

CHAPTER 1 – SUFFOLK’S HISTORIC DISTRICTS

A. The Local Historic District



Figure A—Historic Conservation Overlay District

B. History of the Local Historic District

In 1978, the City of Suffolk established a local historic district known as the Suffolk Historic District. The local district was expanded in 1999 and reflects the current boundaries known as the Historic Conservation Overlay District. The Historic Conservation Overlay District included the National Register District and the Virginia Landmarks District which was focused around the older established Downtown area including the Pinner Street residential neighborhood and the commercial areas along North Main Street and West Washington Street. In 1998, the National Register District was expanded to include portions of North Main Street and again in 2002 to include the East Washington Street Corridor. Expansion of the National Register District continued in 2004 expanding westward to encompass the West End neighborhood and areas along Central Avenue and West Washington Street. The expanded Historic Conservation Overlay District includes the properties within the expanded National Register District as well as additional areas around Washington Street. As shown in Figure A the Historic Conservation Overlay District includes most of the residential and commercial properties within the historic downtown Suffolk.

C. Purpose of the Local Historic District

As set forth in Article 4, Section 31-413 of Suffolk's Unified Development Ordinance provision is made for the establishment of the Historic Conservation Overlay District as follows:

- Enables the Historic Conservation Overlay District to operate in harmony with the plan for land use and population density embodied in the Unified Development Ordinance as a special district to be superimposed on other zoning districts contained therein;
- Ensures that the uses, housing types, minimum lot requirements, minimum yard requirements, maximum heights and accessory uses and accessory signs are determined by the regulations applicable to other districts over which the HC District is superimposed, except as these other district regulations may be modified by application of the regulations in the Historic Conservation Overlay District; and
- Recognizes that the general boundaries of the Historic Conservation Overlay District have been drawn and adopted by the City Council to include all lands closely related to and bearing upon the character of the historic district, thus composing a landscape unit and allowing for transitional regulations needed to control potentially adverse and conflicting environmental influences.

D. Special Areas within the Local Historic District

The Historic Conservation Overlay District, while recognized as a single entity, is comprised of several sub-areas with their own unique characteristics and traits. When taken together, these sub-areas are united in an historical identity that forms the overall Historic Conservation Overlay District. The following is a description of the three sub-areas which comprise the Historic Conservation Overlay District. The location of the individual sub-areas can be found in Figure B.

- Residential Areas

The Downtown's residential areas typically consist of single-family houses that front directly on the primary street with open side yards. These houses are similar to one another in terms of context and are, therefore, grouped into one single sub-area.

Within the Residential sub-area, maintenance and rehabilitation of historic residential property is critical to preserving the character of the district and improving the vibrancy, appeal and success of revitalization efforts. The appropriate design of additions, new construction, alternations, and landscape improvements are critical to assuring that the historic features which define the historic residential area are not overpowered or visually weakened by new development. Landscape and streetscape alterations need to be designed and planned with care to ensure that they are compatible with the residential areas.



Pinner Street

- Historic Urban Core

This area forms the historic core of the Central Business District. It includes properties fronting North Main Street, from East Washington Street to Finney Avenue, and East and West Washington Street, from Lee Street to Pinner Street and the eastern edge of the historic district.

The area consists of a wide variety of historic buildings which work together to create a unified urban setting and a rich street presence. Most of the buildings are two or more stories in height, spaced closely together to form a classic urban pattern and are close to the street.



North Main Street circa 1930

Although the center of the Historic Urban Core is becoming stronger as a result of years of successful revitalization efforts, some commercial buildings along East and West Washington Street remain vacant and are in need of façade improvements, rehabilitation, and re-use.

- Historic Entry Corridors

The Historic Entry Corridors are the commercial areas along West Washington Street and North Main Street between the Historic Urban Core and the outer edge of the Historic District. These areas are less urban in character with lower buildings, more open space between buildings and an intermixing of residential and commercial buildings along the street.



West Washington Street circa 1930

E. Categories of Significance within the Historic Conservation Overlay District

The Unified Development Ordinance provides that an “Inventory Map” of the local historic district may be adopted by City Council. The historical significance of properties within the local historic district is to be designated on the map as follows:

- Landmarks

Historic buildings or structures that are at least 50 years old and districts, objects, or sites that are historically significant because of any of the following criteria: (a) Representative of a significant historic architectural style; (b) Association with a significant historic place; (c) Association with a significant individual; or (d) Association with a significant historic event. In general, most of the buildings within the local historic district are significant because they represent important architectural styles.

Similarly, buildings such as Riddick’s Folly and the Phoenix Bank Building are significant because of important historic events which occurred there.

- Contributing Structures

Historic or non-historic structures contribute to the overall historic character of the historic district through the compatibility of their design, character, scale, material and detailing. They are not, however, significant enough to be designated as landmarks.



Contributing

- Non-Contributing Structures

Not all structures in a Historic Conservation Overlay District are historic. These non-historic structures are termed non-contributing structures and are defined as structures that were either built less than 50

years ago, or structures that have been changed to such a degree that they no longer retain the integrity of their original design or are in such a poor state of repair that their future retention is in doubt. The Suffolk Historic Conservation Overlay District contains a number of non-contributing structures; the majority of these are recent commercial structures. While many are constructed of brick, the overall design of these buildings is inappropriate in the local historic district. Reasons for this inappropriateness include one-story construction with flat roofs and minimal decorative detail, and the use of front and side parking lots which intrude on the historic streetscape of the area. If the trend toward this type of new construction continues, the integrity of the Historic Conservation Overlay District's corridors could be severely compromised.



Non-contributing

F. Goals within the Historic Conservation Overlay District

The Suffolk Historic District Design Guidelines promote the rehabilitation and preservation of historic structures within the local Historic Conservation Overlay District through implementation of the following goals:

- Continued Use of Historic Buildings

It is a goal of the Historic Conservation Overlay District to continue the use of historic buildings as originally intended. Such continued use is essential to the revitalization of the overall historic district and the preservation of the buildings. To this end, rehabilitation and preservation efforts are vital to accomplishing this goal by maintaining the appearance, dignity and integrity of the historic structures.



Suffolk Center for the Cultural Arts
Former Suffolk High School

- Rehabilitation of Deteriorating Historic Structures

The deterioration of historic buildings has become a major problem within the historic district. Rehabilitation efforts are essential in order to preserve the historic qualities of downtown and revitalization of the district. Routine maintenance, painting, and roof repairs are critical to preventing the deterioration and eventual loss of historic structures. Improvements such as installation of insulation, upgrading of electrical and mechanical systems, replacement of deteriorated features, and site improvements are also essential if these historic buildings are to ensure the revitalization and preservation of the entire downtown area.

- Appropriate Design of Additions and Alterations for Buildings

Changes to historic buildings should be appropriately designed to be compatible with the architecture and overall character of the historic district. Additions and alterations to buildings require careful design in order to preserve and strengthen the character of the district. To this end, repair and maintenance activity involving exterior materials, finishes, windows, doors, awnings, signage, fencing and landscaping should be carefully planned to avoid negatively affecting the district's overall character.



114 North Main Street

Suffolk Historic & Cultural Overlay District & National Register Historic Districts

- LEGEND**
-  Suffolk Historic & Cultural Conservation Overlay
 - NATIONAL REGISTER HISTORIC DISTRICTS**
 -  Original Suffolk District (1987)
 -  North Main Street Extension District (1988)
 -  East Washington Street District (2003)
 -  West End District (2004)
 -  Suffolk District Expansion (2004)

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1:10,800
1 inch equals 900 feet

Suffolk
VIRGINIA
City of Suffolk GIS
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Updated : March 9, 2005
It's a good name to be in Suffolk

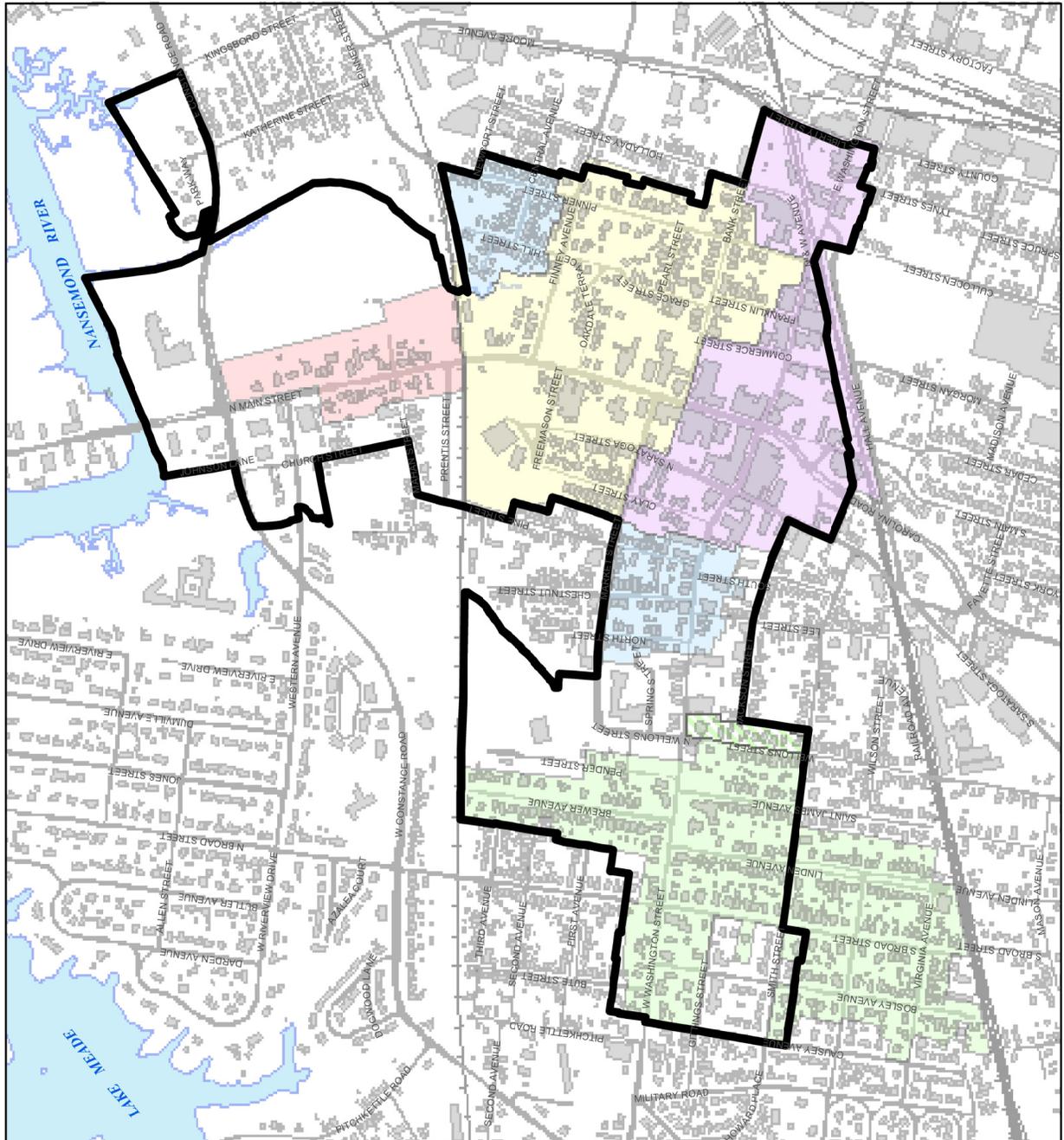


Figure B

- Compatibility of New Construction with the Historic Character of the District

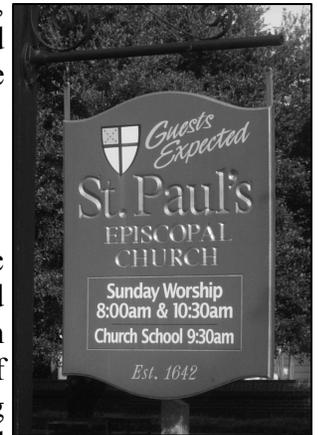
New commercial, residential, and civic infill construction should be appropriate in size, style, details, material and mass for the area in which it is being built. While it is generally not desirable to replicate historic structures, new construction should be compatible with and add to the overall character of the Historic Conservation Overlay District.



Mills E. Godwin Courts Complex

- Signage

Commercial and non-commercial signage should be designed to be clear, concise, appropriate and of a size which compliments the historic district and does not overwhelm historic structures. Well-designed signage can increase the appeal and character of the historic district.



- Streetscape Enhancements Compatible with the Historic Character

Improvements to the streetscape environment are important to make the Historic Conservation Overlay District more appealing to residents, visitors, tourists and shoppers. Emphasis should be placed on making sidewalks and the pedestrian environment more attractive and accessible. The City's recent installation of new street lighting, trees, crosswalk improvements and sidewalk amenities along East Washington Street is an example of how streetscaping can assist and accelerate the revitalization of the historic district.

G. The National Register and Virginia Landmarks District

Within the local Historic Conservation Overlay District is another district known as the Suffolk National Register Historic District. The National Register of Historic Places and Virginia Landmarks Register designations were incorporated as part of the Historic Conservation Overlay District in 1986 and expanded in 1998, 2002 and 2004 to include the areas shown on Figure B. While the state and federal designations contain no restrictions to properties within them, there are several advantages to the designations.

- The National Recognition is an honor which recognizes the district's special significance.
- Income-producing properties may qualify for a Federal and State income-tax credit as an incentive to encourage qualifying rehabilitation.
- Residential properties which are owner-occupied may qualify for State income-tax credit as an incentive to encourage qualifying rehabilitation.
- Any adverse impact of a federally funded or licensed project upon the district must be determined and minimized if possible.

Rehabilitation work under the Federal and State programs must meet the Secretary of Interior's Guidelines in order to qualify. These guidelines are also relevant to other rehabilitation projects within the local historic district. The Virginia Department of Historic Resources may be contacted (www.dhr.virginia.gov) for further information on these programs.