

Suffolk/Virginia

# Driver Village Initiatives Plan

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Prepared for  
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# I Introduction



*Entrance to Driver Village at Kings Highway and Nansemond Parkway. (top)*

*Aerial view from the east with the Nansemond River in the background. (bottom)*

THE INITIATIVES PLAN FOR the village of Driver is part of the City of Suffolk's ongoing Initiatives Planning Process. The process began in 1997 when Urban Design Associates 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, Hall Place, and more recently the outlying historic villages of Holland, Whaleyville, and Chuckatuck.

The City's Comprehensive Plan calls for concentrating a limited amount of new development in the existing walkable historic villages in order to help revitalize the rural villages while protecting the rural character of the surrounding area by reducing sprawl and its associated traffic problems.

## The Neighborhood Planning Process

The physical plan for Driver emerged from a two-phase process, both involving community participation.

The first phase consisted of documenting, analyzing, and understanding the existing conditions and historic structure of the village. The design team gathered maps, from which base maps were drawn. A set of analysis drawings, called X-Rays™ was generated from the maps. Each X-Ray focuses on one or two key pieces of information, such as streets or topography, which help the design team to understand the neighborhood patterns and to make informed decisions during the design process.

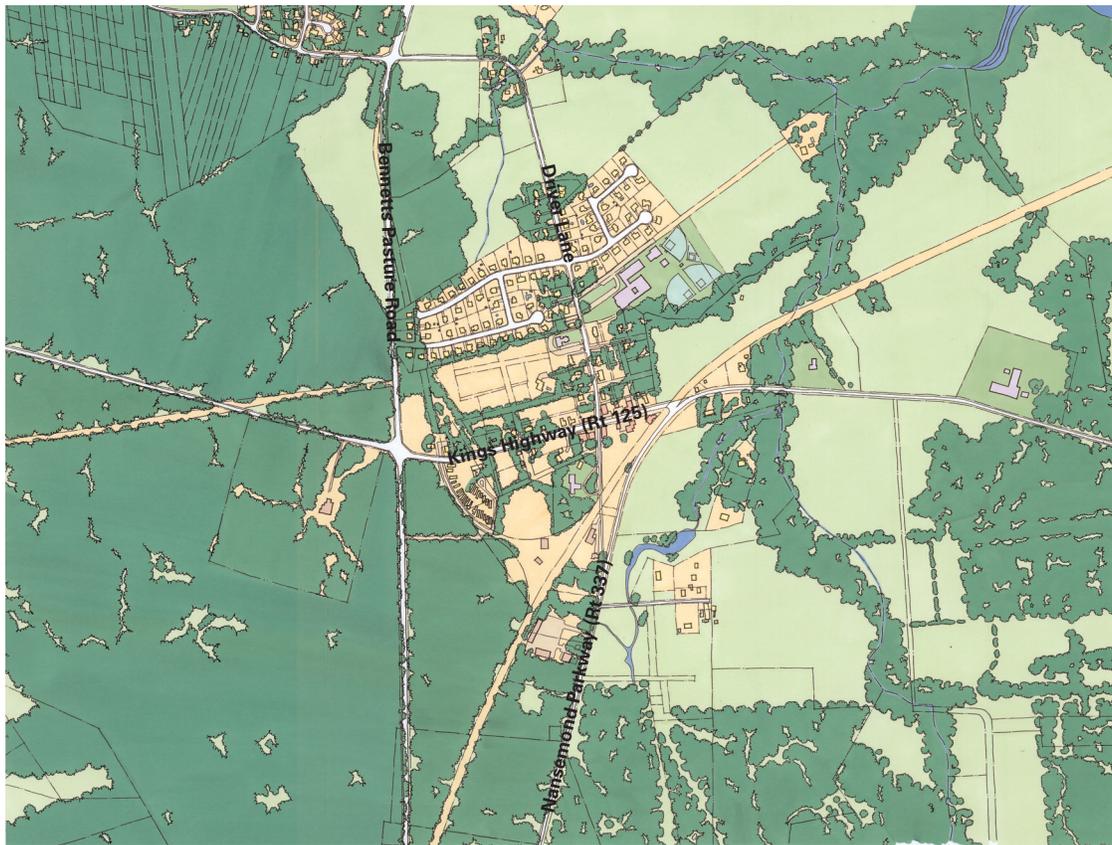
The second phase, and the focus of the UDA planning process, was the design charrette – an intense, multi-day design workshop, held in Driver with the village residents, workers and property owners. The design work was done on-site, with the community actively involved in the creation of the plan, which helps to insure their commitment to the successful implementation of the plan.

The Driver design charrette was held March 12th through 14th, 2002 at the Berea Christian Church on Driver Lane. It began with a kick-off meeting at the Driver Elementary School, where the design team asked the participants to tell them about Driver's strengths and weaknesses, and for visions for the future. The design team used the responses to generate design principles and guide the design process.

**Existing Conditions Analysis**

The village of Driver was founded at the crossroads of the Suffolk-Portsmouth Road and Kings Highway as an agricultural center. Recently the area has grown as new residential subdivisions have replaced agricultural land. Furthermore, unlike the other rural villages, Driver lies within one of the City’s two designated Urban/Suburban Development areas. Consequently, the surrounding lands will continue to be developed with subdivisions, and commercial and industrial parks. The village is readily accessible to

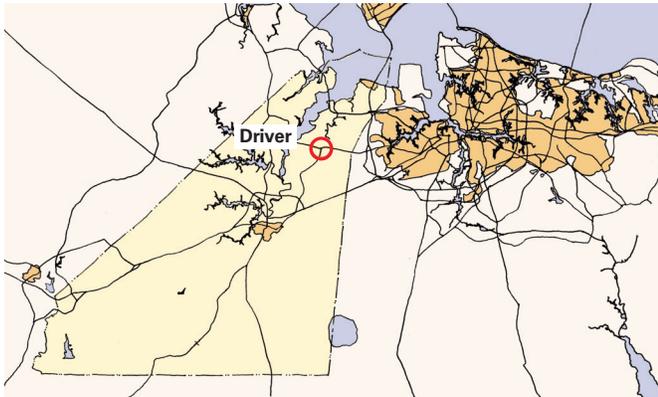
major transportation corridors such as interstate highway I-664, I-64 and I-264. The area boasts three schools, a fire station and a large number of historic churches. The area is well served by three regional parks: Lone Star Lakes across the Nansemond river, Bennett’s Creek Park, and Sleepy Hole Park. The surrounding area is serviced by both water and sewer. Furthermore, while generally not connected, public water and sewer facilities and service are readily available to the Driver village “proper,” making it vulnerable to future development.



*The portrait shows the current land use patterns.*

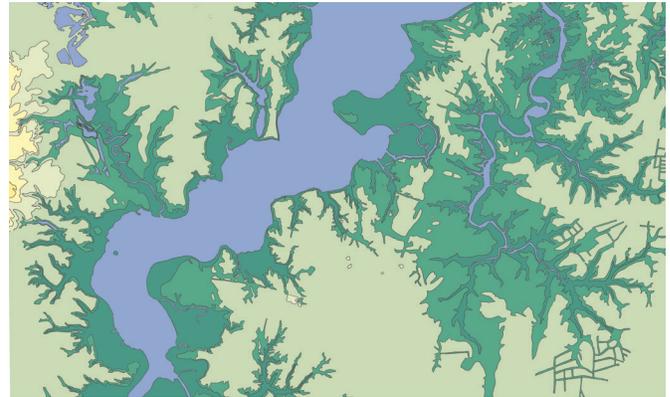
- Key**
- Residential Bldgs
  - Institutions
  - Commercial Bldgs
  - Industrial Bldgs
  - Public Property
  - Agricultural Land
  - Tree Coverage

### Existing Conditions Analysis



#### Location

*Driver Village is located where Kings Highway (Rt 125) intersects Bennetts Pasture Road (Rt 627) and Nansemond Parkway (Rt 337), with the Nansemond River to the northwest.*



#### Topography

*Ravines and wetlands, shown in dark green, act as barriers that make road connections difficult and restrict the amount of developable land.*



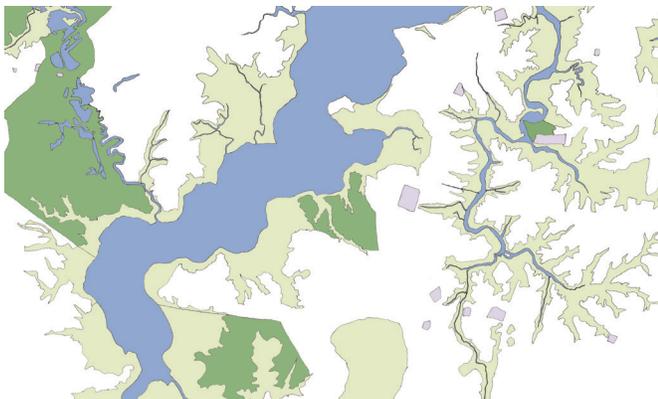
#### Highways & Arterials

*Kings Highway (Rt 125), Nansemond Parkway (Rt 337) and Bennetts Pasture Road (Rt 627) are busy roads that carry regional traffic through Driver.*



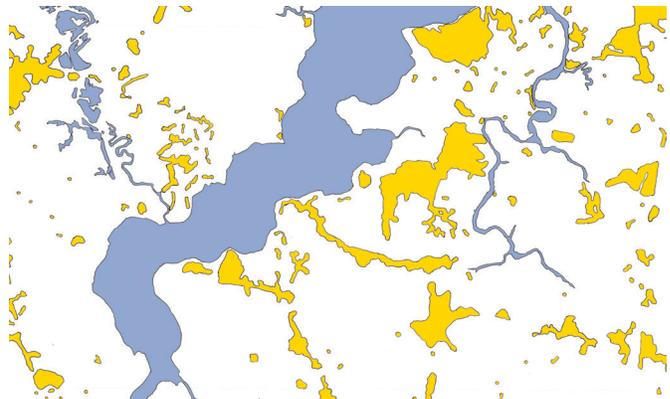
#### Street Network

*While regional road connections are strong, street networks in the new residential developments around Driver are disconnected and isolated.*



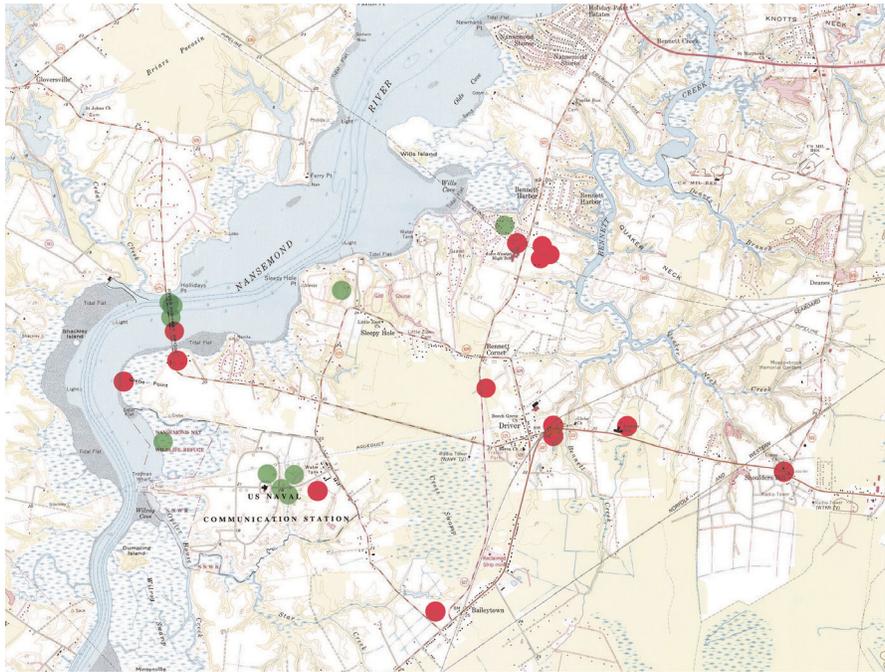
#### Institutions, Parks & Natural Features

*In addition to the many churches and schools, the village is surrounded by a wealth of parks, green space and natural features.*



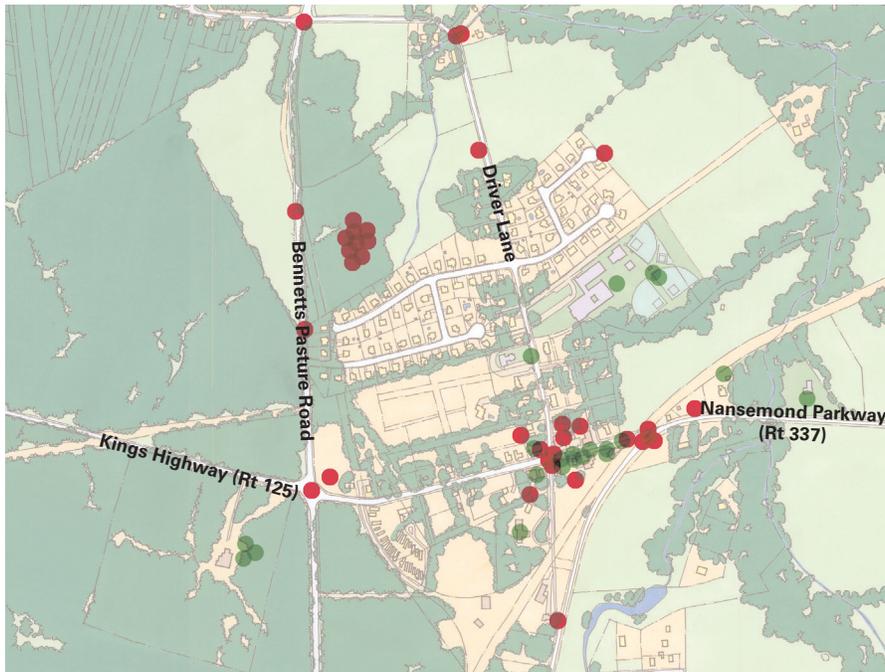
#### Settlement Patterns

*Consistent with the street network diagram, the area's residential developments are isolated along major roads.*



**Strengths and Weaknesses**

*The Driver village residents indicated strengths with green dots and weaknesses with red dots on the area map (right) and portrait (below right).*



**Assets, Liabilities, Hopes and Dreams**

**Strengths**

- Friendly concerned residents
- Strong sense of community
- Quaint small town living – rustic, quiet, walkable scale
- Location: close to parks and recreation, downtown Suffolk and Portsmouth
- Safe environment – low crime rate
- Good road system, no cut-through traffic through subdivisions
- Growing population
- Strong locally-owned businesses
- Active neighborhood churches
- Expansion space for schools
- Open house for gnome signing
- “Driver Day” festival

**Weaknesses**

- Dangerous main intersection
- Lack of street lights, traffic signals and sidewalks
- Speeding, especially from Nansemond Parkway (Route 337)
- No bike paths
- Drainage problem; flooding and storm water system in poor condition
- Retention ponds and ditches are unsafe for drivers and pedestrians, especially kids

**Visions**

- Quality housing compatible with the rustic charm of Driver; no apartments or multi-family housing

- No new commercial development outside of Village Center
- New commercial buildings to be built in keeping with the character of historic buildings
- Impact analysis and design guidelines for any new development
- Improve signage at the gateways
- Street lights and banners consistent with Driver’s village character
- Family-oriented restaurant or cafe
- Improve commercial parking
- Add gazebo for outdoor gatherings
- Renovate Obici House
- Add curbs, sidewalks and bike paths around Village Center
- Add traffic calming devices – signals, rumble strips, signage, and turn lane off Route 337
- Eliminate major truck traffic through Driver
- Expand police, fire and rescue services
- Improve storm water drainage within village
- Preserve natural features and resources – consider a rails-to-trails program, and establish a coordinated system of greenways and blueways
- Update and maintain Sleepy Hole park and Sleepy Hole golf course

### Design Principles

The input from neighborhood residents and stakeholders were incorporated into a list of design principles to help guide the planning process.

- 1 Maintain and enhance Driver's quaint, rustic, small town character
- 2 Support and improve the Kings Highway commercial crossroads
- 3 Calm traffic (Kings Highway, Nansemond Parkway)
- 4 Make streets pedestrian friendly
- 5 Resolve storm drainage problem
- 6 Promote appropriate, rural-scaled infill development
- 7 Provide, improve, and connect parks and trails
- 8 Plan for the Kings Highway improvements and other regional transportation improvements



*The charrette process included participation from neighborhood residents and business owners (below). Strengths included the historic area churches and homes (left).*



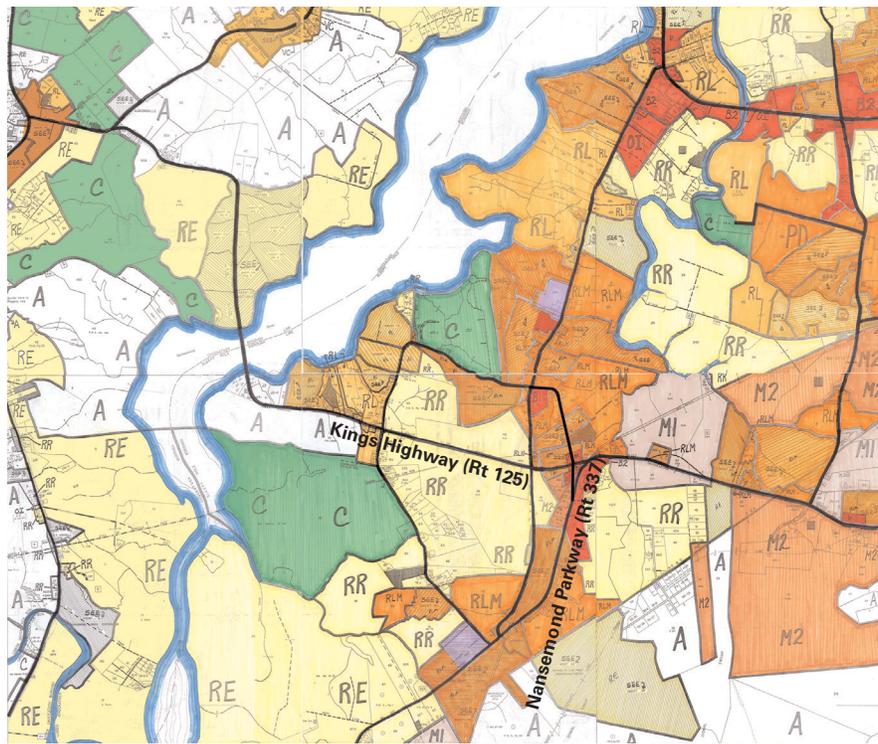
**Zoning and Potential Development**

On March 25, 1998 the City of Suffolk adopted the 2018 Comprehensive Plan. The Comprehensive Plan aims to preserve the open space and wetlands as well as the historic rural villages throughout Suffolk. The plan calls for concentrating a limited amount of new development in the existing walkable historic villages in order to help revitalize the rural villages while protecting the rural character of the surrounding area by reducing sprawl

and its associated traffic problems. One mechanism is the Village Center zoning overlay, which puts into place development guidelines for the historic villages. The village of Driver chose not to adopt the Village Center overlay, which restricts the ability of the village to restrict the development in and around the village. Currently, the zoning (illustrated below) permits residential development around most of the village.

**Zoning**

*Zoning currently permitted in the village of Driver and the surrounding area.*

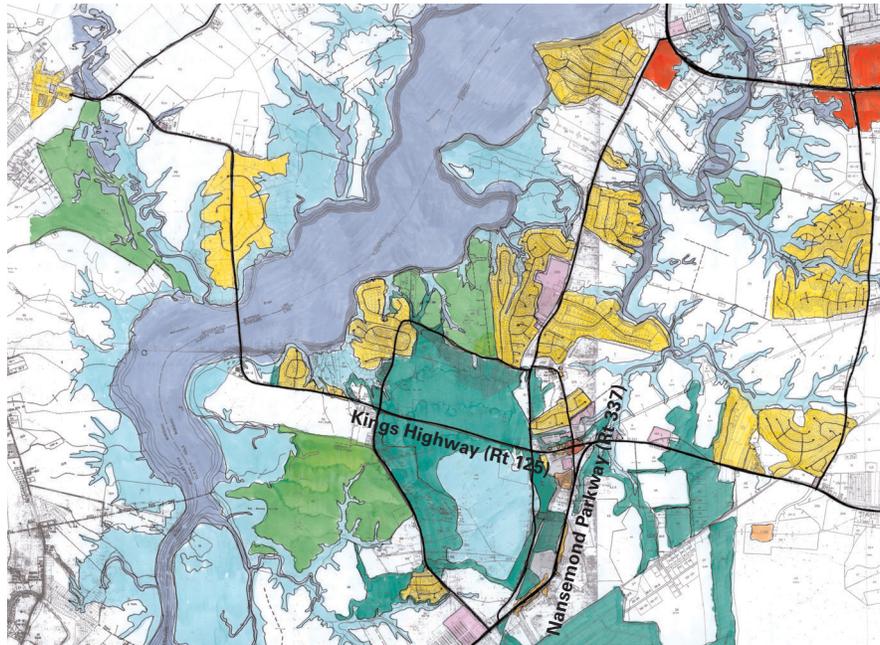


**Key**

- A: Agricultural
- C: Conservation
- Institutional
- B1 & B2: Business
- O-I: Office Institutional
- M1: Light Manufacturing
- M2: Heavy Manufacturing
- RR: Rural Residential
- RL: Residential Low Density
- RLM: Residential Low Medium Density

**Existing Land use**

*The current land use pattern surrounding Driver is scattered residential, mostly in the form of subdivisions, surrounded by agricultural and forested land.*

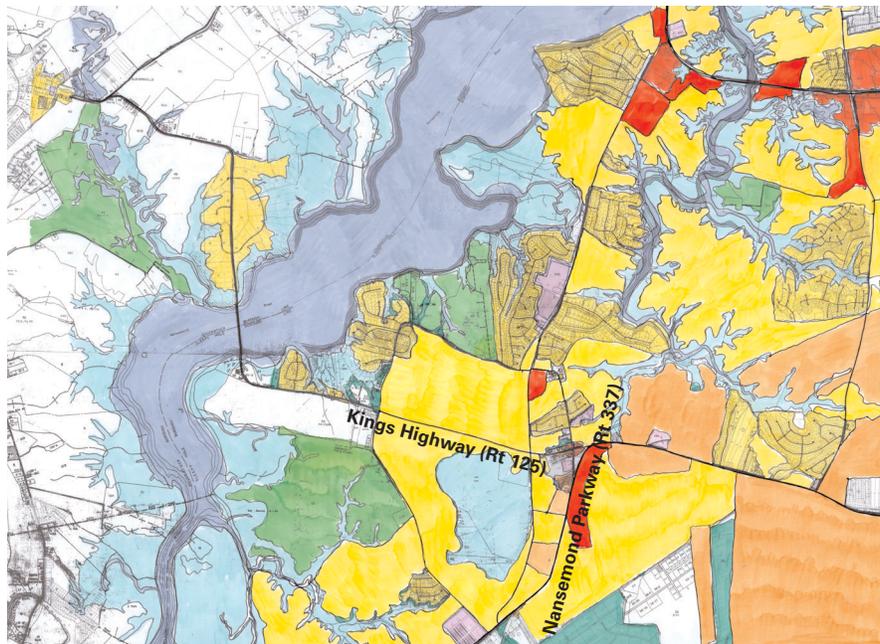


**Key**

- Agricultural
- Parks
- Institutional
- Commercial
- Industrial
- Residential
- Wetlands
- Forested Land
- Waterways

**Land use allowed by zoning**

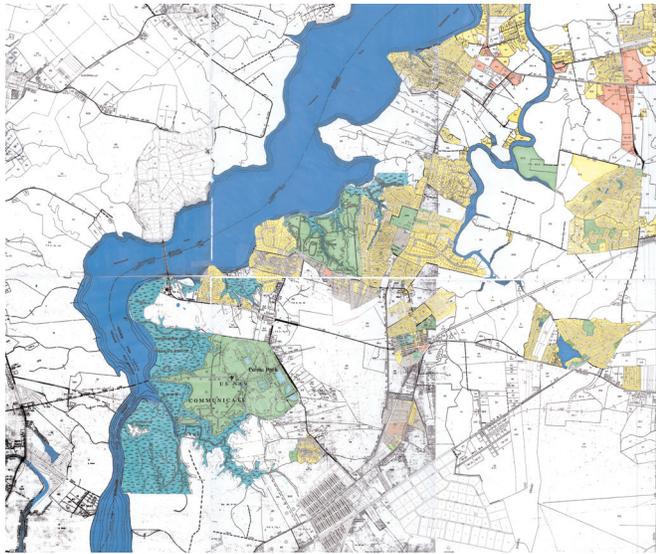
*By the current zoning, residential development is permitted on most of the properties surrounding Driver.*



**Key**

- Agricultural
- Parks
- Institutional
- Commercial
- Industrial
- Residential
- Wetlands
- Forested Land
- Waterways

## II Frameworks

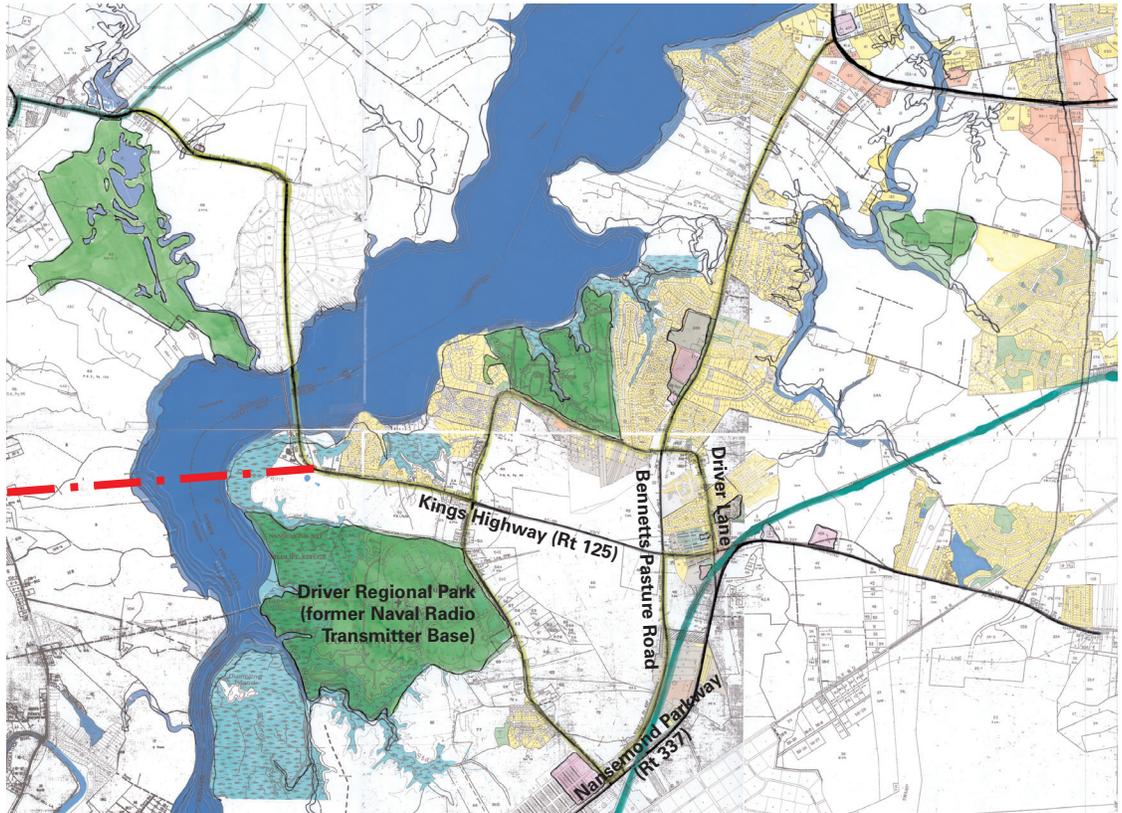


THE VILLAGE OF DRIVER is surrounded by many recreational amenities. Sleepy Hole park is scheduled to be renovated with the addition of new picnic facilities. Sleepy Hole golf course was recently purchased by the City and is scheduled for improvements. Bennett's Creek park, a popular place to launch boats, is scheduled to have the creek dredged to allow for easier access to the Nansemond river. Lone Star Lakes Park has many fishing holes and nature trails. The city recently obtained ownership of 384 acres of the former Driver Naval Radio Transmitting station and is exploring the possibility of building a Regional Park with new uses, which include new recreation and athletic facilities, nature preserves and a boat launch.

The Department of Parks and Recreation is working on the development of an interconnected system of greenways and blueways throughout the city. The system would run down Bennetts Pasture Road, and circle Driver along Sleepy Hole Road and Driver Lane. The trail would connect to Lone Star Lakes Park and Chuckatuck.

**Framework**  
Existing conditions of the area's parks with residential development (above); framework of proposed trails that connect to regional parks and natural features (right).

- Key**
-  New alignment of Kings Highway
  -  Bridge
  -  Trail System
  -  Parks
  -  Institutional
  -  Residential
  -  Wetlands
  -  Commercial

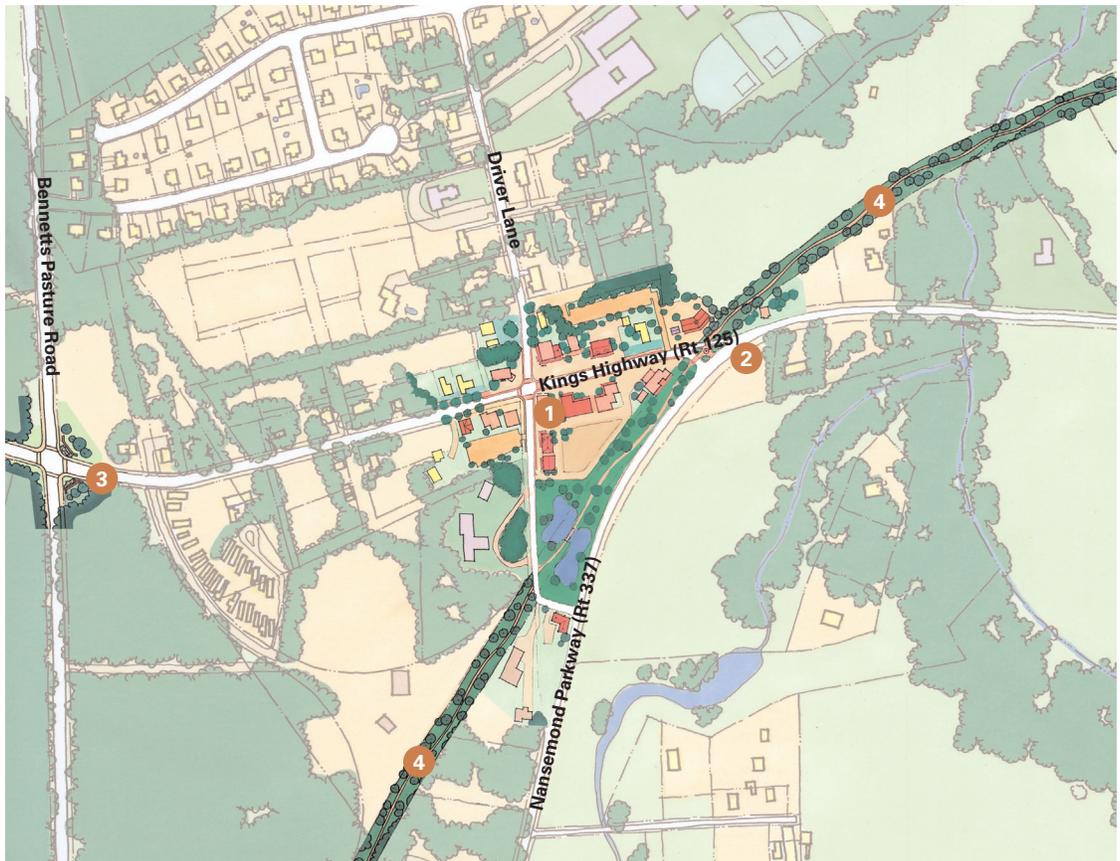


### III Initiatives



#### Initiatives Plan

Portrait showing existing land use (above) and proposed Initiatives Plan for the Village of Driver outlining improvements (right).



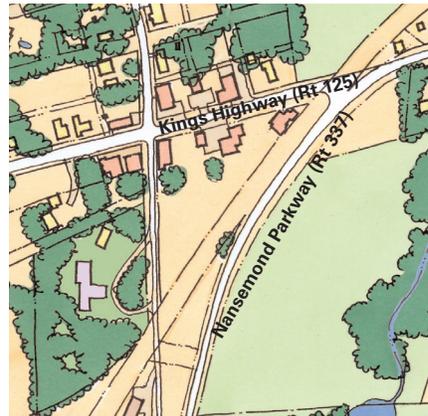
THE PARTICIPANTS OF THE design charrette requested that the initiatives focus mainly on the revitalization of the Village Center. In addition, enhancing the entrances to Driver and providing some trails were ideas that were positively received. The initiatives plan should be considered a shopping list of improvements that can be implemented over time. The initiatives include:

- 1 Village Center Improvements
- 2 Kings Highway and Nansemond Parkway Gateway
- 3 Kings Highway and Bennett's Pasture Road Intersection Improvements
- 4 Trail system

### 1 Village Center

The initiatives for the Village Center include:

- A Streetscape, pedestrian walkways and paths, and intersection improvements for Kings Highway and Driver Lane
- B Infill buildings
- C Shared parking
- D Realignment of Driver Lane/Nansemond Parkway intersection
- E Public water and sewer service, and public restroom facilities



Portrait showing existing conditions of Village Center (left) and proposed Plan outlining initiatives (below).



**A Streetscape, pedestrian walkways and paths, and intersection improvements for Kings Highway and Driver Lane**

Improvements to beautify and enhance the functioning of the intersection that serves as the heart of the village without being out of character include:

- An introduction of a traffic signal at the intersection of Driver Lane and Kings Highway
- A reduction of the radius of the roadways at the intersection to a consistent standard to help calm traffic and improve safety
- The addition of boardwalks, walkways, and paths in front of and connecting buildings and parking areas
- The addition of brick pavers in a two foot wide strip separating the parking area from the street; the change of paving texture protects pedestrians and delineates the street, helping to calm traffic
- The reduction and maintenance of consistent speed limits for Kings Highway and Driver Lane between Nansemond Parkway and Bennetts Pasture Road

- The addition of a pedestrian connection between downtown Driver, Driver Elementary School, and nearby neighborhoods.

Residents and business owners also felt that a standard sidewalk would compromise the character of the village. An appropriate alternative is a walking path built of material different than standard concrete. It was also thought that where appropriate, the walking path should be located away from the edge of the street. Rather, it should meander somewhat, providing connections between buildings and parking areas. Furthermore, existing parking should not be eliminated in favor of the pedestrian path.



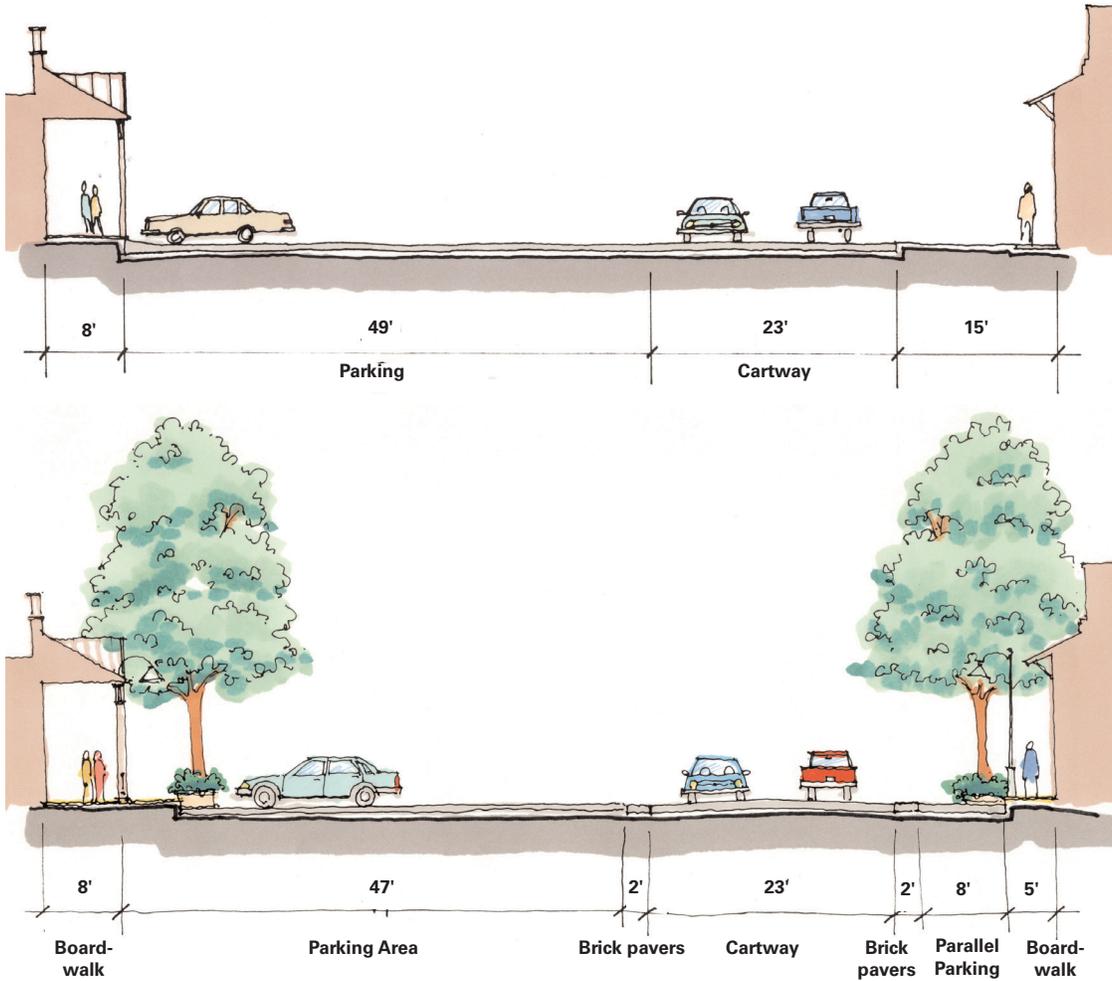
Eye level perspectives of the Driver Lane & Kings Highway intersection as it exists today (left) and as proposed (below) with a traffic light and commercial boardwalks.





**Alternative Paving Materials**

Some alternatives to a standard concrete sidewalk are illustrated here. ADA accessibility and usability for strollers should be taken into consideration. (clockwise, from upper left: concrete pavers, brick, stone and gravel, crushed shell, wooden boardwalk and pine straw mulch)



**Kings Highway Street Improvements**

Section of existing configuration of Kings Highway within the Village Center (left) and proposed street improvements (below).

**B Infill buildings**

This initiative aims to complete the street by filling in the empty spaces with new buildings which will also help create a critical mass of small-scale neighborhood commercial uses to attract shoppers and retailers. The proposed expansion of Knot Hole Station will fill in one of the empty spaces and provide a small number of parking spaces out front. Residents mentioned the desire for a neighborhood cafe or family eating establishment, maybe an ice cream parlor, which could go in the other new buildings.

The new infill buildings should match the architecture and scale of the historic character of the village and maintain the setbacks of existing buildings. All new buildings will be connected by a system of coordinated walkways and a boardwalk as mentioned in the street improvements initiative. To the extent practicable, existing buildings should also be connected by boardwalks and walkways, taking care not to eliminate load-

ing zones and parking if a suitable alternative location cannot be established.

**C Shared parking**

With the addition of new commercial buildings, more parking will be needed. The building of centrally located parking lots that can be shared by all businesses, located behind buildings on vacant lots, can shield the pedestrian environment and protect the historic commercial street. Draining the parking lot to the proposed detention/retention pond along the trail can help mitigate current flooding problems.

Business owners emphasized the need to maintain fronts of businesses facing the street, and not to allow businesses to reestablish their front facing the new rear parking lots.

Where room allows, loading and service areas for the businesses could be integrated into the system of shared parking lots. All shared parking lots and businesses will be connected by a system of coordinated walkways and boardwalks.



*Building and parking configuration of Village Center as proposed with new buildings filling vacant spaces with shared parking in the back (right).*

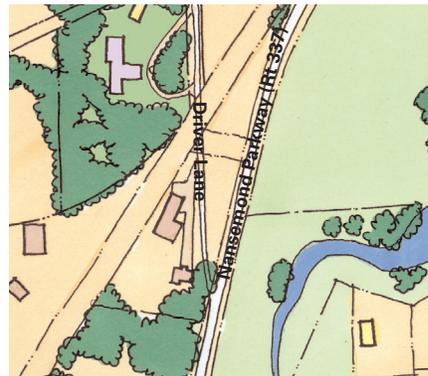
**D Realignment of Driver Lane/  
Nansemond Parkway intersection**

Residents mentioned that the current intersection was dangerous. Making Driver Lane and Nansemond Parkway a 90 degree intersection would improve visibility and safety. This would also allow businesses to develop a new corner building with a more visible location.

**E Public water and sewer system  
and public restroom facilities**

In addition to correcting drainage problems, residents mentioned the desire for public utilities. As mentioned previously, public water and sewer facilities are nearby and service is available. This would require community approval through the Department of Utilities petition process.

Residents and shop owners also mentioned the need for a centrally located public restroom facility. This facility is illustrated as a small, attractive public building along Kings Highway near the intersection of Nansemond Parkway, in close proximity to the shops and the trail.



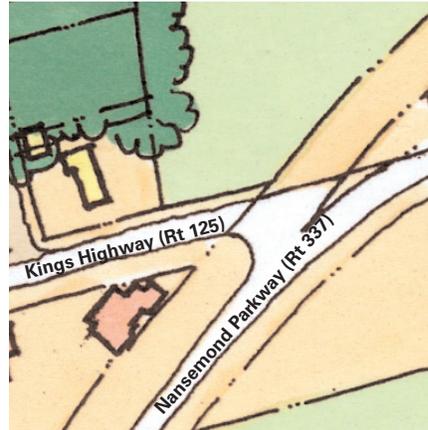
*Intersection as existing(left) and as proposed with Driver Lane meeting Nansemond Parkway at 90 degrees (below).*



## 2 Kings Highway and Nansemond Parkway Gateway

Currently, people speed off Nansemond Parkway onto Kings Highway without slowing down. This intersection could be better designed to calm traffic and also serve as the gateway to Driver:

- Change of paving material like brick sidewalks to indicate change of character from fast moving road to village street
- Add a right-turn lane for traffic coming from the east
- New signage with landscaping that indicates a gateway to Driver
- New commercial building on vacant lot that is architecturally consistent with the character of existing historic buildings



Intersection as existing (left) and as proposed (below left).



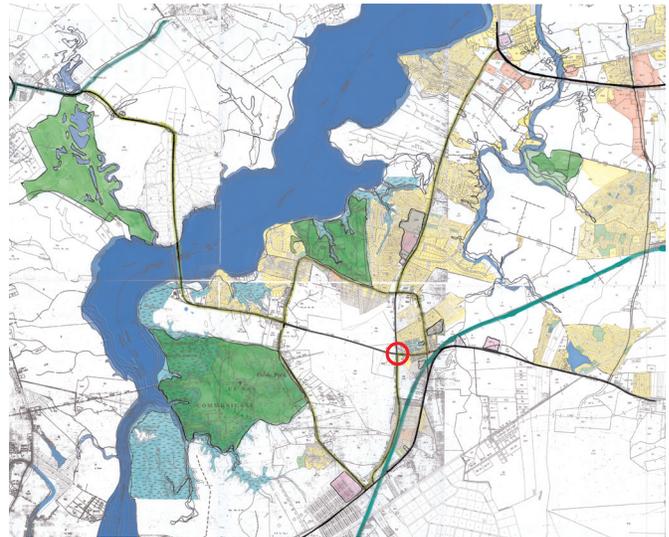
View from east showing new gateway signage with plantings and new commercial buildings (bottom).



### 3 Kings Highway and Bennett's Pasture Road Intersection Improvements

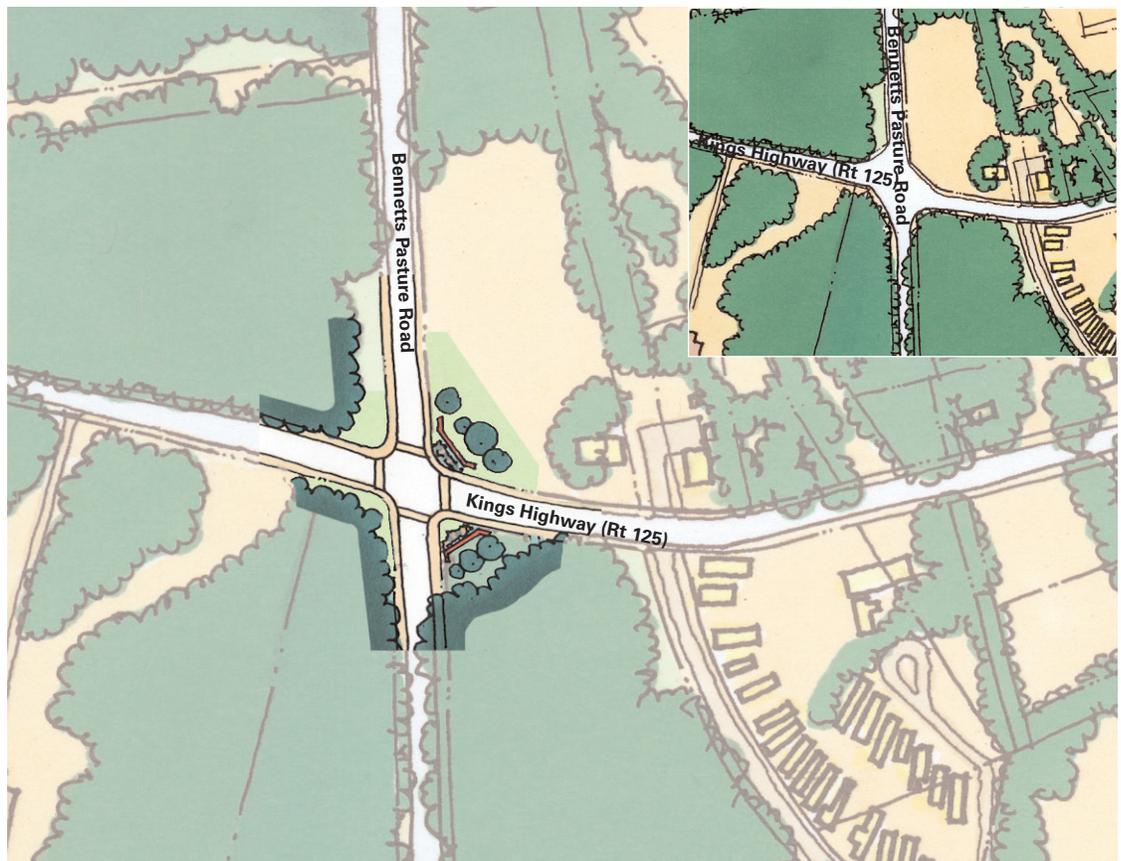
Residents said that the intersection was dangerous due to poor visibility and speeding traffic. This initiative calls for a redesign of the intersection by:

- Narrowing of intersection for improved visibility
- Addition of traffic calming devices and visual clues such as textured and colored cross walks
- Improving pedestrian crossings
- Signage indicating a gateway to Driver which lets people know that they are entering a residential area and should slow down



*Location of intersection on the regional road network (above right).*

*Intersection as existing (inset) and as redesigned for better visibility and traffic calming (right).*



**4 Trail system**

The idea of introducing trails through the beautiful natural areas around Driver was liked by the residents. The Seaboard rail line which is currently abandoned is an ideal location for the inter-city trail that in the long run will connect from the heart of Driver to Downtown Suffolk, east to the waterfront and continuing on through Portsmouth to Downtown Norfolk. It would also create park space at the entrance to the neighborhood. The connection to the regional trail system throughout Suffolk provides access to a variety of destinations like

Lone Star Lakes Park and any new facilities built at the Driver Regional park on the former Naval Radio Transmitter base.

In the near future this trail can be developed to connect to the existing inter-city trail in Chesapeake, establishing, Driver as a destination point for users outside the village. For the time being, the trail could end just to the south of Driver at Nansemond Parkway near the Nansemond River High School and Sleepy Hole Road, giving users easy access to the future Driver Regional Park.



*Portrait as existing (inset) and as redesigned (left).*