtowns struggling to maintain viability in the face of new development on the outskirts of town.

### Use the Main Street Model

The Main Street Program was developed at the national level to help localities revitalize their downtowns.

The program uses a four-point approach: 1) design, 2) promotion, 3) economic restructuring, and 4) organization. It is well suited to the Valley localities, and increasingly they are participating in the program, especially through new categories recently offered by the Virginia Main Street Program.

In fact, over half of the cities and towns in the region (20 of 35) participate to some degree in the Virginia Main Street program (see Figure 3-3). Statewide there are 18 active designated “Main Street Communities” plus 41 affiliate and start-up communities. In the VCC region, there are 5 designated Main Street communities, 3 “Start Up” communities, and 12 “Affiliate” communities. More than a third (34%) of

Figure 3-3.

### Main Street Participation

City	Status	Year
Buena Vista	Start-up	2003
Covington	Start-up	2000
Harrisonburg	Affiliate	2003
Lexington	Main St.	1988
Staunton	Main St.	1995
Waynesboro	Main St.	2000
Winchester	Main St.	1985
<b>Town</b>		
Bridgewater	None	
Broadway	Affiliate	2001
Buchanan	None	
Clifton Forge	Main St.	1992
Craigsville	None	
Dayton	Affiliate	2002
Edinburg	Affiliate	2000
Elkton	Affiliate	2000
Fincastle	Affiliate	2001
Front Royal	Affiliate	2000
Glasgow	None	
Goshen	None	
Grottoes	Affiliate	2003
Iron Gate	none	
Luray	Affiliate	2002
Middletown	None	
Monterey	None	
Mt. Crawford	None	
Mt. Jackson	Affiliate	2001
New Market	Affiliate	2002
Shenandoah	Affiliate	2003
Stanley	None	
Stephens City	None	
Strasburg	None	
Timberville	None	
Toms Brook	None	
Troutville	None	
Woodstock	Start-up	2000
Total	7 cities, 28 towns	

**Source:** Virginia Main Street Program, Va. Dept. of Housing and Community Development as of March 2003

participating communities statewide are located in the VCC region.

All of the cities in the region have some level of participation, ranging from Winchester, which was designated



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in 1985, the first year of the program, to Harrisonburg, which began testing the waters in 2003 as an affiliate.

### Designated Main Street Communities

The Main Street designation brings with it a variety of technical assistance from the state program. This competitive designation requires a high degree of commitment and readiness. Main Street Communities in the VCC region are Lexington (1988), Staunton (1995), Waynesboro (2000), Winchester (1985), and Clifton Forge (1992).

The economic impact in the five designated communities has been dramatic (see Figure 3-4). Cumulative program statistics cite the creation of 673 businesses and 1,969 jobs, the rehabilitation of 614 buildings, and the private investment of \$59 million. The state estimates that every dollar of local Main Street funding leverages \$17.52 in total investment (\$9.13 in private investment and \$8.39 in public investment).

Winchester has been in the program longest and leads the way in all categories in the region, generating nearly

### Main Street Status

	VCC	State
Main Street	5	18
Start-up	3	—
Affiliate	12	41*
Total Participants	20	59

\* Start-ups and Affiliates combined

half of the total jobs and total investment. Lexington's figures are impressive for its small size, while Staunton has seen sizeable impact for its time in the program. In 2002, Staunton became the first Virginia locality to win the *Great American Main Street* award. Staunton and Lexington also have been named to the *Distinctive Dozen* list by the National Trust for Historic Preservation.

### Economic Contributions of Revitalized Downtowns

The U.S. Small Business Administration estimates that locally owned businesses return 60 cents of each retail sales dollar to the community, while chains return only 20 cents of each dollar and mass discounters only 6 cents.

**Figure 3-4**  
**Main Street Impact**  
(Cumulative Statistics, 1985 to 2002)

Main Street Community	Year	Business Created	Jobs Created	Rehabs Complete	Private Investment*
Clifton Forge	1992	49	105	19	\$2,788,349
Lexington	1988	168	409	212	\$10,506,893
Staunton	1995	138	430	212	\$17,199,476
Waynesboro	2000	27	53	9	\$319,361
Winchester	1985	291	972	162	\$28,233,783
Region Total		673	1,969	614	\$59,047,862
Statewide		3,016	8,199	3,853	\$217,097,895

**Note:** \* Private investment adjusted for inflation and expressed in 2002 dollars

**Source:** Virginia Main Street Program, *Main Street Monitor*, March 2003

## Principle 3: Build Livable Communities Encourage Infill Development



A typical downtown worker adds \$2,000 to \$2,500 of spending to the local economy (Real Estate Services Group, from Virginia Main Street, October 2002).

Every million dollars spent on historic rehabilitation in Virginia creates 3.4 more jobs and \$53,500 more income than the same investment in new construction. (Preservation Alliance of Virginia, from Virginia Main Street, October 2002).

### *Start-up and Affiliate Communities*

Established in 2000, the Start-up and Affiliate options have proven very popular. Start-up communities anticipate possibly competing for Main Street designation and are building capacity and preparing for the application process. In the VCC region, Buena Vista, Covington, and the Town of Woodstock have Start-up status.

The Affiliate option is for communities that do not want or are not eligible for full Main Street status. Affiliates have access to training by state and national downtown development experts and the opportunity to network with and learn from peers around the state.

There is no limit on the number of Affiliates. Communities can become an Affiliate at any time with completion of a short application. As of May 2003, Harrisonburg is an Affiliate, along with a number of towns.

### *Encourage Infill Development*

No research is presented, although there are a few noteworthy community actions to note. Winchester uses its proportional improvement policy (see box) to continually improve built-up areas.

The City of Staunton has seen impressive infill development in its downtown in recent years, including the Blackfriars Playhouse, the New Street Parking Garage, and the R.R. Smith Center (under construction). The city's investments in downtown will continue with the city as a partner in plans to redevelop the Stonewall Jackson Hotel.

### *Make an Inviting Streetscape*

No research presented.

### *Streetscape Improvements*

No research presented.

### *Winchester Encourages Retrofits*

Improving built areas is always a challenge, yet is critical for "growing in, not out." The City of Winchester has seen good results from its Proportional Improvement Policy.

This policy requires landowners to bring their properties into current minimum requirements on a basis proportional to the amount of an expansion for same use or the percentage increase in intensity of use (measured by parking requirements). This ensures the installation of landscaping, sidewalks, curb and gutter and parking lot enhancements even when changes are only inside existing buildings.

The proportional improvement worksheet is available at [www.ci.winchester.va.us](http://www.ci.winchester.va.us), under Planning and Zoning Department.



## Principle 3: Build Livable Communities Rework the Strip

### Rework the Strip

Congested commercial “strips” carry most of the business and service activity. Stretching along the main corridors, they also are the introduction to each community. Unfortunately, they typically develop into visually unappealing jumbles set apart from the rest of the community.

“Rework the Strip” means addressing the aesthetics and function of these strips, through control of signs, landscaping requirements, provision

### Rockbridge Corridor Overlay Serves County Goals

Rockbridge County’s Tourism Corridor Overlay (TC-O) District was established in order to serve county goals of protecting and preserving the county’s historic resources and scenic beauty, promoting efficient use of county resources, increasing local job opportunities, and insuring compatibility among various land uses. Tourism is a key industry in Rockbridge County and the overlay district helps protect the character of the entrance corridors and gateways to many historic communities and destinations. Projects for constructing or changing buildings or major site elements along designated roads must first receive a Certificate of Appropriateness from the appointed Tourism Corridor Review Board.

**Figure 3-5.  
Corridor Overlay  
Districts**

County	Corridor Overlay District
Alleghany	No
Augusta	No
Bath	No
Botetourt	No
Frederick	No
Highland	No
Page	No
Rockbridge	Yes
Rockingham	No
Shenandoah	Planning
Warren	Yes
<b>Cities</b>	
Buena Vista	No
Covington	No
Harrisonburg	No
Lexington	Yes
Staunton	Proposed
Waynesboro	Yes
Winchester	Proposed
<b>Total</b>	<b>4</b>

**Source:** VCC research; data as of April 2003

for pedestrian access, and in some cases, design controls to preserve local character. Most often this process includes corridor plans and the adoption of corridor overlay zoning districts.

Currently only two counties (Rockbridge and Warren) and two cities (Lexington and Waynesboro) have corridor overlay districts (see Figure 3-5).

However, interest is strong in developing such overlay zones. Staunton and Winchester have proposed corridor overlay ordinances. Shenandoah County is working on an overlay district in conjunction with its Old Valley Pike Corridor Plan, which also calls for a bicycle or multi-purpose trail.