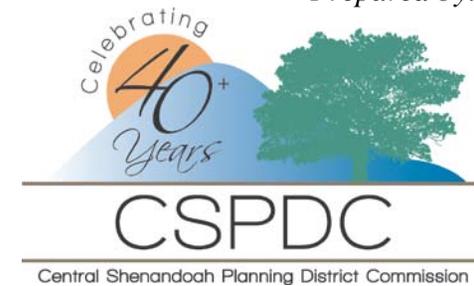




BLUE RIDGE PARKWAY / SKYLINE DRIVE
GATEWAY STUDIES

Study #3: Rockingham County and the Town of Elkton

Prepared by:



Submitted
July 30, 2012

**Blue Ridge Parkway/Skyline Drive Gateway Studies
Study 3: Rockingham County and the Town of Elkton**

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**BLUE RIDGE PARKWAY/SKYLINE DRIVE GATEWAY STUDIES
STUDY 3: ROCKINGHAM COUNTY AND THE TOWN OF ELKTON**

Overview of Gateway Studies

The purpose of the Blue Ridge Parkway/Skyline Drive Gateway studies is to strengthen the connection between the Parkway/Skyline Drive and the communities directly adjacent to those amenities. The studies are anticipated to span three years (one completed per year), working south to north in the region, as follows:

- 1) Rockbridge County - City of Buena Vista (FY10)
- 2) Augusta County – City of Waynesboro (FY11)
- 3) Rockingham County - Town of Elkton (FY12)

Each study will identify issues and opportunities including, but not limited to, land use, economic development, conservation, tourism, and signage. At its conclusion, each study will result in an illustrative conceptual plan indicating key recommendations for the study area as well as steps for plan implementation. This study represents the third in the series to be completed for Rockingham County and the Town of Elkton.

Additionally, this study was selected to complement the previous two Gateway studies but it focuses on the Skyline Drive and highlights the Route 33 corridor leading into the Town of Elkton.

Study Introduction

The Town of Elkton and Rockingham County share an important commercial corridor in U.S. Route 33 (Spotswood Trail), which served as the main focus of this study. The West Spotswood Trail/U.S. 340 intersection is a primary entrance leading to downtown Elkton. This area was studied because of its overall impact to the economic development of Elkton and the experience of those visiting the region along this gateway corridor. The corridor, which features a variety of land uses including commercial, civic, residential and light industrial mixes, was largely developed in the second half of the 20th Century and has remained fairly static of late. This study may be used by Rockingham County and the Town of Elkton as a blueprint to facilitate the revitalization of this corridor. The following project goals led the study process and determined corresponding recommendations.



Project Goals

- Provide a vision and implementation guidelines for the U.S. Route 33 corridor
- Create a sense of arrival in Elkton
- Unify landscaping treatments within both Elkton and Rockingham County
- Address land use variations within both Elkton and Rockingham County
- Direct traffic toward Town and downtown businesses with improved wayfinding signage

Process and Public Participation

A project committee was chosen to work with the Central Shenandoah Planning District Commission and to review all recommendations proposed. In addition, the services of a landscape architect were procured to produce all project illustrative recommendations.

Gateway Project Committee:

Rhonda Cooper, Director of Planning, Rockingham County
Chris Andrews, Planner, Rockingham County
Kevin Fauber, Town Manager, Town of Elkton

Central Shenandoah Planning District Commission Staff:

Elizabeth McCarty, Economic Development Planner
Darren Coffey, Interim Transportation Manager
Robbie Huff, GIS Manager

Sympoetica Consulting Firm:

J. Barry Carpenter, Principal

An initial kick-off meeting was held on April 25, 2012, with Central Shenandoah PDC staff, Sympoetica, VDOT District Planning, and the Gateway Project Committee to discuss the project goals, study process/impacts and corridor issues, and to complete field work in Rockingham County and Elkton. Field work involved a comprehensive photographic inventory of the project area and analysis of the baseline corridor design features. A thorough understanding of the study area conditions underpins the plan's recommendations. This initial meeting was critical to formulate the study vision, goals and objectives along with study expectations. On June 25, 2012, staff from Central Shenandoah PDC met with the Gateway Project Committee in Elkton to discuss the study recommendations and to gather input from the committee. It is anticipated that the study recommendations will be formally presented to the Central Shenandoah PDC Board at their August 2012 meeting. Additionally, presentations will be given for each locality, as requested.

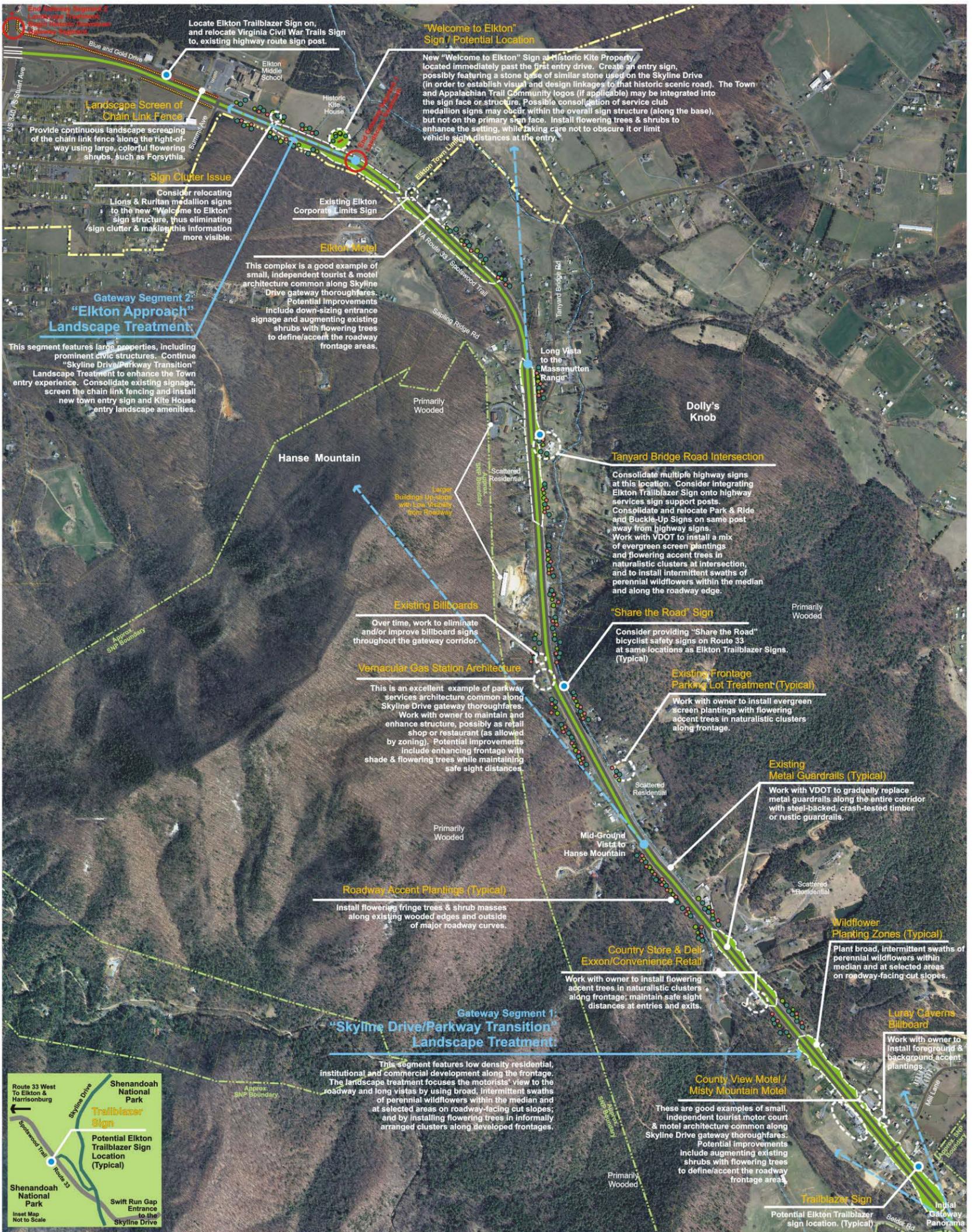


Study Methodology

The study area was identified as the U.S. Route 33 corridor from the intersection of the Skyline Drive and U.S. Route 33 west into downtown Elkton for a distance of approximately 5.5 miles - two and a half miles being in the Shenandoah National Park, two and a half miles from the National Park boundary to the Elkton exit, and approximately half a mile on local streets. The gateway study identifies several issues and opportunities present in this corridor. One of the more noticeable issues is providing some element of unification with distinct land use changes along the corridor. The eastern end of the U.S. Route 33 corridor in Rockingham County is primarily wooded and natural in land use character. From the entry into the town limits of Elkton, the U.S. Route 33 corridor has a primarily commercial character with scattered civic land uses. An analysis highlighting issues and opportunities within the study area are shown on Figures One (1) and Two (2).

The issues identified by this study include:

- Increased directional reinforcement to the motorist by use of directional (“trailblazer”) signage pointing residents and visitors to various destinations within the County and Town.
- Enhance existing wooded buffer areas along roadway edges and property.
- There is a lack of defined entry sequence into the town. Entry sequences may be defined either through unified landscaping, architecture or land uses. A defined entry sequence would create a sense of arrival into Elkton.
- Reinforce the corridor as a bicycle route (i.e., use “sharrows” or bike lanes in town, signage, etc.).
- Establish a visible, attractive Town entry sign.
- Sporadic sign clutter is evident throughout the corridor area. Providing unified signage for residents and visitors is an opportunity in the study area.
- Continuity of street landscape pattern and rhythm.
- Installation and improvement of pedestrian facilities.
- Relocation of overhead wires within the town limits of Elkton (at least within the study area).
- Access management policies should be examined.
- New building architecture should emphasize the best elements of the historic pattern in the corridor.
- Lack of orientation to historic downtown. (This issue is primarily an economic development issue, as well as a wayfinding issue.)



May 18, 2012
 May 31, 2012 Revised
 June 11, 2012 Revised
 July 16, 2012 Final Rev

Notes:

GIS base mapping provided by Central Shenandoah Planning District Commission. This document is for inventory, analysis, and concept planning purposes only. It is not to be used for approvals, permitting or construction purposes.

Approx. Scale in Feet

Gateway Design Context Plan / Rockingham County
Figure 1: Skyline Drive Gateway Corridor Planning Study
 Central Shenandoah Planning District Commission
 for Rockingham County & the Town of Elkton, Virginia





May 22, 2012
 May 31, 2012 Revised
 June 14, 2012 Revised
 July 16, 2012 Final Rev

Notes:



GIS base mapping provided by Central Shenandoah Planning District Commission. This document is for inventory, analysis, and concept planning purposes only. It is not to be used for approvals, permitting or construction purposes.

Approx. Scale in Feet
 0 100 200



Gateway Design Context Plan / Town of Elkton
Figure 2: Skyline Drive Gateway Corridor Planning Study

Central Shenandoah Planning District Commission
 for Rockingham County & the Town of Elkton, Virginia

As shown in Figures 1 and 2, three key gateway zones are identified by this study to target later implementation efforts. These primary zones are the:

1. Skyline Drive/Parkway Transition – This zone is defined by exiting the Shenandoah National Park and the new vistas that open along U.S. Route 33 westbound.
2. Elkton Approach – This zone consists of the section of U.S. Route 33 just within the Town limits of Elkton to the exit off-ramp leading to downtown.
3. Historic Downtown Gateway – This zone begins at the intersection of the US 33 off-ramp and US 340 North and encompasses a two-block area centered on North 340 and West Spotswood Trail to the eastern entrance of the downtown historic district near the W. Rockingham/Spotswood Trail intersection.

Study Recommendations

The U.S. Route 33 gateway corridor is divided into three distinct landscape treatment segments that parallel the above identified zones.

Landscape Treatment Segments Recommendations

The overall purpose of the sequence of landscaping treatments is to provide a transition along the gateway corridor. The gateway corridor begins along U.S. Route 33 west of the National Park boundary, then travels through a transitional area of Rockingham County, enters the Town of Elkton, and extends to the Elkton Historic Downtown commercial area. A comprehensive listing of recommendations addressing the identified issue or feature was a project deliverable. The landscaping treatment recommendations are shown on two enclosed maps, Figure 1, Gateway Design Context Plan/Rockingham County and Figure 2, Gateway Design Context Plan/Town of Elkton. The corridor's existing elements and future recommendations are more generally described below in Table 1. They are presented from east to west in the study area.

Table 1 – Landscape Treatment Segments

Element	Recommendation
Skyline Drive/Parkway Transition Landscape Treatment Segment	
Directional reinforcement to motorist	Install new trailblazer signs to the Town of Elkton.
Enhance existing wooded buffer	Maintain wooded buffer along roadway edges and augment with flowering trees. Work with VDOT and private owners to install landscaping at key points along the corridor.
Older buildings	Work with property owners to install buffer and accent plantings.
Billboards	Over time, work to eliminate and/or improve billboard signs. Sign improvements include installing foreground and background accent plantings.
Metal guardrails	Replace metal guardrails with steel-backed, crash-tested timber or rustic guardrails.
Reinforce the corridor as a bicycle route	Install bicycle route signs at appropriate locations along the corridor. When appropriate, signs should share post with other signs to reduce sign clutter.
Corridor enhancement	In addition to the flowering tree improvements, at select locations plant intermittent swathes of perennial flowers in the median and on roadway facing cut-slopes.
Improve Town entry sign	Install a new “Welcome to Elkton” sign in the vicinity of the Kite House frontage along Rt. 33 prior to the school zone. This sign should begin the Elkton Approach Landscape Treatment Segment.

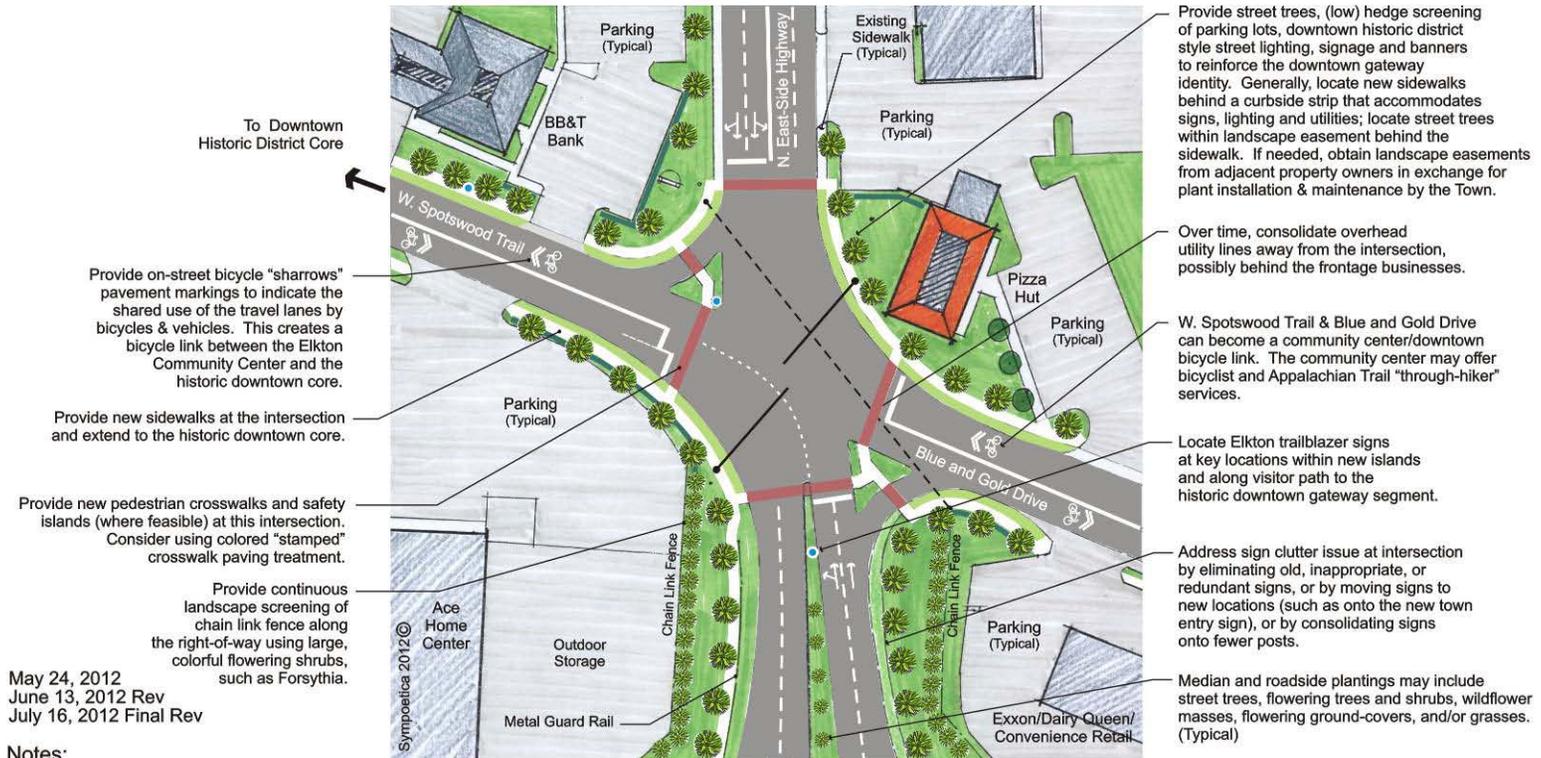
Elkton Approach Landscape Treatment Segment	
Consolidation of Service Club Signs	Incorporate the existing service club medallion signs onto the overall entrance sign. Install appropriate landscaping to enhance entrance sign area.
Pedestrian facilities	Install and improve sidewalks and crosswalks where needed.
Signs	Reduce sign clutter and consolidate where possible such as recommended for the service club signs.
Distracting views	Install buffer plantings to screen areas such as parking lots, storage areas, and other visually unappealing uses.
Building architecture	Architecture of new and redeveloped non-residential uses should incorporate elements of the existing classic architecture seen throughout this corridor.
Enhancement of Right-of-Way	Provide continuous landscape screening of the controlled access ROW fencing with large, flowering shrubs.
Directional reinforcement to motorist	Install new trailblazer sign to the Town of Elkton along with relocating the Civil War Trail sign. These signs signal the entry into Elkton and the end of this landscape treatment segment.
Historic Downtown Gateway Landscape Treatment Segment	
Continue directional reinforcement/ROW enhancement	Install a trailblazer sign to the historic downtown and continue the ROW landscaping from the previous landscape segment into town.
Bridge width limitations	Replace the existing bridge with a modern, multimodal structure that reinforces the historic district gateway experience.
Enhance roadway	Provide pavement markings for “sharrows” to indicate the shared use of the roadway by bikes & vehicles.
Enhance right-of-way	Provide safe pedestrian facilities including stamped crosswalks (historically sensitive), pedestrian refuge island(s), sidewalks with utility/safety strips, street lights, and historically appropriate signage.

The study also highlights the town entryway at the West Spotswood Trail/U.S. 340 intersection. This area is identified as a Gateway Intersection with the following considerations:

1. This is a busy intersection and an important orientation opportunity for visitors.
2. The first impression of Town.
3. Sign clutter must be reduced with more effective wayfinding signage to direct visitors to the historic downtown, the community center, or other points of interest.
4. The community center is an opportunity to offer bicyclists and Appalachian Trail “through-hikers” support services.
5. Other visual clutter to be reduced includes business signage, overhead utility lines, and ROW fencing and litter.
6. Improve the functionality of the local roadways in this area, and redesign for multiple transportation modes.

Illustrative concept plans are provided for this critical intersection and this focal Gateway Zone (see Figures 3 and 4).

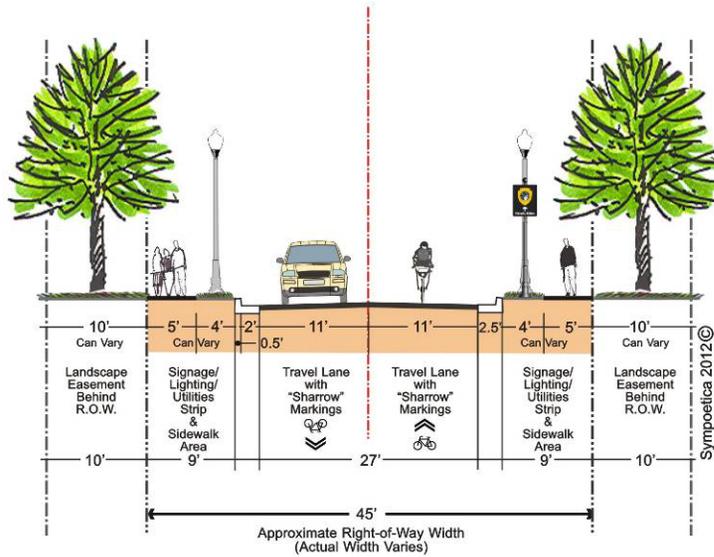
Figure 3: West Spotswood Trail / U.S. 340 Intersection Concept Plan



West Spotswood Trail /
 US 340 Intersection Concept Plan
 Skyline Drive Gateway Corridor Planning Study
 Central Shenandoah Planning District Commission
 for Rockingham County & the Town of Elkton, Virginia



Figure 4: Gateway Design Context Plan



Historic Downtown Gateway Segment
 Illustrative Cross-Section
 (View Westbound On
 West Spotswood Trail)

May 23, 2012
 June 13, 2012 Rev
 July 16, 2012 Final Rev

Notes:

This document is for concept planning purposes only. It is not to be used for approvals, permitting or construction purposes.



- Notes:
- Font shown is Gill Sans MT Condensed.
 - All dimensions are approximate.
 - Sign dimensions & font are subject to change.
 - Sign post design, materials & dimensions are subject to change.
 - This is an illustrative graphic for use as an example only; it is not for sign construction purposes.

Illustrative Example
 Elkton Trailblazer
 Sign Layout

Gateway Design Context Plan / Town of Elkton
 Skyline Drive Gateway Corridor Planning Study
 Central Shenandoah Planning District Commission
 for Rockingham County & the Town of Elkton, Virginia



Study Implementation

The Town of Elkton and Rockingham County may incrementally implement the recommendations of the Gateway Concept Plan through a variety of local planning mechanisms. Specific projects that could result from this study, among others:

- ❖ Right-of-way enhancement
- ❖ Streetscape improvements
- ❖ Wayfinding signage program
- ❖ Bridge replacement
- ❖ Roadway improvements
- ❖ Historic overlay guidelines
- ❖ Downtown revitalization
- ❖ Stormwater enhancements
- ❖ Heritage/Recreational tourism

Within Rockingham County, this study proposes a few important strategies for integration with local zoning and cooperation with VDOT and private owners for right-of-way corridor improvements. The close proximity of this particular corridor to the Skyline Drive and the Shenandoah National Park is particularly important when proposing County gateway strategies and recommendations. Trailblazer signs were proposed in various locations along the corridor within Rockingham County to navigate local residents and park visitors to the Town of Elkton and points west. Below is a brief listing of potential funding opportunities for implementation of the items within this gateway study (see the *Central Shenandoah PDC Grant Resource Guide* for other opportunities), along with a listing of potential project partners tailored for Rockingham County and the Town of Elkton.

Funding Opportunities

- Urban and Community Forestry Assistance Program, Virginia Department of Forestry
- Transportation Enhancement Grant Program, Virginia Department of Transportation
- Virginia Wildflower Program, Virginia Department of Transportation
- Community Development Block Grant (CDBG), Virginia Department of Housing & Community Development
- Private Development Improvements

Project Partners

- Local Business Community
- Local Community Service Organizations
- Town of Elkton
- Rockingham County
- Virginia Department of Transportation
- Virginia Department of Forestry
- Shenandoah National Park

