



## 10.0 COMMUNITY APPEARANCE

### 10.1 Overview

***Goal: An attractive, clean community that instills pride in residents, contributes to the appeal of the City of Portsmouth for visitors, and earns the reputation of being the cleanest municipality in the Hampton Roads region.***

The visual appearance of roadway corridors, neighborhoods, commercial areas, and other parts of the City has been identified by citizens as an important factor in Portsmouth's quality of life. In recognition of the linkage between community appearance and neighborhood health as measured by resident satisfaction and stable or growing property values, six of ten Strategic Directions identified by the operational component of the City's Neighborhood Quality Action Plan (NQAP) relate directly to this topic:



Westbury  
neighborhood

- Improve the City's corridors/entranceways (#1)
- Forge partnerships with businesses to improve the perception and attractiveness of business locations emphasizing cleanliness and aesthetics (#3)
- Forge a partnership with the Downtown Business District in order to enhance the perception and attractiveness of the district and associated/adjacent residential neighborhoods (#4)
- Create guidelines to encourage and promote neighborhood clean-ups (#6)
- Create a Citywide Beautification Program (#7)
- Develop a program to eliminate visual clutter on the city streets (#9)

In addition to the NQAP, which is being implemented by action teams formed from city departments, Portsmouth has in place an active Clean Community Commission. The Clean Community Commission sponsors a variety of community volunteer activities ranging from "Adopt-A-Spot" projects to neighborhood cleanups to "Clean the Bay Day," an annual event to clean trash and debris from the City's waterways.

A variety of approaches can be used to address Community Appearance issues. At the most basic level there is a need for on-going maintenance, code enforcement, cleanup, and similar activities to maintain or restore neighborhoods, commercial areas, and roadway corridors to acceptable visual condition. A second approach involves physical improvements (e.g., landscaping, attractive signage, street furnishings, removal of visually objectionable elements) to improve visual character in selected locations. The City is pursuing both of these types of community appearance initiatives. The activities of the Clean Community Commission are an

example of the first approach; streetscape improvements made to the High Street corridor are an example of the second. A third approach is to modify development regulations in high visibility locations (e.g., gateways and roadway corridors) to promote aesthetic improvements as properties are modified or redeveloped over time.

The Community Appearance policies and action strategies build on and integrate the City's current efforts. Policy #1 addresses citywide beautification, beginning with the community appearance initiatives and activities of the NQAP and Clean Community Commission. Key action strategies include initiation of a citywide tree planting program (Greening Portsmouth) and aggressive code enforcement focused on private properties whose visual appearance degrades the quality of neighborhoods and commercial areas (identified as a priority by City Council). Policy #1 also addresses the link between community appearance and solid waste recycling and other programs that can reduce the amount of trash generated in the City.

Policy #2 focuses on improving the visual character of gateway entrances (e.g., I-264 exits) and major roadway corridors through the City, which play a key role in defining Portsmouth's image and identity both for residents and visitors (Map 14). With a few exceptions these important community resources have an uneven visual character with unattractive uses in prominent locations (e.g., the City's Public Works Compound (Operations Center) at the I-264/Frederick Boulevard interchange). The City has begun to address this issue by allocating funds in its Capital Improvement Program (\$200,000 annually between Fiscal Years 2004-05 and 2008-09) for a "City Gateway project to improve the City's entrances and public green spaces."



Proposed  
Midtown  
Gateway at  
Frederick  
Boulevard

Source: Wallace Roberts & Todd, LLC

A variety of action strategies are identified to improve the appearance of key entrances and corridors, ranging from physical improvements of the kind envisioned by the City Gateway project (landscaping, signage, etc.) to removal of "visual clutter" to land use strategies to promote the redevelopment of obsolescent, unattractive uses. Given limited city resources and the extent of gateways and corridors in need of visual enhancement, priorities will need to be set and improvements phased over time. This effort should begin with a citywide visual assessment, following which a strategic action plan should be developed to address detrimental elements identified by the assessment. Related planning initiatives undertaken by the City (e.g., plans for Revitalization Corridors such as Airline Boulevard) will provide additional opportunities to identify specific actions to be taken in areas of concern. Land use strategies should include exploration of regulatory changes such as design standards and overlay districts to promote a higher quality visual environment as properties are redeveloped over time.



## 10.2 Policies and Action Strategies

### ***Policy #1: Beautification***

Continue and expand current efforts to beautify Portsmouth.

#### **Action Strategies**

- Implement the community appearance recommendations of the Neighborhood Quality Action Plan (NQAP), i.e.:
  - Corridor/entranceway improvements (Policy #2)
  - Downtown/business cleanliness and aesthetics
  - Neighborhood clean-ups (“Clean Community”)
  - Citywide Beautification program
  - Elimination of visual clutter on city streets
- Continue and expand the community clean-up activities of the Portsmouth Clean Community Commission
- Building on the NQAP, implement a citywide Greening Portsmouth initiative involving planting of trees and other vegetation, in cooperation with community, civic, and business groups
- Maintain designation as a Tree City USA by the National Arbor Day Foundation on an annual basis
- Explore regulatory approaches (e.g., design standards for nonconforming lots) to encourage development that is compatible with the visual character of existing neighborhoods [*Policy Link: Land Use #1*]
- Strengthen and enforce codes pertaining to the unkempt appearance of private property (building deterioration, trash accumulation, abandoned vehicles, vacant lots, etc.) [*Policy Link: Neighborhoods #1 & 2*]
- Promote solid waste minimization and recycling programs [*Policy Link: Parks, Open Space, and Environment #5*]
- Aggressively maintain the appearance of open green spaces

### ***Policy #2: Gateways and Corridors***

Improve the appearance of gateway entrances to and roadway corridors through Portsmouth.

#### **Action Strategies**

- Invest in visual improvements (e.g., clean up/replacement of land uses that convey a negative image; landscaping, directional and identity signage [*Policy Link: Transportation #8*], public art, etc.) at interchange entrances and along major roadway corridors:
  - Undertake citywide visual assessment
  - Develop and implement a strategic action plan to address detrimental elements identified through the assessment
- Improve the visual appearance of and reduce visual clutter (excess signage, substandard structures, selective removal of overhead utilities, etc.) along Portsmouth’s roadway corridors



- Coordinate visual improvements with land use strategies to promote redevelopment of obsolescent land uses along roadway corridors
- Explore regulatory approaches (design standards, overlay districts, etc.) to promote visual improvements to major gateways and corridors over time as properties are redeveloped  
*[Policy Link: Land Use #5]*
- Develop and implement a coordinated program for the installation of attractive directional/informational signage throughout Portsmouth, graphically consistent with the City's marketing program
- Install period lighting and signage in historical neighborhoods consistent with era
- Maintain and enhance existing and create new view corridors from public ways to scenic resources (e.g., waterfront and wetland areas)
- Improve city maintenance of right-of-way landscape and streetscape conditions