

Suffolk/Virginia

# Crittenden / Eclipse Initiatives Plan

*Prepared by* U R B A N D E S I G N A S S O C I A T E S

Prepared for  
City of Suffolk, Virginia

SEPTEMBER 2002



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## Acknowledgements

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# I Introduction

THE INITIATIVES PLAN FOR the Crittenden/Eclipse village in the northern part of Suffolk is part of the City of Suffolk's ongoing Initiatives Planning Process. The process began in 1997 when Urban Design Associates (UDA) was hired by the City to create a plan for the historic Downtown area. Since that time, the process has expanded to include plans for other parts of the City including the East Washington neighborhoods, Olde Towne, the Civic Center, Hall Place and the Fairgrounds, and for some of the historic villages including Holland, Whaleyville, and Chuckatuck/Oakland.

The Crittenden/Eclipse area started as an isolated fishing village in the 1630's. The village of Crittenden was founded in 1873; Eclipse was added in 1910 when an additional post office was needed. The village retains much of its historic buildings and charm despite the pressures of development nearby. Situated in a unique location in the northwest area of the City of Suffolk, Crittenden/Eclipse is surrounded on three sides by water. The Chuckatuck Creek, the James River, and the Nansemond River surround the peninsula, and it is separated from its neighboring community by the Bleakhorn Creek.

**Aerial view**  
*A view from the northwest with the mouth of the Chuckatuck Creek in the foreground.*



BACKUS AERIAL PHOTO.

**The Neighborhood Planning Process**

The physical plan for Crittenden/Eclipse is the result of a two phase planning process that involved the neighborhood residents and stakeholders.

During the first phase, the design team visited the neighborhood to document and photograph the existing conditions and historic structures of the area. A number of long-term residents led a tour on August 8, 2002. From the information collected, and using the city’s GIS information, the design team generated a set of analysis drawings, called X-Rays®. Each X-Ray focuses on one or two key pieces of information, such as streets or buildings, helping the design team to understand the neighborhood patterns and make informed decisions during the design process.

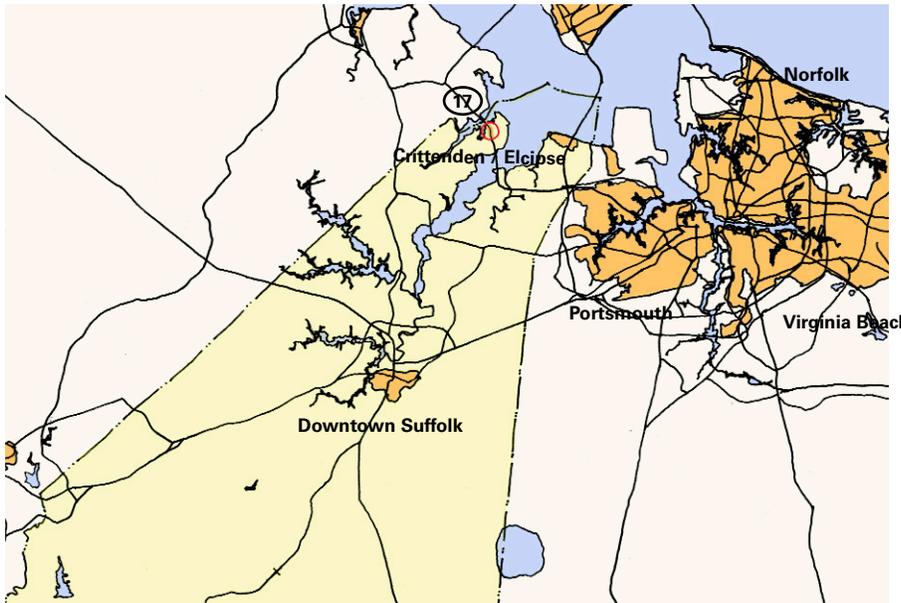
The second phase, and the focus of the planning process, was the design charrette – an intense, multi-day design

workshop, held in the community with area residents and property owners. The community was led by a Steering Committee, made up of residents, property owners, and stakeholders. The plan was created by the local community, with the design team facilitating the process and creating the drawings.

The Crittenden/Eclipse design charrette was held August 27-29, 2002 at the Ebenezer Methodist Church on Steeple Drive. The charrette began with a kick-off meeting where the design team asked the participants about the area’s strengths, weaknesses, and vision for the future. Participants were also asked to map the area’s strengths and weaknesses using green and red dots. The design team used the answers to these questions to generate a list of design guidelines which acted as a checklist during the design process.

**Location Plan**

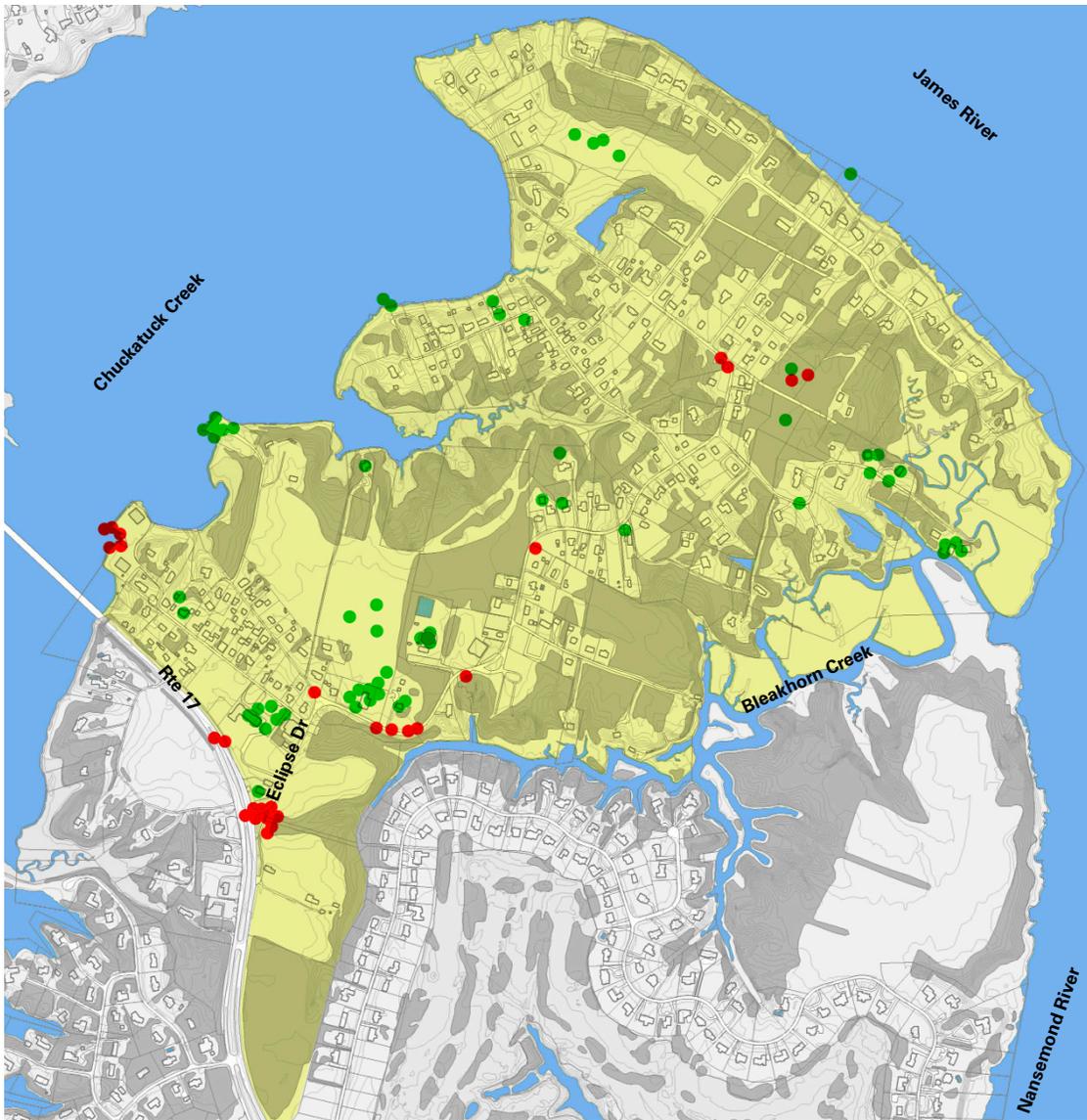
*Crittenden/Eclipse is located off of Route 17 in the northwest corner of Suffolk, on a peninsula surrounded by the Chuckatuck Creek, the James River, and the Nansemond River.*



**Charrette Process**

Community residents participate in the dot exercise (above).

The red and green dots (left) provide a graphic representation of the stakeholders' opinions.



**Strengths, Weaknesses, and Visions**

**Strengths/Good Things**

- Quaint small town character
- Water
- History
- Safe, friendly, neighborly community
- Open space and natural beauty
- One way in, one way out
- Two strong active churches
- Community Center/Ruritan Club
- 4th of July celebrations

**Weaknesses/Bad Things**

- Lack of park space with recreation for older children
- Lack of sidewalks
- Narrow roads
- Unpaved roads
- Power lines - cause power outages and are unattractive
- Poor lighting in some areas
- Dangerous ditches, intersections and curves
- Poor drainage

**Visions**

- Walking paths
- Boat launch
- Better public access to the water's edge

- Supervised public park with recreation for children
- Gateways with a positive image
- Restrictions on development allowing only large lot single family residential development, no big box retail
- Historic renovation/restoration funds
- Safer intersections
- Senior citizens recreation/social center

**Design Principles**

- 1** Maintain Crittenden/Eclipse's quaint rural small town character.
- 2** Preserve the historic buildings and landscape.
- 3** Protect the natural assets of the community, including the wetlands, waterways, topography, and woods.
- 4** Use the opportunity of the utility improvements to create a safer pedestrian environment and improve the removal of storm water.
- 5** Accommodate pedestrians and bicyclists, and design for the safety of children.
- 6** Improve the safety of the intersection of Route 17 and Eclipse Drive.
- 7** Provide a city-run neighborhood park.

**Existing Conditions Analysis**

The design team prepared a set of analysis drawings, called X-Rays, in order to understand the existing conditions and historic structure of the neighborhood. Each drawing focuses on one or two key pieces of information, such as residential settlement patterns or topography. The analysis drawings were done at a scale that shows the neighborhood in its sur-

roundings, including the Chuckatuck Creek Bridge, the Nansemond River Bridge, and surrounding residential neighborhoods. Through this analysis process the design team is able to identify patterns in the study area and surrounding neighborhoods, which allows the design team to make informed decisions during the planning process.

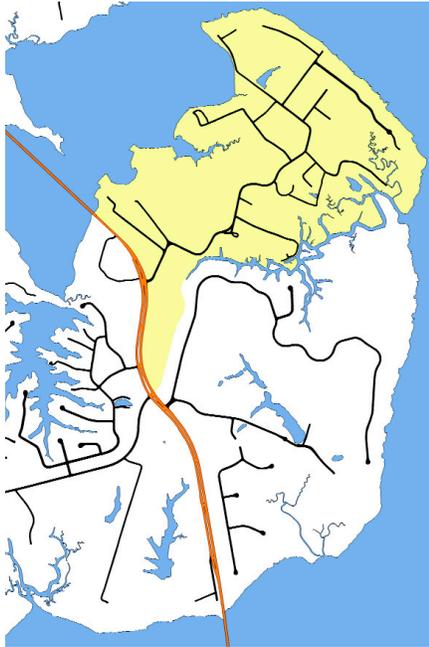


**Portrait**

*The portrait is the complete land use and natural features map of the village. The village is bounded by Route 17, Chuckatuck Creek, the James and Nansemond Rivers. It is separated from Cedar Point by the Bleakhorn Creek.*

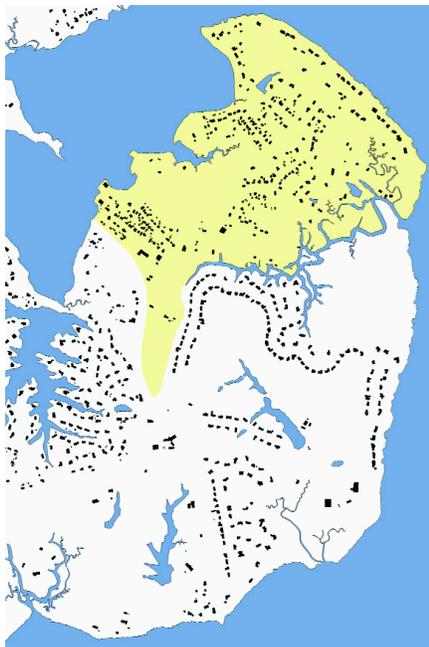
**Key**

- Residential
- Institutions
- Wetlands, Undeveloped & Agricultural Land
- Recreation Areas
- Institutional Property
- Tree Coverage
- Parking



**Streets**

The streets in Crittenden/Eclipse are laid out mostly as a series of dead-end streets, all of which open onto Eclipse Drive; there are few connected complete blocks. Eclipse Drive provides the only access for the village to Route 17. Route 17 and Crittenden Road are the village's links to the rest of the city of Suffolk. The "one way in, one way out" was cited as both a strength and a weakness by village residents.



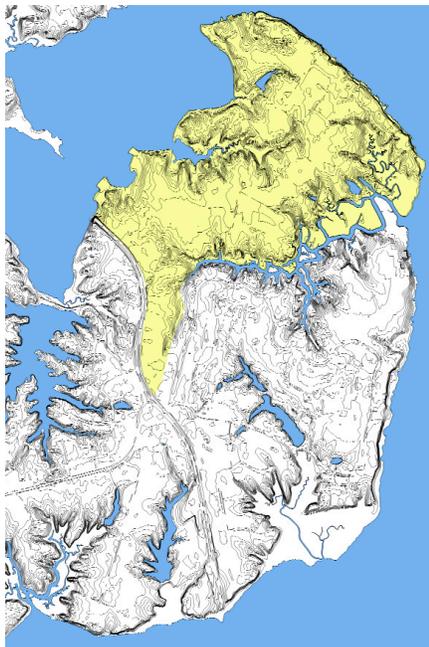
**Figure/Ground**

The building pattern within Crittenden/Eclipse shows the smaller building footprints of the historic compact core along Steeple Drive and White Dogwood Trail, and the larger more widely spread out newer houses along the waterfront. Outside of Crittenden/Eclipse, the pattern is typical of newer residential development.



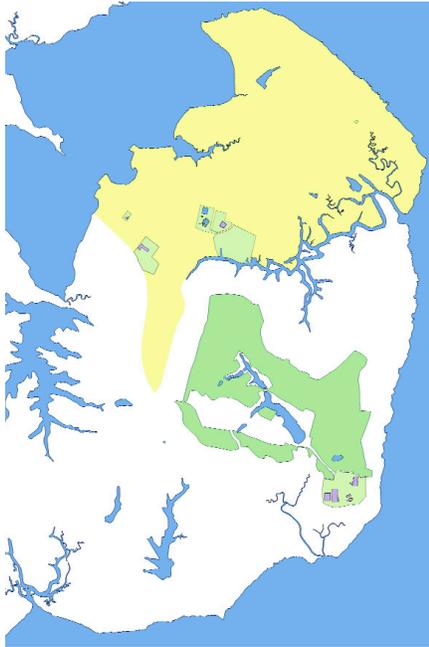
### Natural Features

Tree coverage is indicated in dark green, and wetlands in aqua. The village's natural features are a key aspect of its character as a historic fishing village, surrounded on three sides by water. The village itself touches the Chuckatuck Creek, the James River, the Nansemond River, and Bleakhorn Creek.



### Topography

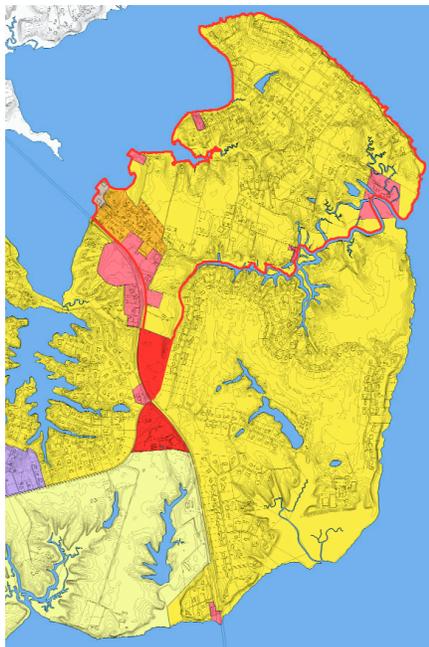
The topography of the waterways and wetlands is evident in the Topography X-Ray. The influence of the waterways extends throughout the village in terms of topography.



**Institutions, Parks & Open Space**

There is no publicly owned park space within Crittenden/Eclipse. Institutions include Ebenezer Methodist Church, Mount Zion Church, and the Community Center/Ruritan Club. Active recreation is limited to the private swim club, and programs associated with Ebenezer Methodist Church. The cemetery is indicated in light green. The waterfront functions as the village’s public open space. Some property owners often allow neighbors access to the water’s edge over private property.

The Cedar Point golf course is to the southeast of the village.



**Zoning**

The majority of the Crittenden/Eclipse village is zoned low density residential, with the exception of some waterfront businesses and the Route 17 frontage. Residents see Route 17 as the front door to Crittenden/Eclipse and feel that new development should be of the same character as the historic village.

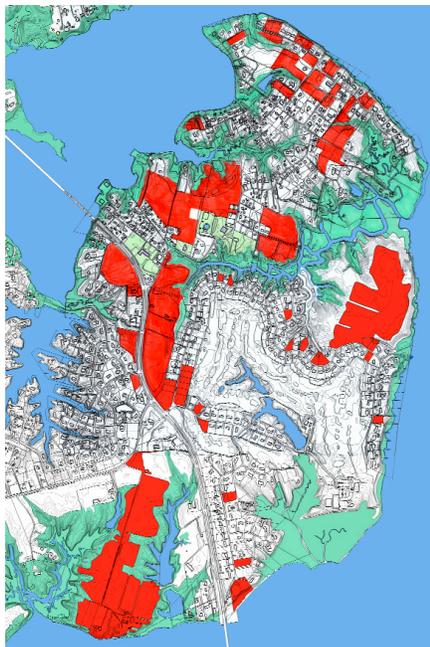
-  RL: Residential Low Density
-  RR: Rural Residential
-  RLM: Residential Low Medium Density
-  B1: Neighborhood Business District
-  B2: General Business District
-  VC: Village Center
-  M1: Light Manufacturing



**Undevelopable Land**

The buildable land within the village is restricted by the natural features, including the wetlands and waterways. The undevelopable land provides the open space framework for the village.

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**Developable Land**

The vacant buildable land in the area is indicated in red. Of the most concern to the neighborhood is the developable land that is not zoned low density residential, that could allow for development out of character with the historic village.

## II Initiatives

THE MASTER PLAN FOR the Crittenden/Eclipse area consists of a number of design initiatives, which can be viewed as a shopping list of ideas that can be prioritized and implemented over time as funding becomes available. The initiatives are described by geographical areas and include: (1) Route 17 improvements; (2) a gateway at Route 17 and Eclipse Drive; (3) improvements to the intersection of Eclipse Drive and White Dogwood Trail; (4) new neighborhood recreation; (5) Community Center improvements; and (6) Eclipse Drive streetscaping.

**Master Plan**  
*The Master Plan illustrates a shopping list of design initiatives.*



*Aerial view of the village as it exists today from the northwest (right) and as proposed (below).*



- 1 Route 17 improvements
- 2 Gateway at Route 17 and Eclipse Drive
- 3 Improvements to the intersection of Eclipse Drive and White Dogwood Trail
- 4 New neighborhood recreation
- 5 Community Center improvements
- 6 Eclipse Drive streetscaping

**1 Route 17 Improvements**

Route 17 is the entrance to the Crittenden/Eclipse village. It stretches south across the Nansemond River as the Mills E. Goodwin Junior Bridge to Interstate 664, and access to Portsmouth, Norfolk, and Newport News. To the north, it crosses Chuckatuck Creek as the Hazelwood Bridge and provides access to Isle of Wight County and Smithfield. Crittenden/Eclipse is connected to Downtown Suffolk by Crittenden Road and Route 17.

Route 17, the front door to the historic Crittenden/Eclipse village, is cur-

rently a high-speed thoroughfare with no pedestrian environment. It is an important link in the City’s Greenways system, which would come up Crittenden Road, onto Route 17, and into the village, providing access to Lone Star Lakes Park and other park and recreation facilities.

Street improvements should include landscaping in the median, and a sidewalk and bike trail separated from the vehicular travel lanes on one side of the street. Trees that provide shade for pedestrians and bicyclists would contribute to the walkable nature of the park connection.

*Streetscape improvements to Route 17 extend from the Goodwin Bridge to the Hazelwood Bridge and onto Crittenden Road.*



## 2 Gateway at Route 17 and Eclipse Drive

The intersection of Route 17 and Eclipse Drive is the only entrance into the neighborhood. Residents expressed an interest in beautifying the entrance in order to form a new gateway image. In addition, improvements to the configuration of the intersection would improve safety.

Beautification to the gateway would

include new trees in the median of Route 17, which could change in character as they approach Eclipse Drive. Crepe Myrtles are a tree that residents associate with the area and could be used for the new image. A new sign can announce the entrance into a historic residential area, which would help to slow traffic. Finally, adding landscaping and a low wall to the Mobil gas station can bring it into context with the village character.

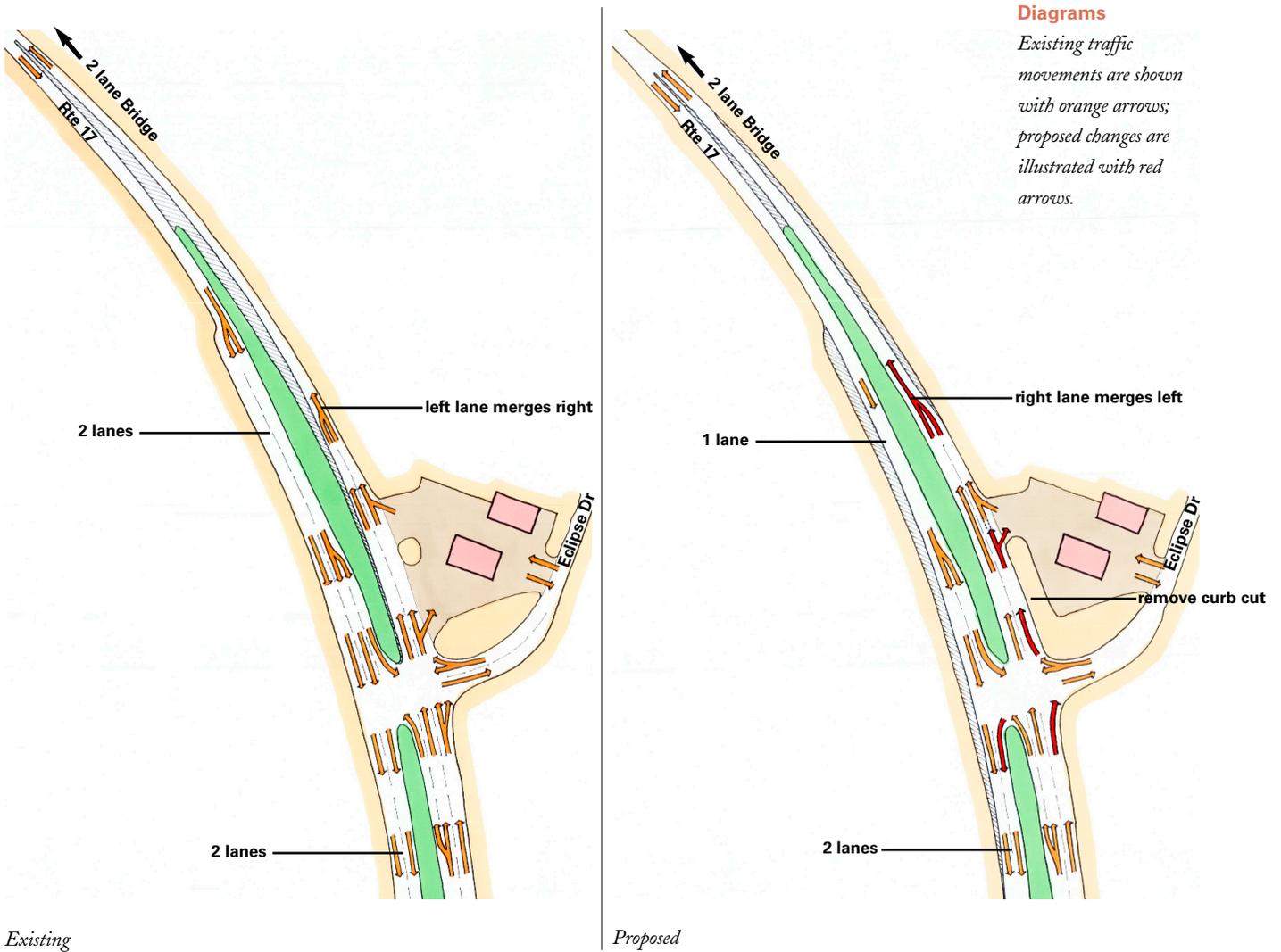
*View of the existing intersection of Route 17 and Eclipse Drive (right) and as proposed with new gateway sign, street landscaping and walking path (below).*



The existing intersection at Eclipse Drive and Route 17 is dangerous for cars and pedestrians. Traffic on Route 17 travels at high speeds as it approaches both from the north and south.

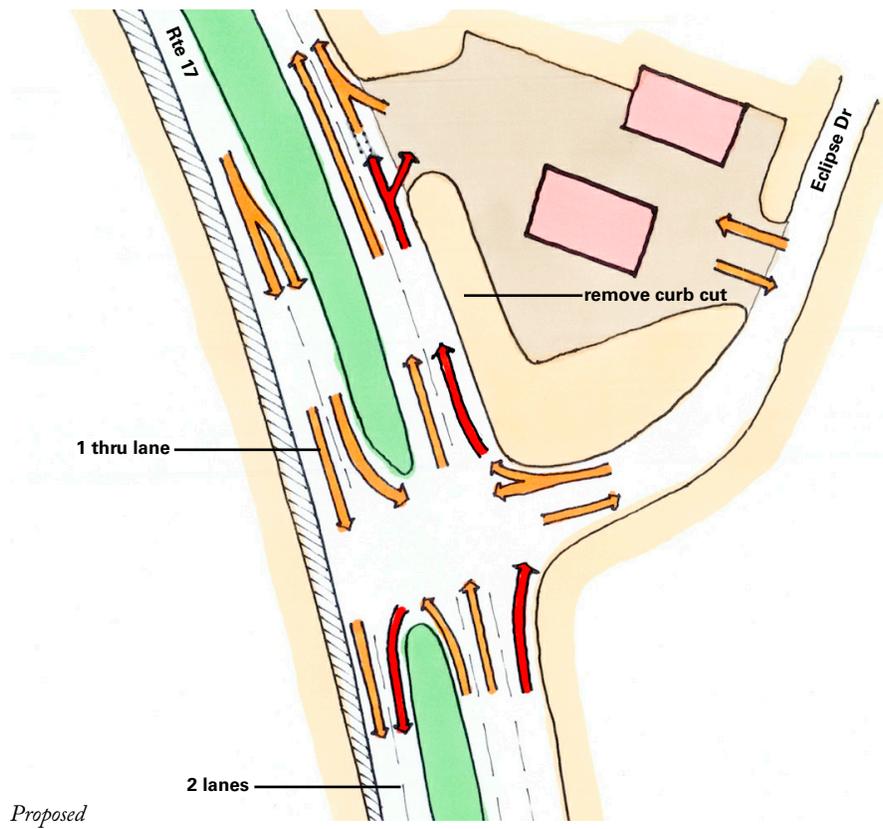
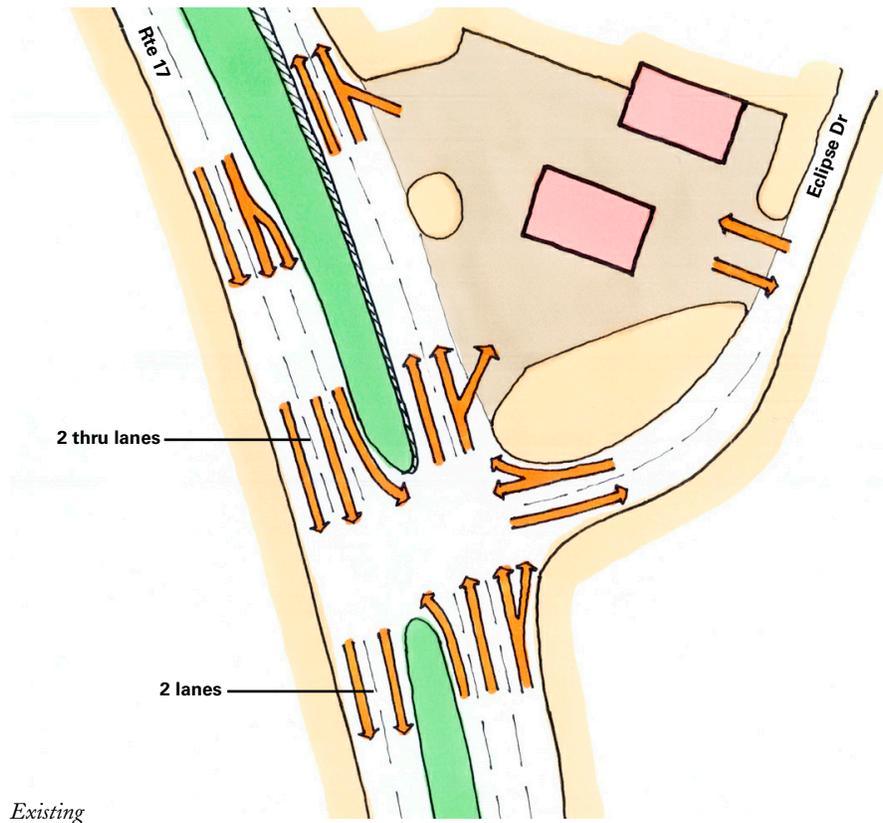
Northbound traffic in the left lane must merge right, while traffic in the right lane can go straight ahead, turn right onto Eclipse Drive, or turn right into the gas station. Southbound traffic speeds downhill from the Hazelwood Bridge and splits into two travel lanes and a left hand turn lane.

The proposed changes to the traffic flow would include: northbound traffic would merge left before the intersection with Eclipse Drive, which would allow for a right turn only lane onto Eclipse Drive. The entrance to the gas station closest to Eclipse Drive would be closed; all traffic would have to use the second entrance. Southbound, the road would remain one through travel lane, with a left turn only lane. After the intersection, the second lane would be added, allowing for a safer left turn out of Eclipse Drive.



**Intersection Detail Plan**

Existing traffic movements are shown with orange arrows; proposed changes are illustrated with red arrows.



### 3 Intersection of Eclipse Drive & White Dogwood Trail

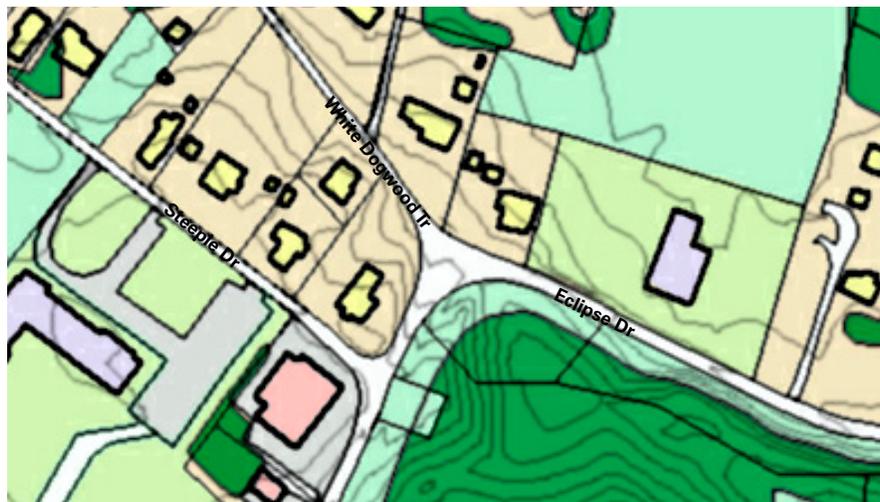
The intersection of Eclipse Drive and White Dogwood Trail is extremely wide, encouraging speeding. The trees and shrubs growing on the south side of Eclipse Drive, combined with the rise in the road, make it difficult to see oncoming traffic.

Proposed changes to the intersection include narrowing the intersection for a standard turn. Regrading the intersection and trimming back the vegetation will improve visibility. It would be recommended to make these changes when the new water and sewer lines are installed.

As part of the water and sewer improvements, a pump station will be built on the south side of Eclipse Drive at the intersection of White Dogwood Trail. This could be designed in the character of the historic village and beautify the intersection.



*View of new pump station.*



*The intersection as it exists today (left) and as proposed with improvements in visibility and a new pump station (below left).*



**4 Neighborhood Recreation**

Currently, there is no active recreation in Crittenden/Eclipse, with the exception of some programs run by Ebenezer Methodist Church. The church has an agreement with the land owner across Eclipse Drive that will allow them to build additional athletic fields, including a soccer field and a baseball field. This would allow the church to expand their building on the land that they own.

The addition to the church’s plan of walking paths surrounding the ball fields would connect the space into the City Parks and Recreation greenway system. A pedestrian bridge connecting the fields to the Community Center across Eclipse Drive would improve access for the rest of the village.



*Proposed aerial view (top right), the existing conditions plan (middle right) and the proposed plan (right).*



### 5 Community Center Site Improvements

The Community Center/Ruritan Club on Eclipse Drive is an important asset to the community. Currently, it does not have any land associated with it for public use, and the community would like to have a place for neighborhood gatherings and picnics. Acquiring part of the field behind the community center for a new gazebo, picnic shelters, benches and walking paths, combined with new landscaping and sign improvements would make the community center more useable.

Church's recreation fields by a pedestrian bridge that crosses over a stream bed. A new access drive allows the community center to share parking spaces with the swim club.



*Existing conditions plan of the community center (above right); and proposed plan (right).*

*View of Eclipse Drive at the community center as exists (right) and as proposed with pedestrian bridge, walking path and street landscaping (below).*



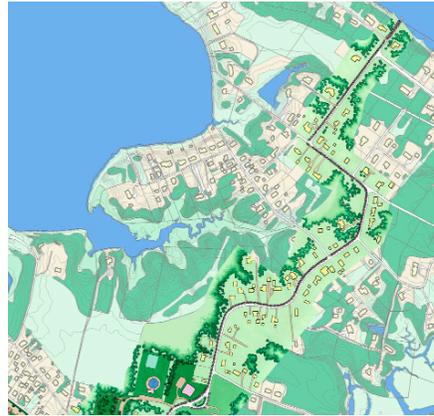


*Existing section through Eclipse Drive at the community center (top); proposed section showing pedestrian connection to the recreation fields (left); proposed aerial view (bottom).*



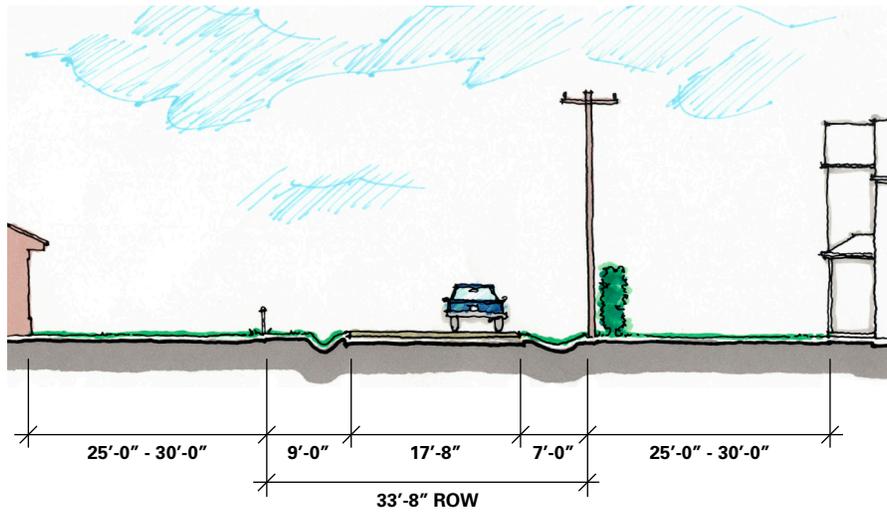
**6 Eclipse Drive Streetscaping**

There is an opportunity with the installation of the new water and sewer lines to change the streetscaping to make the streets safer for pedestrians and cars. Residents felt that there was a lot of speeding, that the curves in the roads prohibited visibility, and that the lack of a walking path made walking and bicycling unsafe, especially for children and seniors.

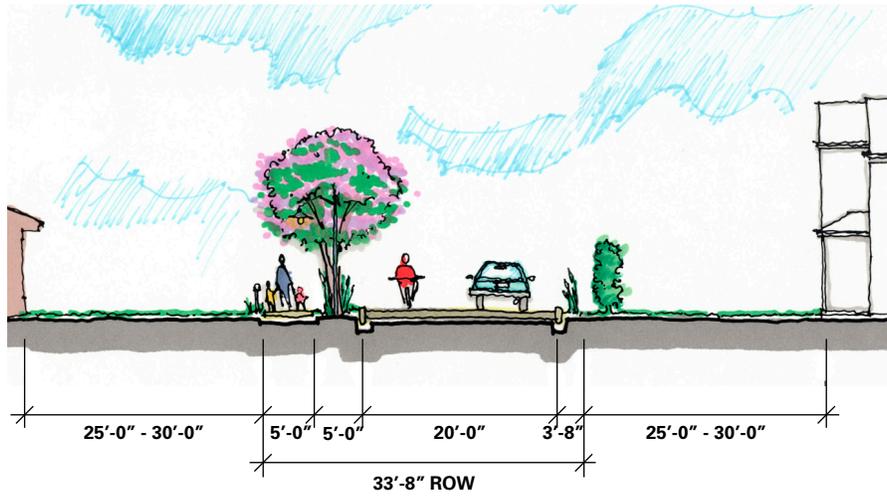


*Detail plan of Eclipse Drive as it exists (left) and as proposed with a pedestrian walking path and some pedestrian-scaled lighting.*





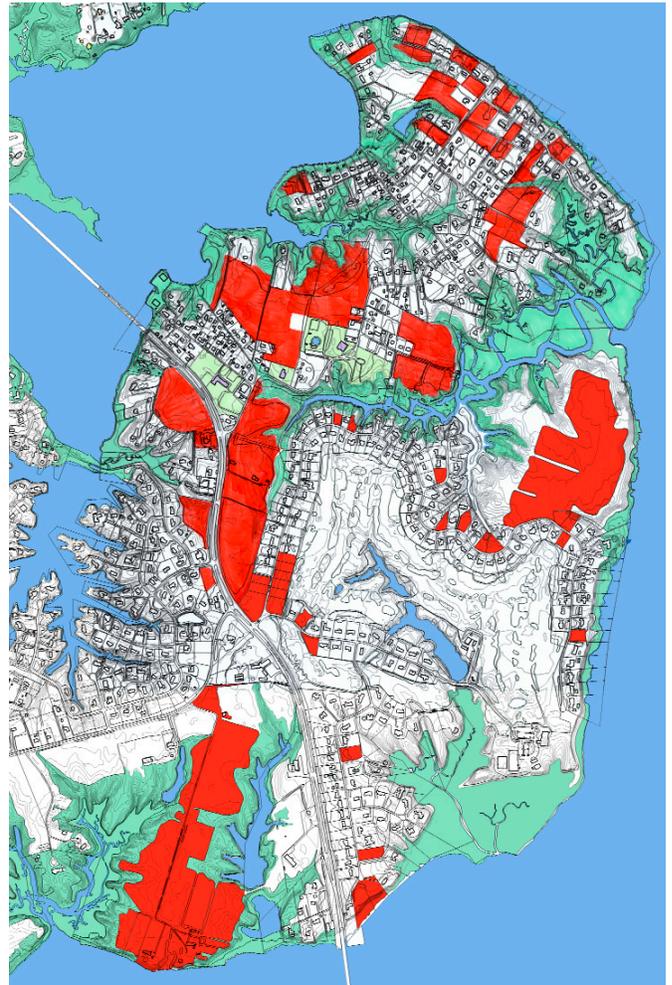
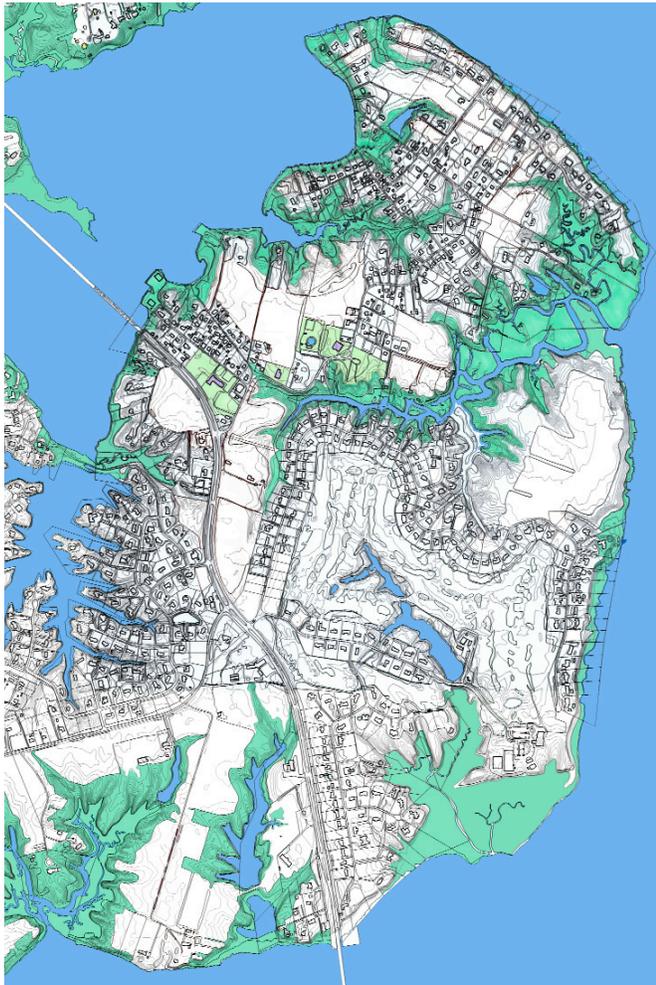
Eclipse Drive section as it exists (left) and as proposed with walking path and lighting. 23



### III General Guidelines

THE RESIDENTS OF CRITTENDEN/ECLIPSE did not want to see any new development in the village. However, there is the opportunity for some additional development in the buildable areas that are currently not built upon or are functioning as open space. Of most concern are the areas that are not zoned low density residential, although even residential development could compromise the historic charm of the village if it is not designed to fit in with the character of the village. General guidelines for new development should be considered for development along Route 17; for residential development within Crittenden/Eclipse; and for streetscaping.

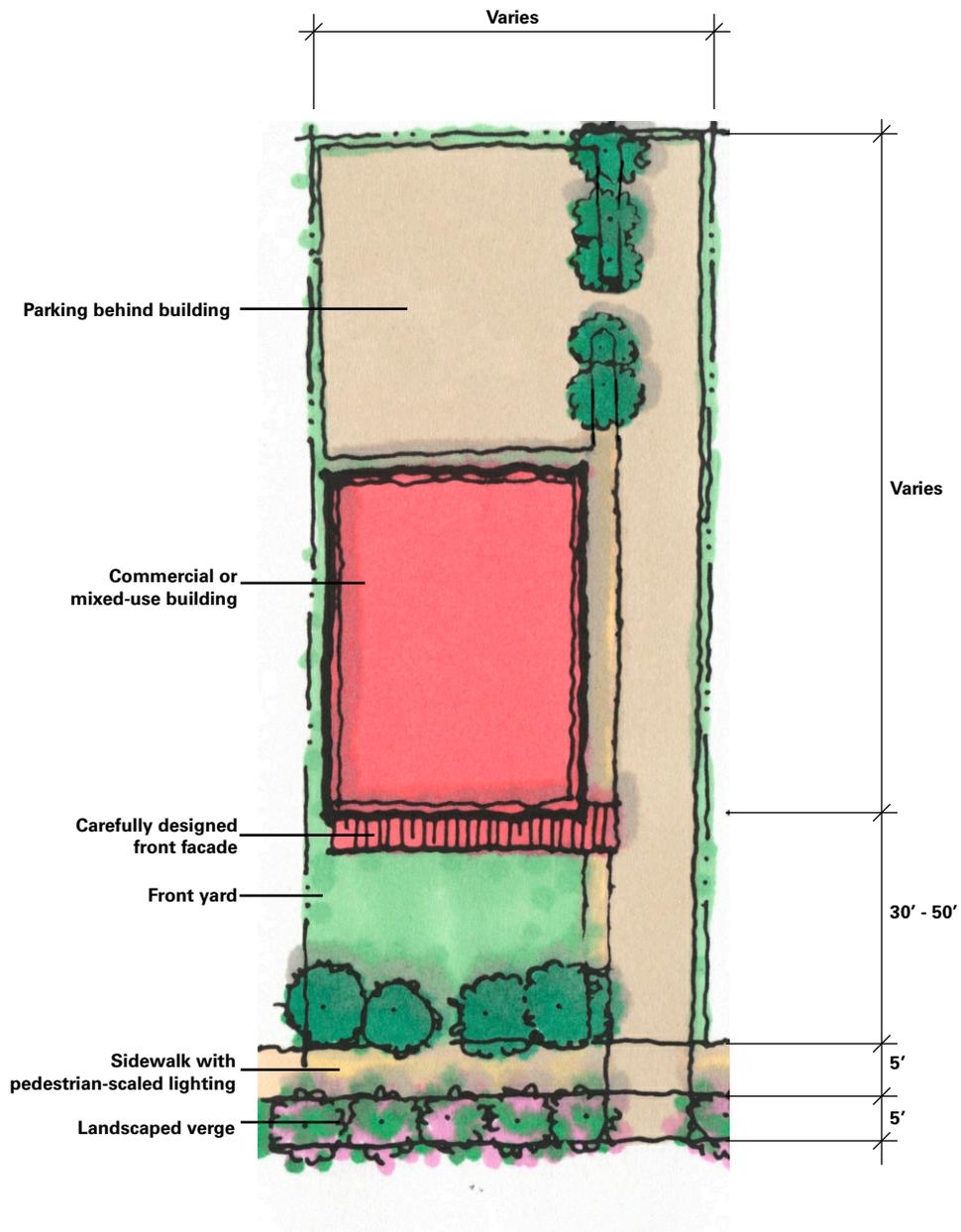
 Undevelopable Land  
 Developable Land



**Commercial Development**

Commercial development along Route 17 should maintain the historic character of the Crittenden/Eclipse village. Business should be encouraged to place parking lots in the back of build-

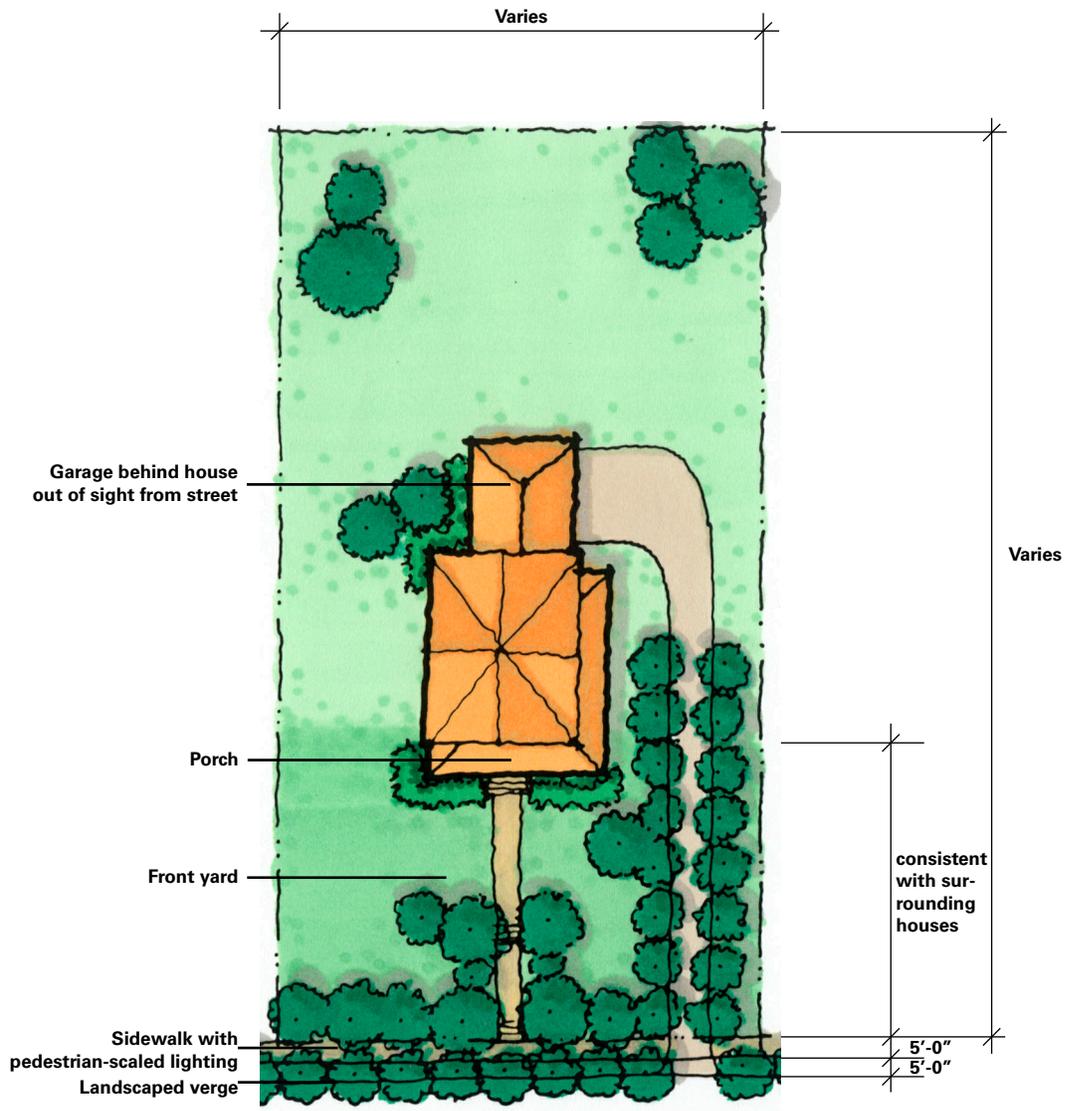
ings, where they can be shared between adjacent buildings. This allows the front of the building to be set back 30-50 feet from the road with a landscaped buffer from the heavily trafficked Route 17.



**Residential Development**

Residential development should be maintained on lots sizes similar to those found in the surrounding neighborhood. Large garage doors fronting onto the road detract from the historic character

of the neighborhood. Garages should be placed behind buildings with the garage doors facing away from the street. Building setbacks should match those of the village.



**Streetscape Standards**

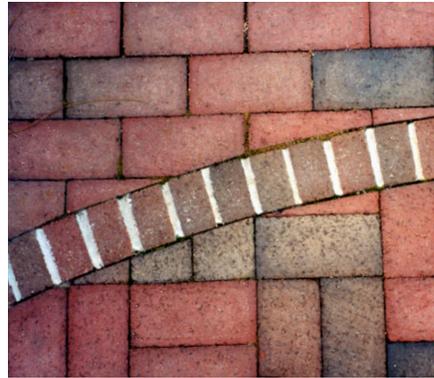
Residents felt that a standard sidewalk would compromise the character of the village, although it was felt that the safety of pedestrians was in danger. An alternative to a standard sidewalk is a walking path of a different material than standard concrete. Some alternatives are illustrated here. ADA accessibility and usability for strollers should be taken into consideration.



*Stone and Gravel*



*Concrete Pavers*



*Brick*



*Wooden Boardwalk and Pine Straw Mulch*



*Crushed Shell*