

## **CORRIDOR ENHANCEMENT (CE) DISTRICTS** **(as of August 2016)**

Corridor Enhancement (CE) districts are overlay zoning districts depicted on the Zoning Map and established locally by City Council to compliment the general land use provisions covered by the underlying zoning designation. The overlay zoning helps guide the physical design aspects of the development otherwise guided by the underlying zoning as called out in the Zoning Ordinance. Corridor overlay zoning is allowed under Virginia State Code Section 15.2-2306 for properties along streets found by the City to be significant routes of tourist access to the locality or designated historic district.

The impetus for Corridor Enhancement zoning in Winchester was a Winchester-Frederick County Chamber of Commerce Report by its Corridor Appearance Committee in 1993. The committee of private-sector representatives and public officials concluded that “...*because of their importance to economic development in Winchester and Frederick County, the appearance of roadway corridors leading into the community deserve special attention.*” The report also specifically stated “*Our Community Needs to Establish Standards for Corridors.*”

City Council adopted Standards and Guidelines in the Zoning Ordinance for nine CE Districts in 2005. Each district includes provisions pertaining to exterior design that take effect only when a private property owner chooses to alter the exterior of an existing structure or construct a new one. Some provisions are in the form of standards (i.e. things required or prohibited) and other provisions are in the form of guidelines (i.e. things that are encouraged or discouraged). These provisions are summarized in a Matrix that is available on the City’s website. Generally, corridors with stricter design provisions (e.g. Amherst St) make heavier use of standards while other districts make more use of suggested guidelines that are considered to be business friendly.

City-sponsored CE rezonings were adopted by Council subsequent to provisions being adopted in the Zoning Ordinance. The districts and the year in which they were established as overlay districts on Official Zoning Map are as follows:

- Amherst St (2005)
- Cedar Creek Grade (2006)
- Pleasant Valley Rd/Cork St (2006)
- Valley Ave- south city limits to Weems (2006)
- Valley Ave- Weems to N. end of B-2 District just north of Bellview Ave (2007)
- Berryville Ave (2013)
- National Ave including parts of E. Piccadilly St, East Ln, & E. Fairfax Ln (2015)
- Millwood Ave including parts of E. Gerrard St & S. Cameron St (2016)

CE Districts that are pending implementation in 2016 include:

- Fairmont Ave (N. City limits to slightly north of North Ave)
- N. Loudoun St (N. City limits to North Ave)

CE Districts awaiting future initiation of rezoning proposal:

- Valley Ave (north of Bellview Ave including part of S. Braddock St)

While the northernmost segment of Valley Ave is an important continuation of the existing Valley Ave CE District, it is primarily a stable residential area with relatively little threat of immediate or inappropriate change. A rezoning case to establish the CE overlay zoning on this portion of Valley Ave was discontinued in March of 2007 prior to the Planning Commission public hearing after concerns were expressed by single-family residential property owners.

The standards and guidelines (i.e. the Zoning Ordinance text) adopted by Council in 2005 have remained in place since then with two exceptions as follows:

- In May 2006, following citizen and Councilor complaints about a controversial paint scheme used on a Valley Avenue former bank building, Council added a requirement that exterior color schemes be submitted, reviewed and approved as part of a CE application.
- In August 2007, Council amended the Berryville Ave and Valley Ave CE provisions to convert some mandatory design standards to encouraged/discouraged design guidelines. It also provided Development Incentives to property owners who fully comply with various guidelines. The Development Incentives include reduction of required parking, and increases of maximum residential density for certain mixed use projects.

Since adoption of the CE districts and subsequent rezonings, **there have been no Certificates of Appropriateness (COA) for exterior changes in the CE Districts denied.** All but one request has been approved administratively by the Planning Director instead of going to the Planning Commission for review and approval. A total of 301 COAs have been approved between 2007 and August of 2016. Three applications were withdrawn. No appeals have been filed.

For over a decade now, the City has had corridor enhancement standards and guidelines in place. The City's Comprehensive Plan and the current Strategic Plan advocate the completion of the remaining rezonings needed to implement all nine CE overlay districts.

The City believes that the various CE districts and the standards and guidelines applicable to each are making a positive contribution to corridor appearance as advocated by the local Chamber of Commerce and as enabled by State Code. The almost 100% approval rate and the lack of appeals and complaints from those already subject to CE provisions suggest that the measures are not having a detrimental impact on doing business in the City. Winchester was recently designated as one of the best places to start a business (Nerdwallet), the 15<sup>th</sup> Best Small Place for Business and Careers (Forbes) and 19<sup>th</sup> Best Place in terms of cost of doing business (Forbes).