

Report of the 2022 Historic Preservation Advisory Group

Guiding Philosophy

“If Walker Timberlake toured his ‘grandly idyllic Seat of Justice’ today, he would immediately recognize the Court Green ... He might be surprised by the amount of planning now required to build here, but perhaps more than some he would welcome the idea of a Comprehensive Plan to ease growing pains like the ones he experienced when he brought into being this courthouse community. He would surely notice the mark that fires, floods, neglect, politics, and seeming progress have each left on this place still called Palmyra. Yet, despite the gains and losses, the Reverend Mr. Timberlake would know from his visit that the ‘Shiretown of Fluvanna’ has held its own and was well-positioned for the present age” (Barr, 2012; p. 36).

Though the above passage from David Barr’s *Virginia’s Palmyra* focuses only on the county seat, it well articulates the intentions of this 2022 Historic Preservation Advisory Group as we have considered the interests of Fluvanna County, our history, our historic resources that hold that history, and our future. Barr envisioned Reverend Timberlake’s return to Palmyra and celebrated the significance of maintaining genuine historic character through time and that effort’s value going forward. Likewise, our Advisory Group worked to expand this vision. We asked ourselves if Reverend S.C. Abrams returned to the schools he led if he could see the impact of his work expanding the reach of education as well as the progress that continues to grow from it. We asked if Sherriff Key would know the routes he rode, or if Trooper William Thompson would find the familiar in the Fork Union streets he once patrolled. We asked if this land’s precolonial caretakers could return to their historic Seat of Rassawek and find that place in the care of the Monacan Indian Nation. We asked if Ms. Sadie B. Seay could feel the legacy she left behind for Fluvanna students and business owners, and if Mr. Jesse Taylor could return to the wooded acres he once passionately surveyed and recognize some of the paths he wandered. And, perhaps, what we asked most of all is how we could contribute our own talents and convictions in the hopes that we would recognize Fluvanna and our various communities in 2040, and how the Fluvannians born in 2040 would be able to live with the knowledge and tangible evidence of the many histories that came before them.

We aim to honor the well-established histories of the various places, stories, and lives already well preserved, as well as expand the protections needed to safeguard the histories and historic resources that are otherwise slipping away, and honor too those still on the cusp of being created. We wish for new residents and new stories to create their own history in this county while giving them the opportunity to learn from their surroundings, from the history alive in historic resources, and the characters that filled those spaces in past lives. We aspire to provide guidance and inspiration to update policies to assist our county to **Grow with Grace**.

We offer this report of the 2022 Historic Preservation Advisory Group with the hope that it be helpful and complementary to the work that has been done by past advisory groups, the contributions collected in the Fluvanna County Comprehensive Plan, and the daily commitment of the staff in the Planning and Zoning Department.

The New Challenge

Current Conditions and Goals

- We reject as a false dichotomy the notion that growth and retention of character, identity, and quality are opposing values
- Fluvanna County has available to it modern and effective planning tools to meaningfully consider and preserve our rich historic resources and rural character, two deeply *intertwined goals, while also growing*
- We must, however, pick up these tools, sharpen them, and use them proactively through Comp Plan revisions and robust and meaningful ordinances to ensure we **Grow with Grace**
- A well-crafted Comp Plan has served us well to now. We are, however, at an inflection point and no longer adequately prepared to manage and shape growth responsibly for the future and will fail to retain character, identity, and the quality of life our community and citizens want and desire in the face of new and intense pressures on our economic, physical, and cultural resources

The Foundation

“If you want to preserve something, first you have to find it.”

- Conduct a countywide cost-share survey and resources assessment with the Department of Historic Resources in order to address the outdated and inadequate cultural resources data.
- The absence of good data risks unforced-harm to resources, project delays, rising costs, and controversy.
- The data in use today is now more than 30 years old and less than inclusive in its focus
- The data is inadequate as sound basis for planning, considering, shaping, approving, or budgeting for projects, whether in the case of the range of private development proposals

Broadening our Vision and Services

- Following the countywide survey and resources assessments, the County should expand its engagement with interested communities to support and promote underappreciated and/or under-served historic resources in order to share a more holistic history and incorporate more individuals and communities.
- As appropriate, the county should work with the private owners of surviving Rosenwald schools to strengthen awareness of the struggle for education in Fluvanna.
- As possible, the county should partner with and follow the lead of the Monacan Indian Nation in preserving Rassawek and or public works undertakings such as roads.

Maintaining Rural Character -- Historic and Rural Preservation are inherently linked

- Rural character has always been a top value for people visiting and

- relocating to our county and we must continue prioritizing it as such
- Open land, and the wildlife that relies on it for habitat, are historically and culturally important to our community, and must be preserved for the enjoyment, recreation, and education of future Fluvanna citizens and visitors

Putting Fluvanna Historic Resources to Work

Restoring Landmarks and Identity – Leading by Example

- For almost two centuries our Courthouse has been a gathering place, a symbol of identity and pride. This local landmark of national and international importance is at risk
- We must ensure it can continue to serve these public purposes for centuries to come
- Initiate, fund, and complete the restoration of the 1830 Fluvanna County Courthouse in accordance with the assessment land recommendations laid out in an independent Historic Structures Report funded in partnership with the FHS
- Recognize and work to fully tap the economic potential of the Courthouse and the Village as a tourism anchor

Tourism and Economic Development --Tourists and Businesses are attracted to the same attributes

- Recognize and value that we have what tourists want in a diverse travel experience: Identity and authenticity – That is Historic Resources, scenic beauty and open spaces, a range of outdoor experiences, a strong arts community, a craft community, wineries and breweries, farmers markets
- Unlock Fluvanna's potential by integrating the county's tourism, economic development, business recruitment, outdoor recreation, and other related personnel and organizations to work together
- Plan and develop core tourism infrastructure assets
- Develop products, joint programming, collaborative promotion and marketing

Meeting the Challenge

Enhance Professional Capacity

- Support and supplement Planning and Zoning Department
 - Secure a grants administrator on staff to work in conjunction with local non-profits to secure funding for projects supported both by the county and the non-profits
- Encourage Historic Preservation Training
 - County staff should think of historic preservation as a key strategy for planning for quality of life and a vital future
- Support and enable training for staff, working with DHR to identify in-service training opportunities, including workshops, seminars, webinars, etc.
- To ensure quality and character, hire appropriate consultant or appoint an architectural Review Commission or informal resource group of professionals with related skills to help draft architectural guidelines for ordinances covering commercial and residential developments and overlay districts

Strengthening the Process

- Integrate modern planning tools, including design guidelines and strong review processes, in order to grow with grace
- Cultural Review - Consider Impacts
Implement a robust cultural review process to fully consider and assess proposed projects and their potential to adversely affect important historic resources.
- Consistent with all environmental review processes, the standard is to first avoid, second minimize, and, only if these two are not feasible, to third mitigate adverse effects.

Overlay Districts – Grow with Grace

- Adopt overlay districts for entrance corridors and scenic areas that are essential to retaining rural character, identity, and economic opportunity through tourism and business recruitment.
- Adopt an overlay district for the Village of Palmyra as absolutely key to ensuring the future of this tourism anchor attraction
- An overlay for Palmyra is both timely and the only responsible step as the county vacates buildings.
- Adopt an overlay district for Fork Union as this potential key business address enjoys growth and development of quality.
- Consider overlay districts for Fluvanna’s distinctive crossroads villages.

Scenic Protections Within Overlays and Countywide

- Protect the county’s scenic roadways by seeking designation of State Scenic Byways and by adopting a local scenic byway ordinance
- Identify scenic vistas countywide, seek a listing in the state register managed by Scenic Virginia, and protect with by limiting incompatible development.
- Include in overlay provisions for context-sensitive design, setbacks as appropriate, height, massing, muted colors, and non-reflective material with the exception of metal roofs, etc.
- Ensure quality, compatible or complementary character, and context sensitivity in new developments, business or residential, or for infill within existing areas
- Manage and enforce the County’s tree ordinances for its intended purpose

Incentives

- Adopt tax abatement programs to encourage material investment in historic areas, particularly the Village of Palmyra and elsewhere as appropriate.
- Establish an enterprise zone with incentives for investment and job creation in Fork Union and elsewhere as appropriate
- Adopt a façade improvement program and incentive grants for Fork Union’s existing structures

Building Community Through Connection

Initiating New Opportunities for through Shared Symbolism

- The County should be intentional about systematically reinforcing traditions and expanding sources of community identity and connection.
- One example would be requiring all new county buildings to have two trees planted in front, a dogwood tree to honor the Commonwealth, and a persimmon tree to honor the county.

History Everyday -- Sharing Stories, People, and Places to Strengthen Community and Awareness

- Publish, for example, a column in Fluvanna FAN Mail to include historical trivia, stories about people, and places to connect residents to our community and history in lively ways. Engage interest in the county, stimulate pride and a sense of belonging, nurture a strong spirit of community, and inspire residents, both new and longtime and new generations to care for historic places.
- Take advantage of digital marketing tools to promote Fluvanna's historic resources to residents in, and visitors to, the county.

Promote - Stewarding for the Future

- Expand upon the strong community culture already in place here in the county and continue to develop a culture of historic awareness and appreciation.
- In the case of county-owned properties, the county should support and provide more regular opportunities for the public to engage with, benefit from, and contribute to our historic resources.
- Independent organizations like the Fluvanna Historical Society and the Fluvanna Leadership Development Program provide crucial opportunities for individuals to expand their awareness, but the County should play a large role in providing low-barrier opportunities for historic appreciation
- Develop, engage, or participate as an active partner in heritage education programs that foster community pride, good citizenship, a strong school curriculum, and stewardship of the County's historic resources.

Voluntary Preservation

- Encourage landowners to pursue voluntary methods of preservation and conservation that provide tax and other financial incentive programs, including requesting landmark and district designations and offering conservation easements.
- Pursue historic district designations in cooperation with the Owners and in partnership with the FHS and DHR

Conclusion:

Fluvanna County is a special place of beauty, character, and quality. It is ours to lose if we do not rise to meet new challenges and to use the tools available to us to manage, shape, and direct for quality growth. If we lose our distinct community, identity, and character, they are gone forever.

We can and must step up to **Grow with Grace**, intention, and an eye to the future.

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