

General Community Appearance Guidelines

COMMUNITY APPEARANCE AND DESIGN

Establishes a lasting positive impression

Virginia Beach is a mosaic of distinctive places. It is the character, image and activity of these unique places that, in large measure, define our community. Virginia Beach's identity is composed of places like the oceanfront resort area, a growing year-round destination for those who love beach activities. Our identity also includes the Town Center, which is a major focal point for business and commerce in the city. There are places for those who want a more peaceful, quiet, historic and cultural experience. These include our city and state parks, federal wildlife refuges, and historic landmarks.



Oceanfront Boardwalk

Photo courtesy of the City Convention and Visitor Bureau



Town Center

The diversity of our places attracts residents and visitors alike and helps foster interaction of people and pride in our community.



Walk in First Landing State Park

Provides open space and protects the environment

Open space and the natural environment are important ingredients that contribute to the overall quality of our physical environment. These areas provide people with places to relax and enjoy the beauty of nature. No two open space areas or natural settings are alike. Indeed, they take on a wide variety of shapes, styles and uses from active to passive from formal to informal. Active open space fosters social interaction and a sense of place among the residents. Passive open spaces can be enjoyed visually from a road or actively through nature walks or canoe rides.



Actively enjoying city open space

Photo courtesy of the City PIO



Quality environment designed for people

Creates 'human-scale' environments

It is important for public and private developments to integrate quality design that recognizes the importance of 'human-scale.' The composition and context of community design elements such as pedestrian spaces, streetscapes, landscaping, as well as other design consideration play a critical role in defining quality community appearance.

When designing any development, it is important to remember good design does not interrupt the existing land uses or predominant character of the surrounding area - it complements it. To accomplish this, design elements must include a scale and mass that exhibit a proportional relationship between the built environment and the people who will live, work and play in that setting.

Integrates attractive public facilities and roadways

The City has an obligation to ensure that the design of its public facilities and roadways complement the character of the surrounding community. The size and architectural choice of buildings, orientations of buildings, open spaces, streets, colors, landscape features, sidewalks, lighting and other design considerations of public improvements must be composed in a manner that is harmonious and consistent with the land use goals of the Comprehensive Plan. For example, within the Strategic Growth Areas, this means adjusting the design of public facilities that will blend in with a higher density urban setting. In other areas, such as established neighborhoods with lower densities, this means composing a more traditional suburban design package. In either case, the design and materials of Capital Improvement Program (CIP) projects should make a positive contribution to the overall quality of the neighborhood within which it is located.



Attractive Resort Area Public Facilities

Creates Quality Community Design

Understanding the physical opportunities and constraints of land and applying good planning and design principles are essential first steps in the process of developing property. The quality of a community's design is influenced by such factors as the existing characteristics of the physical site, the flexibility or lack of flexibility of development regulations, and the value and marketability of the site, which affect investor financing and other decisions. Achieving quality community design begins with an understanding of the larger land planning goals of how the proposed development relates to the other land uses in the area. Once these goals are understood, decisions then focus on implementing more specific elements such as detailed site designs, structural improvements and other issues.



Part of a Well Planned Neighborhood Design

Quality elements of our City are those elements that

- 1.) In the aggregate respond to the needs of all the community, and not just to the needs of a select few;
- 2.) Present a long-range rather than short-range response to the needs of the community, that is, that tend to build a broad and long-lasting base of amenity;
- 3.) Evoke a positive image of Virginia Beach in the minds of our residents and visitors.



Attractive Walkway with Good Visibility

Offers safe, well-planned and attractive pedestrian ways

Virginia Beach encourages good site design, which maximizes safe pedestrian movement to the site and within the site. The City supports community design alternatives that reduce crime, improve the attractiveness of the setting and promote a sense of comfort and security to its residents and guests.

Promotes a Positive Image and Economic Vitality

Protecting scenic views and vistas, planting trees, landscaping parking lots, integrating amenities and controlling signs not only improve the overall livability of communities, these elements are fundamentally important to their economic health. We must encourage and assist residents and businesses to pursue projects that will improve the environment, image, aesthetic quality and, consequently, marketability of their neighborhoods. There are many other ways to accomplish these objectives. Various examples include street tree planting, trail connections, tot lot and pocket park additions, waterway cleanup, street and alley cleanup, housing rehabilitation, traffic calming and transit-stop enhancements.



Positive Images Help Promote Prosperity

CHALLENGES TO ACHIEVING QUALITY COMMUNITY APPEARANCE

In order to focus on the positive aspects of community appearance, it is useful to touch on certain design elements that pose challenges to improving the quality of our physical environment. The following identifies a few of these challenges.

Sign Clutter

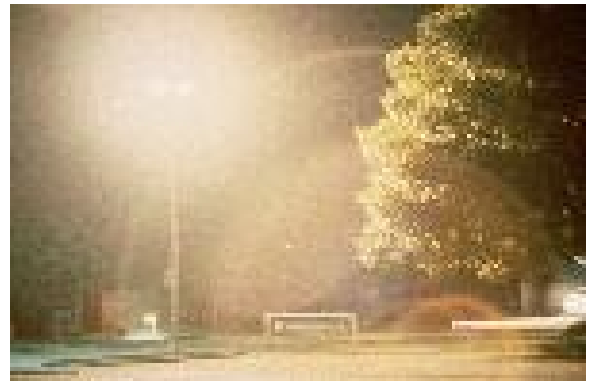
While signs are essential to the success of commerce, a balance must be struck between providing a reasonable opportunity to advertise and the tendency in some places to proliferate such signage. The number, size, placement and quality of signs can either contribute to or detract from the quality of community appearance. It is the intent of the City of Virginia Beach to reduce the negative community impacts created by poor sign arrangements and design.



Unattractive Sign Clutter

Too Much Light

Outdoor lighting plans should be designed to provide safe, attractive and appropriate degrees of illumination for the proposed land use. It is important to avoid over-illumination in certain places including residential and rural areas, among others. Other areas may need more lighting for safety and security reasons, such as commercial parking lots and outdoor ATM stations. Nevertheless, every effort should be made to minimize the degree of outdoor lighting, where appropriate, to avoid unwanted glare.



Glare from Excessive Illumination

Landscaping

A typical problem with landscaping is using plant material that, upon maturation, will not be suited to the land use or site. Another problem is the use of plant material that is non-indigenous to the climate of southeastern Virginia. Finally, there is no such thing as a maintenance-free landscape material. Some plants require less attention than others, but all must be maintained to assure long-term health and viability.



Disproportional Landscaping (note sign)

Parking Lots: Excessive Impervious Coverage

We must change the template that is typically used to design and build suburban parking lots. Many times, these facilities are designed exclusively around the automobile and make little or no provisions for safe and orderly pedestrian movement. This often results in the creation of an unattractive 'sea of parking' that is difficult to negotiate on foot and lacks aesthetic appeal. We recognize the need to accommodate the automobile but must also create parking lot designs that address the functional and aesthetic needs of pedestrians.

Vacant and underutilized buildings

Buildings that suffer from long-term vacancies or underutilization do not contribute to a productive economy or attractive community environment. The city must work with owners of such structures to find mutually agreeable solutions to revitalize such properties. These remedies may include reuse and revitalization of the building. They may also include possible redevelopment including a mix of new, marketable uses and site design improvements.

Fences along Roadways

City ordinances allow fences but many have deteriorated leaving a less than desirable view from the road.

Coordination of Public and Private Infrastructure

Signs should be legible but conform to regulations. Landscaping should be controlled so not blocking signs. Enhance areas that are to be used by pedestrians. Lightings appropriate for the area.



Vast expanse of asphalt



Vacant and Underutilized Buildings



Deteriorating fences along roadway



Coordinate Infrastructure

ACHIEVING A POSITIVE COMMUNITY APPEARANCE

Promote quality in design for all developments

All development should incorporate environmentally sensitive design that protects the integrity of existing neighborhoods, complements adjacent land uses, incorporates crime prevention principles and enhances the overall function and visual quality of the street, neighboring properties and community. Some distinct sections are addressed within this Comprehensive Plan. The creation of design guidelines provides assistance in creating a quality development. Those developments that promote quality design should be recognized.



Positive Neighborhood Design (Concept)

Residential development should enhance the quality of life for residents by incorporating safe, innovative design that integrates planning elements, such as connectivity, visually and functional open space, pedestrian networks and landscaped streetscapes.



Good blend of mixed uses

Non-residential development should incorporate solutions and design principles such as connectivity and consolidation while responding to adjacent residential development, improving the streetscape and enhancing the experience and perception of employees and customers through appropriate scale and mass.

Industrial development should utilize appropriate design elements to avoid intrusive visual, noise, odor and other potential impacts on adjacent uses. Such design should consider the link between function and aesthetic quality and contribute to the planning goal of achieving a quality physical environment.



Complementary Industrial Design