

## 1.0 Introduction

### 1.1. Purpose of This Report

The *Architectural and Landscape Architectural Guidelines for the Spotsylvania Courthouse Area* are a complement to a number of current and past planning efforts. The designation of the Spotsylvania Courthouse [Historic District](#) as a local and National Register district in 1987 resulted in the creation of the local Historic Preservation Commission. The Commission's role is to encourage the sensitive rehabilitation of the [historic structures](#) within this district through a design review process.

The [Spotsylvania Courthouse Area Plan](#), an element of the [Spotsylvania County Comprehensive Plan](#), proposes to expand the existing historic district. The new district, known as the Historic Planning Area, includes the addition of land and historic structures, such as the high school and several residences, and the inclusion of the Fredericksburg Spotsylvania National Military Park. The *Area Plan* organizes the courthouse area into three distinct planning zones, arranged in a tiered fashion, radiating from the crossroads. These planning zones include the following: (1) Historic Planning Area, described above and intended for intensive, mixed use developments; (2) Village Planning Area, planned primarily for residential development with a local commercial node; and (3) Transitional Planning Area, designated for less intensive residential development and serving as a [buffer](#) between the courthouse area and the larger Spotsylvania County. These planning areas are illustrated on [Map 1](#). The vision for the *Area Plan* is as follows:

*“Spotsylvania Courthouse is an attractive, harmonious community that embodies the best of rural and small town life where one feels continuity with the past.”*

The purpose of these guidelines is to promote continuity with the past through the preservation of the community's existing [historic structures](#) and landscapes. The guidelines further direct new development to complement this historic environment. Not only are the guidelines intended to address historic resources, but the guidelines also incorporate concepts to promote the conservation of the community's rural landscapes and the retention of its small town character.

Some of the community's most significant historic features are the Civil War era resources. These resources are located within the Fredericksburg Spotsylvania National Military Park as well as on public and private lands outside the park. The National Park Service, like Spotsylvania County, has completed a number of planning studies to assist in the wise management of its resources. A *General Management Plan* was developed for the Military Park in 1986. Most recently, a planning study, *A Community Guide to Protecting Civil War Battlefield Sites and Features in the Fredericksburg Region of Virginia*, has been completed to illustrate how Civil War resources outside the jurisdiction of the National Park Service can be conserved in future development projects. Portions of this publication are included as [Appendix A](#) to this report.

*A Community Guide to Protecting Civil War Battlefield Sites and Features* offers a comprehensive approach to site planning. It includes the consideration of cultural, natural, and scenic resources. By following this approach, the community's historic resources, farmland vistas, and creek corridors can be retained as important features in future development proposals. The guidelines offered in this publication are a complement to the planning approaches and planning frameworks set forth in the county's *Area Plan* as well as in the National Park Service's *Community Guide*.

## **1.2.        *Spotsylvania Courthouse as a Traditional Neighborhood Development***

The *Area Plan* also sets forth a direction for the community that follows the popular “neo-traditional” trends of today. These communities are considered more “livable” They are designed to be “walkable.” They are high density, mixed use developments where the pedestrian takes prominence over the automobile. Ideally, children can walk to schools or the playground. Likewise, parents can walk to work, to the courthouse, to the post office, and to the grocery store. “Walkability” fosters security. When people can walk in their community, they make acquaintances, they feel safe. “Neo-traditional” communities incorporate the elements that made historic towns more livable, such as grid streets, on-street parking, front porches, public green space, alleys, and vibrant central cores.

In the United States, “neo-traditional” planning is usually associated with noted planners and designers, including Andres Duany & Elizabeth Plater-Zyberk, who have summarized the trend in the following thirteen points

### ***THE THIRTEEN POINTS OF TRADITIONAL NEIGHBORHOOD DEVELOPMENT***

*Andres Duany & Elizabeth Plater-Zyberk*

*The social and environmental benefits of a Traditional Neighborhood Development (TND) result from certain physical and organizational characteristics. An authentic Neighborhood includes most of the following:*

- 1. The Neighborhood has a discernible center.*** This is often a square or green, and sometimes a busy or memorable street intersection. A transit stop would be located at this center.
- 2. Most of the dwellings are within a five-minute walk of the center.*** This distance averages one-quarter of a mile.
- 3. There are a variety of dwelling types within the Neighborhood.*** These usually take the form of houses, rowhouses and apartments, such that younger and older people, singles and families, the poor and the wealthy may find places to live.
- 4. There are shops and offices at the edge of the Neighborhood.*** The shops should be sufficiently varied to supply the weekly needs of a household. A convenience store is the most important among them.
- 5. A small ancillary building is permitted within the backyard of each house.*** It may be used as one rental unit, or as a place to work
- 6. There is an elementary school close enough so that most children can walk from their dwelling.*** This distance should not be more than one mile.
- 7. There are small playgrounds quite near every dwelling.*** This distance should not be more than one-eighth of a mile.
- 8. The streets within the Neighborhood are a connected network.*** This provides a variety of itineraries and disperses traffic congestion.

9. ***The streets are relatively narrow and shaded by rows of trees.*** This slows down the traffic, creating an environment for the pedestrian and the bicycle.
10. ***Buildings at the Neighborhood center are placed close to the street.*** This creates a strong sense of place.
11. ***Parking lots and garage doors rarely enfront the streets.*** Parking is relegated to the rear of the buildings, usually accessed by alleys.
12. ***Certain prominent sites are reserved for civic buildings.*** Buildings for meeting, education, religion or culture are located at the termination of street vistas or at the Neighborhood center.
13. ***The Neighborhood is organized to be self-governing.*** A formal association debates and decides on matters of maintenance, security and physical change (but not on taxation which should be the responsibility of the larger community).

It is interesting to note from the preceding list how many “neo-traditional” characteristics exist in the Spotsylvania Courthouse area. Since “neo-traditional” concepts were taken from historic prototypes, the historic character of Spotsylvania Courthouse makes the features inherent. The following comparisons are offered:

- ◆ **Town Center** - Spotsylvania has a discernible center, the crossroads.
- ◆ **Walking Distances** - Many of the dwellings are within a “walkable” distance to the crossroads. [Map 2](#) illustrates the walking distances from the crossroads, which are as follows: **(1)** Five minute walk within the Historic Planning Area; **(2)** Ten minute walk to areas on the edge of the Historic Planning Area and the Village Planning Area; and **(3)** Twenty minute walk to the edge of the Village Planning Area. This “Walking Distance” analysis also sets in place the pedestrian circulation system for the Spotsylvania Courthouse Area. The Historic and Village Planning areas are pedestrian-oriented and thus are appropriate for well-developed public pedestrian systems, particularly sidewalks and multi-use trails. The Transitional Planning Area falls outside the twenty minute walk criteria and is, thus, more bike-oriented. Pedestrian access from the Transitional zone to the crossroads is best facilitated through multi-use trails. The guidelines in this report foster this hierarchical arrangement.
- ◆ **Variety of Dwelling Types** - There is an intact collection of many dwelling types and a diversity of architectural styles at Spotsylvania Courthouse. In addition, the *Area Plan* encourages diversity in the future - detached, attached, multi, and single housing.
- ◆ **Commercial Center** - There is a variety of shops and offices within the Historic and Village Planning Area. In addition, *the Area Plan* encourages more intensive commercial development with the Historic Area and a commercial node has also been assigned as part of the plan in the Village zone.
- ◆ **Ancillary Buildings** - These are currently allowed.
- ◆ **Elementary School within Walking Distance** - The Robert E Lee Elementary School is located at the crossroads and is, thus, within walking distance to a majority of the area’s residents. The *Area Plan* continues to promote this residential pattern in the future.

- ◆ **Small Playgrounds** - There are a number of playground opportunities within the community at schools and other public sites, churches, and Marshall Park.
- ◆ **Connected Network of Streets** - The *Area Plan* promotes a system of connected streets as an important consideration in future developments. The use of the cul de-sac is discouraged in the plan.
- ◆ **Narrow Streets, Shaded by Trees** - The prescriptive easements of thirty feet in width results in narrow streets. The mature vegetation at Spotsylvania Courthouse in many situations shades the existing streets. The landscape standards offered in this report further promote landscape enhancements.
- ◆ **Center Siting Requirements** - The crossroads currently offers a “strong sense of place” through the siting of existing buildings. The recommendations of this report and the *Area Plan* further the creation of a visually strong center core.
- ◆ **Garage Location** - Garages are not a major element in the Historic Area. New garages should be oriented to the rear or on an alley, where possible.
- ◆ **Prominent Sites for Public Buildings** - The governmental center for Spotsylvania County is located at the crossroads. This campus-type development should be developed or redeveloped in the future with appropriate infill development. In addition, there is discussion about continuing the tradition of public buildings at the town center. The Post Office is considering sites near the crossroads and a future visitors’ center to support tourism is under discussion.
- ◆ **Self-government**- The Spotsylvania Courthouse area is part of Spotsylvania County government. Through the *Area Plan*, the work of the Historic Preservation Commission, and the future use of these Design Guidelines, the community can determine such matters as maintenance, security, and physical change.