

# BROOK ROAD

ENHANCEMENT STUDY



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# Brook Road Enhancement Study



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## INTRODUCTION

The purpose of the Brook Road Enhancement Study is to develop a comprehensive and coordinated revitalization strategy to help maintain and improve one of the County's older residential and commercial areas. By establishing a framework for revitalization, the Brook Road Study is also intended to address specific concerns expressed by the businesses and residents over the past several years. These concerns have focused on undesirable trends in land use, public safety, building and zoning code issues, and aesthetic and functional problems with the corridor and its relationship to the surrounding neighborhoods. The study was requested by Mr. Frank Thornton, the Fairfield District Board of Supervisors member in response to concerns expressed at several community meetings held in January and February 2002. A Brook Road Advisory Committee made up of business owners and residents was appointed by Supervisor Thornton in August 2002 to advise the County and its consultants during the course of the study. The study is funded by Henrico County.

## STUDY OBJECTIVES AND STRATEGIES

- To inventory existing conditions, looking not only for development or redevelopment constraints, but opportunities to celebrate, and rediscover the Brook Road Area.
- To provide a physical “blue-print” to guide the County, the Virginia Department of Transportation, property owners, developers, neighborhood residents and businesses for redevelopment, infill and future growth over the next 10 to 15 years.
- To identify redevelopment strategies that can help make the area more attractive for business and residential uses in accordance with this “blue-print”.
- To recognize factors inherent to redevelopment in devising appropriate strategies for improvement.
- To establish an effective public-private partnership for the revitalization of Brook Road.

## BACKGROUND

The Brook Road study area is located in the south-central portion of Henrico County and includes the commercial frontage and adjacent residential neighborhoods of Brook Road. The study area of 942 acres extends from the County boundary with the City of Richmond at Azalea Avenue north approximately 2.3 miles to Parham Road.

## HISTORY OF THE AREA

The Brook Road area has a rich history to be celebrated by highlighting the features that remain:

**Brook Turnpike.** In February 1812, the Brook Turnpike Company was established to construct a turnpike 30-feet in width from the city of Richmond to Dabney Williamson’s tavern (present-day Solomon’s Store on U.S. Route 1 [Source: [The History of Henrico County](#), Louis H. Manarin and Clifford Dowdey, 1984, University Press of Virginia.] Brook “Avenue” was dedicated in 1815 as the first avenue in the state.



**Brook Turnpike Toll Keeper’s House.** The original early 19<sup>th</sup> century toll keeper’s house still stands approximately 300 feet from Brook Road east of the historic markers. Erected ca. 1825-40, the tollhouse retains some original detailing. The turnpike originally passed on the east side of the tollhouse, but it is said that the noise and dust generated by traffic on the heavily traveled road to Washington became so bothersome to the Stewart family of nearby Brook Hill that they arranged to have the road moved further west to its current location. [Source: [Inventory of Early Architecture and Historic Sites](#) by Jeff O’Dell, 1976] The toll house is significant because it is the only one-room-plan frame dwelling recorded in Henrico County and it is one of the few antebellum toll houses remaining in Virginia [Source: Virginia Historic Landmarks Commission Survey Form, File # 43-243, May 1978].

**Brook Hill Estate.** Located to the southeast of the toll house on the same property, the Brook Hill estate house was constructed by Robert Carter Williamson between 1839 and 1841 on a 367-acre site on the south side of Upham Brook on the foundation of an earlier building [the original estate property was settled by Robert Williamson in 1714 and the derivation of the name “Brook” Road actually came from the Brook Hill estate]. During the Civil War, the house served as a hospital for Confederate soldiers and as an inn for Southern generals. The lineage of the house traces from Williamson to John Stewart, and then on to Joseph Bryan who married a Stewart daughter in 1871. [“Brook Hill and the Stewarts’ Architectural Patronage” by Janet Blutstein, VCU Department of Art History, December 1994]. After the Civil War, Joseph Bryan came to Richmond to practice law where one of his first clients Lewis Ginter sold him the *Richmond Times* from which Bryan built his newspaper publishing empire. [Source: Lewis Ginter’s Richmond by David Ryan with Wayland Rennie, 1991, Whittet & Shepperson].

**Emmanuel Church.** The Stewart family undertook the founding and construction of Emmanuel Church in 1859-60 which is the only National Register property in the study area, Emmanuel Church at Brook Hill is described by the nomination form as “a superb example of late antebellum Gothic Revival ecclesiastical architecture. It is very likely that it was the last such building constructed before the Civil War began.”



**Civil War Earthworks.** The city of Richmond’s northernmost fortifications for the Civil War formed a ½ circle from the James River at The University of Richmond to Chaffin’s Bluff. The fortification was located at a distance of five (5) miles from the capitol building and generally followed Brook Turnpike and the bluffs of Brook Run. Designed for artillery, the walls and the parapet were originally 8-15 feet thick. The earthworks were constructed in 1862 and occupied until 1865. The area was occupied by the union army on three occasions, May 4, 1863, March 1, 1864, and May 11, 1864 by General Sheridan when J.E.B. Stuart retreated to the east. Remnants

of the Civil War earthworks are preserved on a small site northwest of Brook Road at Brook Run shopping center. Additional earthworks as well as the original Brook Turnpike roadbed may extend to the east in the vicinity of the Toll Keeper’s house.

**Richmond-Ashland Car Line.** In 1902 Frank Jay Gould purchased Brook Turnpike and planned an electric railroad from Norfolk to Fredericksburg by way of Petersburg and Richmond, with a branch to Northern Neck and waterfronts. The Richmond-Ashland line of the Richmond & Chesapeake Bay Railway Company was the first section of the line to be built and operated from 1907 to 1917. [In April 1919, the rail was converted to streetcar operations and continued until March 22, 1938. [Source: Rails in Richmond, Carlton Norris McKenney, Interurban Press, Glendale, California, 1986] The path of the rail line is still visible today under the existing Dominion Virginia Power lines approximately 1000 feet to the west and parallel to Brook Road. A concrete rail bridge located southwest of Lakeside Avenue and Brook Road on the edge of the Belmont Golf Course is also evidence of its former route.



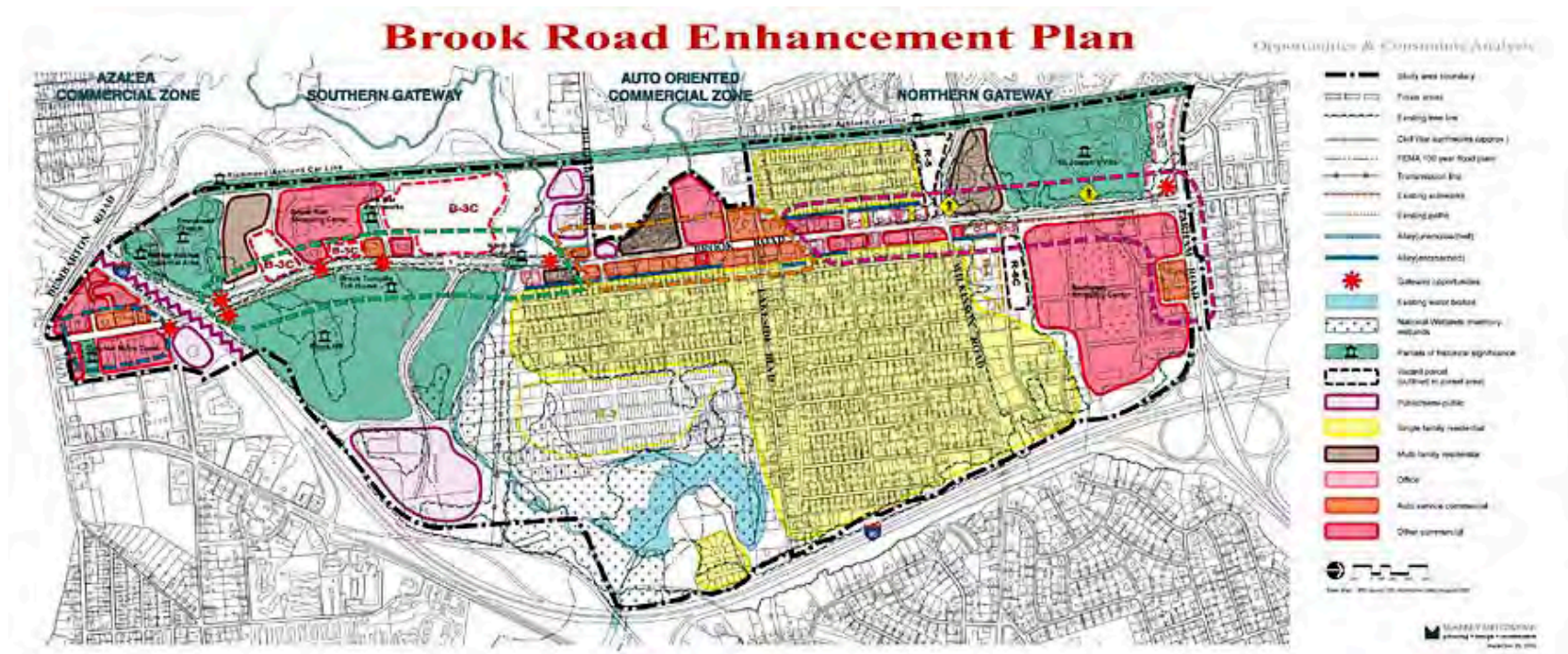
**St. Joseph’s Villa** was constructed in 1931 using funds from a bequeath of Major James Dooley to an orphan asylum and school founded 100 years before by Father Timothy O’Brien and located on another site in Richmond. The planned campus of yellow-brick neo-Romanesque structures remains largely unaltered.

**Belmont Golf Course.** Formerly the Hermitage Country Club, Belmont Golf Course is an 18-hole PGA championship course designed in 1916 by Albert Warren Tillenghast, one of the best course architects of his time. The course was redesigned in 1927 by Donald Ross. In 1949, the course was host to the PGA Championship won by Sam Snead. Henrico County purchased the golf course, recreation center, and other buildings in 1976.

**U.S. Route 1** follows an old Indian path that runs from the northern reach of Maine to the southern tip of Florida—2,467.7 miles. U.S. Route 1 is a modern name for an old road, the Boston Post Road, Kings Highway and Washington Highway. In 1925, the Federal government began collecting pieces of local roads and numbering them to form highways such as U.S. Route 1 [Source: U.S. Route 1 America's Original Main Street, Andrew H. Malcolm, St. Martin's Press, New York, 1991]

### STUDY PROCESS

The study has involved the community through both the Brook Road Advisory Committee and a series of community-wide meetings from September 2002 to April 2003. County staff and administration has also contributed extensively to the review of the analysis of existing conditions and formulation of practical strategies for implementation. The Virginia Department of Transportation has been involved in the planning process since Brook Road is a State highway, and many of the improvements within the public right-of-way related to the revitalization of the corridor will require the assistance of VDOT. The study has followed the traditional planning process: (1) inventory of existing conditions, (2) composite analysis, (3) development alternatives, and (4) recommendations and strategies.



## ANALYSIS OF EXISTING CONDITIONS

**Demographic Characteristics.** The study area population is 1825 persons based on 2000 U.S. Census data. Representing essentially the same racial composition of the County as a whole, 1298 (71 percent) are white and 443 (24 percent) are black making up 95% of the population in the study area. 18% of the residents are over the age of 62, comparable to the overall percentage in the County. A special needs segment of the study area population is represented by residents of St. Joseph's Villa, particularly the 60-unit Hollybrook apartments with an average population of 65 physically or mentally handicapped residents, or residents over age 62. Current population reports of the Villa show that about 500 people use the on-site services on an average week. The Villa currently employs 260 people, representing the single largest employer in the area.

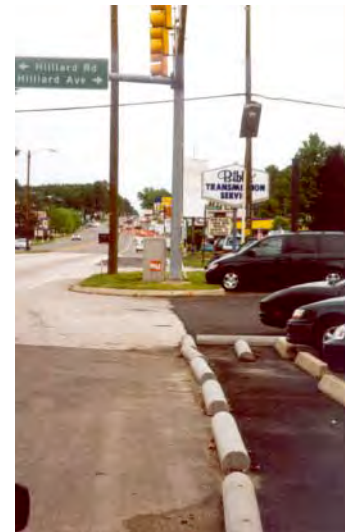
The age of housing ranges generally from 31 to 45 years. Eighty-five (85) percent of the homes are owner-occupied, compared with 66% in the County as a whole, a positive reflection on the stability of the neighborhood.



**Land Uses and Development Patterns.** The land use pattern along Brook Road has been largely influenced by the road's former role as a major travel corridor along the East Coast. The heyday of U.S. Route 1 concluded with the construction of Interstate 95 in the 1950's that allowed travellers to "by-pass" Brook Road. Remnants of the corridor's former role are evident in the many sites and buildings developed before enactment of the development standards in place today. Some are functionally obsolete for contemporary commercial uses. The study area consists of the following general land uses in descending proportional order of the total study area:

- Public/vacant land uses (35%) consists principally of the large, undeveloped 100-year flood plain of Upham Brook.
- Single-family residential uses (30%) are made up of several different neighborhoods including Lakeside Hills on the west side and the larger neighborhood of Club Court located on the east side of Brook Road.
- Historic/cultural uses (15%) including Emmanuel Episcopal Church and associated Wilmer Avenue historic district of 7 residences that includes late 19<sup>th</sup> century cottages of the Ginter estate, the Brook Hill estate, and St. Joseph's Villa.
- Commercial/Retail/Office (15%) made up of the older Azalea Avenue commercial area, Brook Run and North Park Shopping Centers, and the narrow strip of individual commercial uses north of Upham Brook to Wilkinson Road oriented to Brook Road.
- Multi-Family uses (5%) consisting of two older trailer parks and the newer Overlook at Brook Run apartment complex.

**Buffers between residential and commercial uses.** Commercial lot depths range from 130 to 170 feet with residential lots immediately to their rear. Alleys divide the uses along 70 percent of the commercial/residential interface, but they are sporadically used as thoroughfares for service, additional landscaping, or other encroachments. Several of the residential neighborhoods were actually platted before the commercial frontage, meaning future buffer area dedications from



abandoned alleys would be the responsibility of the residential occupants. Existing buffer treatments along rear property lines are inconsistent ranging from ply-board and chain link to the newer masonry walls; specific buffer requirements are tied to the standards in place at the time of site plan approval for a particular property.

**Traffic Circulation & Safety.** Brook Road is a four-lane road classified as a minor arterial on the county's major thoroughfare and predominantly used by through-traffic connecting the various east-west collectors in the area. Unlike most roads in Henrico County, Brook Road (U.S. Route 1) lies within the State-owned and maintained right-of-way. North and south travel lanes are separated by medians for approximately two-thirds of the corridor and by a center turn-lane on the remaining one-third, middle portion of the corridor from just north of Hilliard Road to immediately south of Villa Park Drive. The medians in the southern portion, from I-95 north to Hilliard Road, are planted and generally curb-less except for some curb nosing. The planted medians are generally wide ( $\pm 20$  feet) and contain turf as well as mature hardwood trees of varying degrees of maintenance. The medians in the northern portion of the study area have curb and gutter with concrete and no planting area. The existing Brook Road right-of-way (ROW) varies from 70 to 105 feet, additional ROW has been added as individual parcels develop contributing to a somewhat piecemeal road edge. The effect of this sporadically wider ROW is a frequently left-over, paved shoulder lane that is uncommitted to travel and heavily lined with "No Parking" signs which create a predominant image of the Brook Road edge.



Although varying from intersection to intersection, the VDOT vehicle count along the corridor averaged 25,000 vehicles per day (VPD) in 2002. The range varies from 21,000 to 28,000, supporting the idea that Brook Road is predominantly used for through-traffic movement vs. local use. For comparison, the traffic volume on Parham Road between I-95 and Brook Road is 33,000 VPD. Hilliard Road and Lakeside Avenue are both offset intersections where the cross-streets are not aligned. These non-standard road alignments resulted from development and parcel purchases over time. Relatively high traffic volumes, coupled with the

offset alignment, create confusing vehicle movements at these intersections. Inadequacy of turn-lanes, lack of marking and signage, and sight distance problems also contribute to confusion at these intersections. According to Henrico County records, the highest incidents of traffic accidents in the Brook Road corridor from 1997 to 2001 occurred in at following locations in descending order: Parham Road, Wilmer Avenue, Lakeside Avenue, and Hilliard Road. Approximately one-half of all the accidents involved injury to drivers or passengers.

**Pedestrian Circulation.** Existing sidewalks are located primarily on the east side of Brook Road and for a short 250-foot distance north of Wilkinson Road on the west side. To the south, a worn path is evident along the east side of Brook Road along the Brook Hill property. Pedestrian signals, markings and a motion camera for handicapped pedestrian crossing are provided at Wilkinson Road and the





entrance into the Northpark Shopping Center. Accommodations for the separation of pedestrian and vehicular traffic is not provided elsewhere in the corridor. Retail destinations that attract pedestrian activity are distributed along the corridor. Observations of pedestrians, disabled residents of Hollybrook apartments (60 units) at St. Joseph's Villa and bicyclists in the area indicate a fairly active daily pattern of pedestrian use. Accident data shows that one (1) pedestrian has been killed at the Hilliard Road intersection, and three (3) pedestrians have been injured during the time period from September 2001 to August 2002.

**Transit Service.** The Brook Road corridor is served by a relatively new bus route, #90 of the GRTC system. The route runs from Regency Square to Virginia Center Commons, and makes scheduled stops on an hourly basis. Northbound stops are located at Advance Auto, Ridge Road, Wilkinson Road and North Park Shopping Center. Southbound stops are located at St. Joseph's Villa main entrance, Ridge Road and Hanover Estates mobile home park. Although special accommodations for handicapped riders are made on the buses, the bus stops do not provide wide landings or shelter for wheelchair bound riders. Current monthly ridership (April 2003) along the route is 1022 passengers, and has increased by 70 percent since its initiation in August 2002.

**Aesthetics and Image.** The Brook Road corridor projects a variable image moving from the more urban Azalea area, crossing Interstate 95 into a denser landscaped roadway edge. One then moves north across Upham Brook into the present-day auto-oriented commercial zone with strong vestiges of U.S. Route 1 and its former tourist base of "mom-and-pop" motor courts, trailer camp-turned trailer parks, and filling stations. The northern image of the corridor gives way to the stately trees of St. Joseph's Villa on the west side which effectively downplays the Northpark/Walmart commercial uses below Brook Road to the east. It is in the center section of the corridor from Hilliard Road to Wilkinson Road where the image becomes most confused by the physical appearance, left-over and undesirable land/building uses, signage, and little landscaping. This sector is where the roadway cross-section is undivided by median, planted or otherwise, and contributes to confusing turning movements and lack of aesthetics. Many of the participants in this planning process have expressed growing concern with the negative image this sector has on the larger area, and have begun working with County code enforcement staff to deal with correction of violations to building and community maintenance codes. Positive factors are low vacancies among existing properties and the important visual and cultural anchors at either end of the corridor. The surrounding residential neighborhoods also make a positive contribution back to the corridor by fostering neighborhood patronage of the businesses and pride in the area.



## STUDY RECOMMENDATIONS

The Brook Road corridor has the potential to develop a strong market for business; this is key to its successful redevelopment and revitalization. The Brook Road Enhancement Study identifies possible physical improvements, which together with organizational/programmatic improvements, will help transform Brook Road from an aging, “by-passed” commercial corridor to one that is healthy, vibrant and continues to serve as a focal point for the surrounding residential community. The summary of Study Recommendations consists of four essential components in general order of sequence: 1) Organization; 2) Land Use, Preservation, Opportunity Sites and Redevelopment Opportunities; 3) Traffic Patterns and Signalization; and 4) Streetscape and Environmental Enhancements. As presented by this study, physical improvements are recognized as an outgrowth of effective organization although it is understood that all the steps often represent concurrent efforts. The description of possible enhancements under item 4 follow a geographic order based on common characteristics of each area established at the beginning of the study and as shown below: Azalea Commercial Area (from Azalea Avenue to the Interstate), Southern Gateway (from Azalea to Hilliard Road), Auto-Oriented Commercial Zone (from Hilliard Road to just north of Lakeside Avenue), and the Northern Gateway (to Parham Road).

### GEOGRAPHIC SUB-AREAS



**Azalea  
Commercial Area**

**Southern  
Gateway**

**Auto-Oriented  
Commercial**

**Northern  
Gateway**

## **I. ORGANIZATIONAL RECOMMENDATIONS**

The formation of effective neighborhood and business associations is the essential first step to organize and promote efforts to enhance the Brook Road corridor. Currently, there is no group or organization to represent the business community along Brook Road or to help coordinate enhancement efforts. Over the past year, a number of the neighborhood residents have formed a Brook Road Committee within the North Chamberlayne Civic Association. The following recommendations are intended to improve the organizational effectiveness of the Brook Road business and residential community:

### **A. Brook Road Business Association**

The Brook Road Business Association, possibly as a private non-profit 501(c)(3) corporation, should be formed to include all businesses and property owners along the corridor; a liaison member from the Brook Road Committee should facilitate communication and coordination between the two groups. Activities of the business association could include:

1. Investigate becoming an affiliate of the Virginia Main Street Program. This State administered program offers training and network opportunities with other communities centered around the four components necessary for successful commercial revitalization: organization, promotion, design, and economic restructuring.
2. Coordinate an annual clean-up day along the Brook Road commercial corridor possibly in conjunction with the Brook Road Committee and the County's Community Maintenance Office.
3. Work with the County to develop design guidelines to address signage, facade improvements, landscaping, buffers and property maintenance.
4. Undertake ongoing marketing and business recruitment effort as described below.
5. Seek funding from private foundations (as a non-profit organization) and government sources to assist in paying for physical enhancements.
6. Participate in County-wide planning project promotion.

### **B. Brook Road Neighborhood Committee or Civic Association**

This committee is proposed to be the companion residential organization to the business association; it may evolve into a separate 501 (c)(3) non-profit corporation depending on the level of funding activities the group would like to undertake. Activities recommended to be considered by the Brook Road Committee include:

1. Prepare a brochure promoting the benefits of living and working in the Brook Road area. Distribute the brochure to area businesses, realtors and other organizations.
2. Coordinate an annual clean-up day for the residential neighborhoods along Brook Road possibly in conjunction with the proposed Brook Road Business Association.
3. Organize a Neighborhood Watch Program(s) for all residential neighborhoods along the Brook Road corridor.
4. Meet with the Community Police Officer assigned to the Brook Road area on a regular basis to discuss concerns regarding safety and recommendations for improvement.

5. Expand the existing Brook Road web site to include information on the benefits of living in the Brook Road area, new business developments, on-going projects and other efforts to improve the community.
6. Monitor development activities occurring within the community especially requests for rezoning and other land development activities.

### C. Ongoing Marketing and Business Development



A critical element to the future of Brook Road is an ongoing marketing and business recruitment effort. The following possible projects can be set up as joint projects to be undertaken by the Business Association and the Brook Road Committee to help improve the image of Brook Road to perspective residents and attract new businesses to the area:

1. Working with local realtors, create a database of properties along the Brook Road corridor to include information on each parcel such as ownership, availability, assessed value, rental rates, zoning, area, parking, etc. The information would be made available to businesses seeking to locate along the corridor.
2. Assisted by a local college, prepare a market analysis indicating the demand for businesses and services in the area. Assist in the survey of patrons and residents to determine the types of businesses and services needed by the community.
3. Establish a subcommittee of business representatives and residents to help attract new businesses to the area.

## II. LAND USE, PRESERVATION, OPPORTUNITY SITES, & REDEVELOPMENT OPPORTUNITIES

Changes beyond the study area and within the larger undeveloped land areas of the study area offer the greatest impetus to positive change in the Brook Road corridor. For example, the eventual redevelopment of the Azalea Mall site would have a positive impact similar to the impact that Virginia Commons Mall has exerted on the area north of Parham Road. Increased visitation at the Lewis Ginter Botanical Garden represents a market opportunity for new retail businesses. The properties along Brook Road will have greater potential to redevelop as market forces improve. Vacant sites offer opportunities for new infill development. Specific steps may be taken to capture the positive benefits from external changes in land use and create a framework for revitalization:



### **A. Designation as a Special Strategy Area**

The Brook Road Corridor should be designated as a Special Strategy Area in the County's Comprehensive Plan to increase awareness of the area and serve as a mechanism for the establishment of building infill and new construction guidelines that will help ensure attractive new commercial development. The guidelines should also address maintenance of existing commercial structures and properties, signage, landscaping, pedestrian paths and buffers to protect adjacent residential neighborhoods from commercial uses

### **B. Development Opportunities**

The following development policies and objectives should guide decision makers regarding land use in the Brook Road study area:

1. Promote and encourage development of the large vacant parcel adjacent to the Brook Run Shopping Center in the Southern Gateway Zone consistent with the objectives of the Brook Road Enhancement Study and Brook Road Land Use Plan.
2. Encourage the sensitive development of the large estate property and existing platted parcels east of Brook Road in the Southern Gateway Zone consistent with land uses and objectives of the Brook Road Enhancement Study.
3. Review and assess the development potential for additional sites within the Brook Road corridor.
4. Attract and encourage the development of new office, retail, sensitive mixed-use, and single-family development to the project area, directed by findings of the market surveys conducted in the area.
5. Discourage new multi-family development in the project area.



### **C. Redevelopment Opportunities**

The Brook Road corridor's future is in redevelopment and economic restructuring that is pro-active and directed to accomplish objectives of this study:

1. Provide design and technical assistance to property owners and businesses through the County's Commercial Assistance Team and other staff.
2. Schedule regular meetings with the proposed Brook Road Business Association and businesses in the area to review the County's revitalization initiatives/programs and to discuss other issues of mutual concern.
3. Encourage the redevelopment of the two existing trailer parks in the project area for uses consistent with the Brook Road Enhancement Study. In the interim, continue to use a cross-department team approach of County staff to enforce all health, building, zoning and fire codes to help improve living conditions within the existing parks.

### **D. Historic Resources**

An abundance of history represent stories that have not fully been explored and told to the general public who already frequent the area or could be attracted to travel down Brook Road.



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1. Promote and encourage the preservation of the Toll Keepers House and Civil War fortifications located on private property within the Southern Gateway Zone to include appropriate development of the site and related programming as an attraction to the County and its preservation for future generations.
2. Develop a brochure or poster that describes the history of the area that can be distributed to realtors, businesses, school children and other interested groups and organizations.



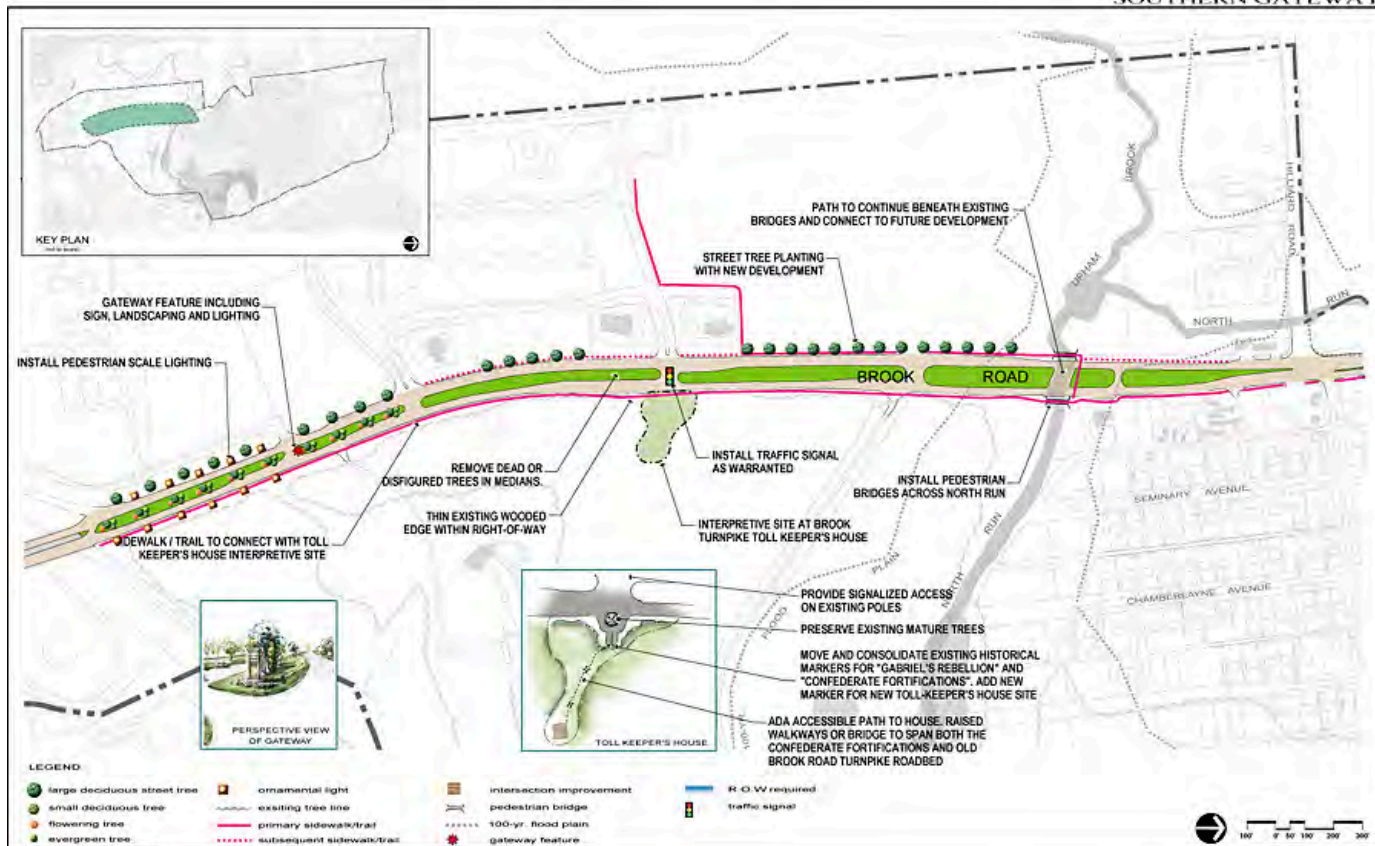
### III. TRAFFIC PATTERNS AND SIGNALIZATION

Brook Road is a State-maintained highway. Any changes to improve traffic flow and signalization along the commercial corridor will require approval and funding from the Virginia Department of Transportation (VDOT). The following recommendations are made in order to establish the groundwork for possible physical enhancements that will both improve the functional traffic situation and enhance the corridor:

1. The County should request VDOT to study existing traffic patterns and related needs for pavement markings, signs and signalization particularly at Hilliard Road/Brook Road and the Lakeside Avenue/Brook Road intersections.
2. The County should request VDOT to examine the need for a new signalized pedestrian crossing at Parham Road at Villa Park Drive.
3. The County should seek endorsement from VDOT for possible gateway improvements and other improvements that may occur within the highway right-of-way as new development and redevelopment proceeds.
4. The County should request VDOT to look at the need for a left-turn arrow at the Walmart drive onto Brook Road.

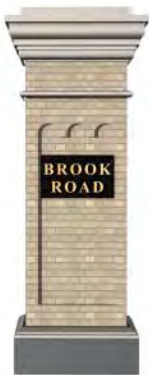
### IV. STREETScape AND ENVIRONMENTAL ENHANCEMENTS

The lack of continuity or sense of identity is a major problem on Brook Road. Driving the corridor, the experience is one of disorder and confusion that discourages potential shoppers and customers. These conditions have evolved over 50 years from the corridor's transition from its traditional function as a primary U.S. highway, serving as the major north-south traffic artery on the East Coast. The changing function of the corridor, followed by the construction of Interstate 95, has resulted in a mixed environment consisting of old and new development, a diversity of architectural styles, and a lack



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of landscaping. The following list of possible physical improvements are intended to help bring a more attractive and cohesive appearance to the Brook Road commercial corridor in order to help attract new businesses and residents to the area.

### **A. Gateways**

Gateways or entrances into a corridor can visually mark the edges of the commercial district. An effective gateway will create a sense of place and a positive first impression for visitors and travelers passing through the area. The Parham Avenue/Brook Road intersection and the area on Brook Road north of Azalea Avenue and the I-95 underpass are the two most important gateways into the project area. Possible locations of both a southern and northern gateway are shown within their respective zone diagrams. The gateways are envisioned to include

landscaping, “Brook Road” signage, and possibly decorative lighting. Placement of gateway features should consider visibility to the visitor by car with the intent of creating a good first impression.

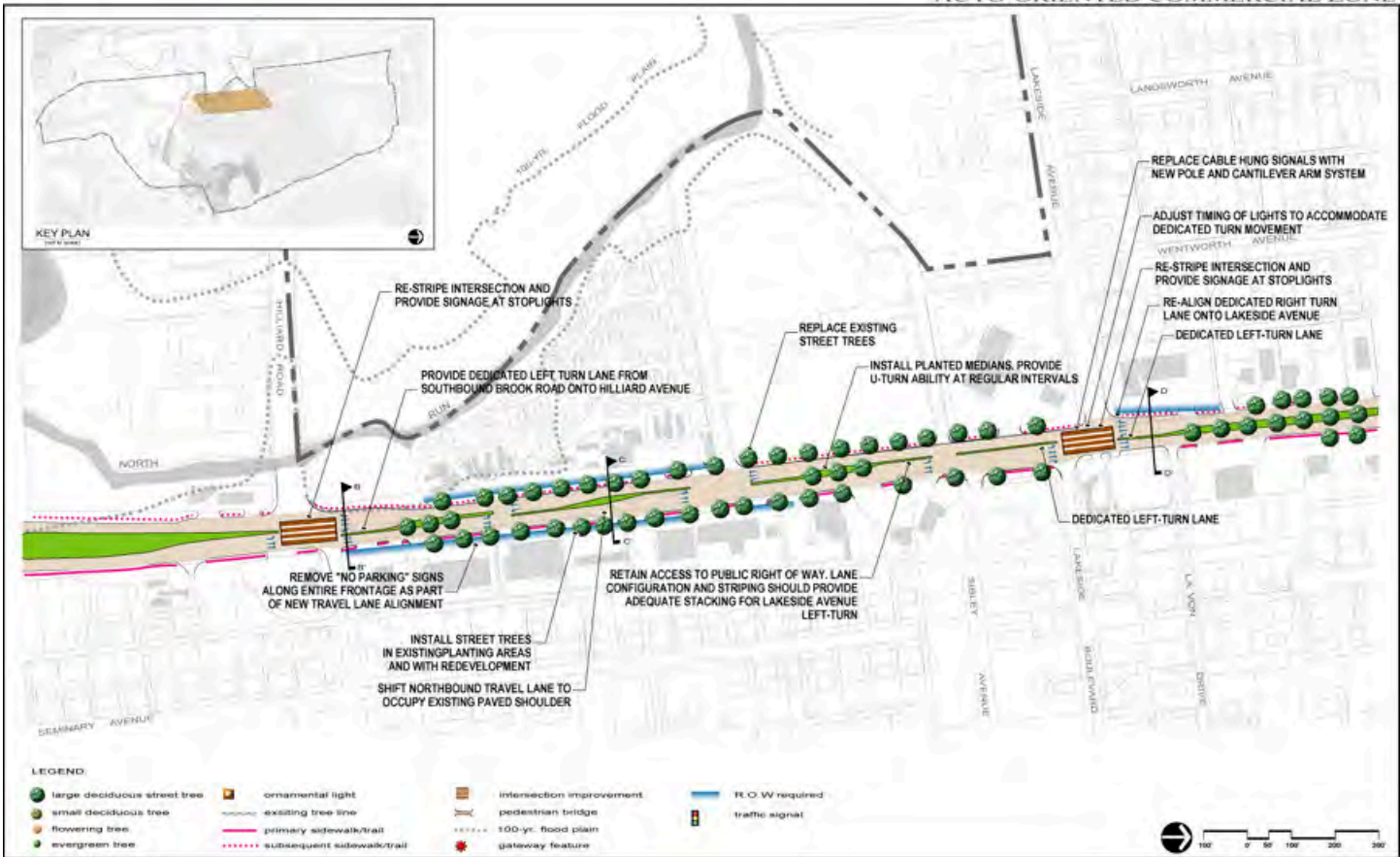
### **B. Medians**

Medians help to control errant traffic patterns and can offer the added aesthetic benefit of introducing new landscaping to the street. A wide natural median exists on Brook Road south of Hilliard Road. This median is the responsibility of VDOT. Any proposals for improvements to existing medians would need to meet VDOT standards and will require cooperative funding efforts from VDOT, the County and possibly the private sector. The continued maintenance of improved medians would also need to be worked out before any new landscaping or other improvements are made. The addition of medians would have to be based on traffic studies that may be requested as a result of this study and will require approval and funding from the VDOT. Considerations of limiting traffic movements as a result of additional medians will also require discussion and consensus among the adjacent property owners and businesses. One possible scenario for installation of median control in the Auto-Oriented Commercial Zone is shown below; specific design would be required. The initial steps of traffic study and intersection improvements are recommended to be taken to determine the feasibility of median installation. This study suggests that the Virginia Department of Transportation incorporate the construction of planted medians similar to those shown in the Auto Oriented Commercial Zone and the Northern Gateway Zone as part of future highway construction projects.

### **C. Landscaping**

Much of the Brook Road is essentially developed following older zoning and plan of development standards; however, where infill opportunities occur (similar to the WaWa in the Azalea Commercial Zone) and larger tracts of land remain undeveloped, new standards for landscaping can be applied. This opportunity exists in about one-third of the corridor’s length based on the Opportunities and Constraints analysis. In large part, recommendations for landscaping will have to be implemented as redevelopment occurs.

AUTO-ORIENTED COMMERCIAL ZONE



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1. Develop a consistent landscape theme to include appropriate street trees and landscaping for the Brook Road corridor.
2. Require landscaping to be installed on both sides of Brook Road as redevelopment occurs.
3. Work with the owners of the two trailer parks to improve edge treatment (possibly including landscaping and fencing) as an interim measure until redevelopment of these sites occurs.

#### D. Pedestrian Access

Similar recommendations for new pedestrian pathways/sidewalks will have to be implemented as redevelopment occurs or Brook Road reconstruction and improvements are made over time by VDOT.

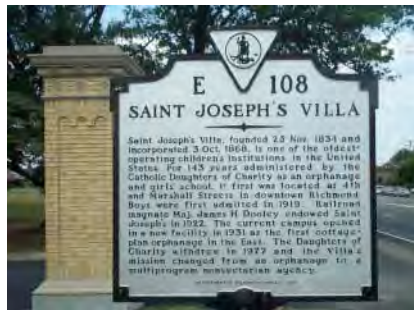
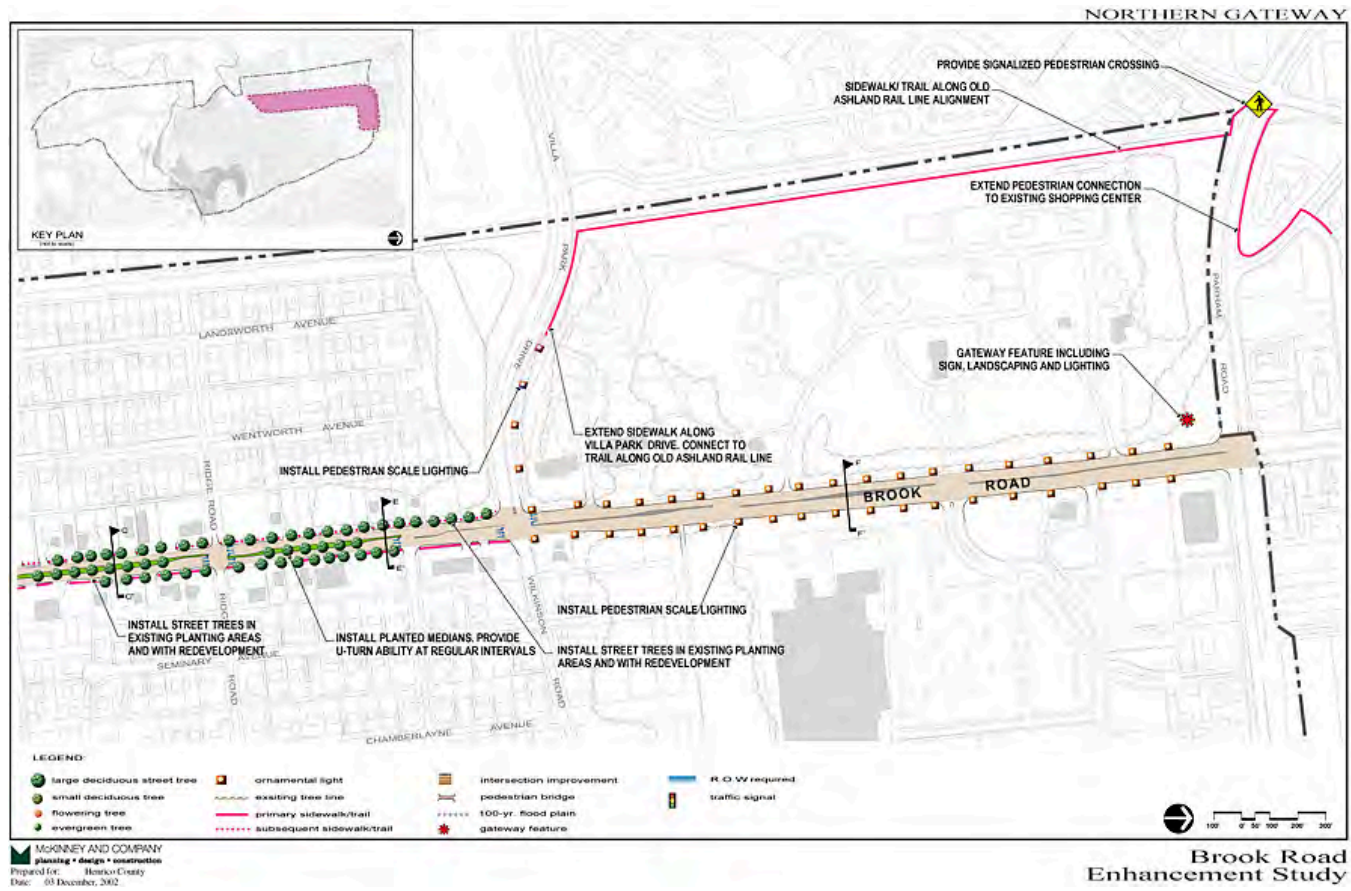
1. Provide a pedestrian pathway along both sides of Brook Road as redevelopment occurs or as part of future roadway development, as appropriate.
2. Provide a pedestrian pathway along the rear property line of St. Joseph's Villa on private property to improve pedestrian access to the new signalized pedestrian crossing on Parham Road.
3. Extend the existing sidewalk along the east side of Brook Road to Parham Road in the Northern Gateway Zone.

#### E. Signage Improvements

The amount and characteristics of existing business, commercial and public signage is one of the main factors contributing to the discontinuity and visual chaos of Brook Road. In addition to the individual signs that have been erected by each business, there are a number of large billboards along the corridor. The following list of possible projects are intended to improve the quality and reduce the quantity of commercial signs along Brook Road in order to increase visibility for individual businesses and to improve the overall appearance of the commercial corridor.

1. Prepare an inventory of existing signs and develop recommendations for improvement.
2. Encourage the removal of outdated, unattractive signage
3. Encourage the removal of existing billboards as redevelopment occurs.
4. Develop design guidelines to encourage attractive new signage.
5. Enforce the County's sign requirements.
6. Remove "no-parking" signs as paved shoulders become committed to travel lanes.





## F. Facade Improvements

Many of the commercial structures along Brook Road were constructed in the 1930's, 40's and 50's and reflect a dated appearance. In addition, a number of commercial structures and properties are in need of improved maintenance. The following list of possible projects is intended to help improve the appearance of older commercial structures and properties along the corridor.

1. Develop design guidelines as part of the Special Strategy Area designation to assist owners of older commercial structures to improve existing facades and to ensure new infill development represents a consistent quality.
2. Provide design assistance to owners of older commercial properties.
3. Develop incentive programs to encourage commercial property owners to improve older commercial structures.
4. Conduct periodic training sessions for property owners and businesses addressing such issues as design improvements and property maintenance.

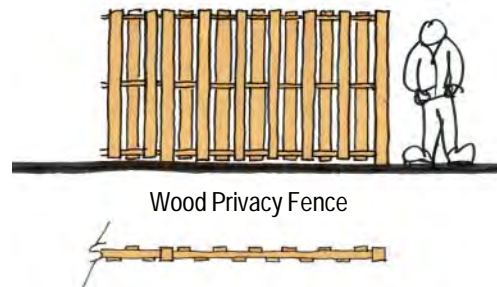
## G. Buffers

Effective buffers are needed to protect adjacent residential neighborhoods from the more intensive commercial development fronting on Brook Road. A variety of buffers currently exist including chain link fences, wood privacy fences and masonry walls. The existing buffers reflect the development standards that were in effect at the time that the commercial properties were developed. The following recommendations would help improve buffering between adjacent residential and commercial uses.

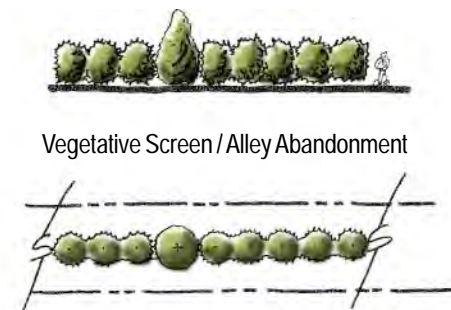
1. Develop design guidelines to encourage appropriate buffer alternatives.
2. Provide effective buffer options between commercial and residential uses throughout the Auto Oriented Commercial and North Gateway Zones.
3. Require masonry walls as buffers, where possible.
4. Study possible vacation of unused alleys to provide room for business expansion and additional buffer area.
5. Continue to enforce applicable code requirements for required buffers as an interim measure.



Masonry Wall



Wood Privacy Fence



Vegetative Screen / Alley Abandonment

## Conclusion

Building on the positive history of Brook Road, the assets of strong community and beginnings of organization to partnership with the County to direct the efforts, the Brook Road Enhancement Study establishes a framework for positive action that can result in corridor-transforming physical enhancements over time. A variety of planning tools, incentives, and funding opportunities, if used effectively can help ensure success:

- **Special Strategy Area**, with design guidelines. The special designation of a corridor in the County's Comprehensive Plan identifies the area for investors, owners and businesses as one in which special attention will be focused for the encouragement of investment, development and redevelopment. The related design guidelines will provide for consistent and appropriate landscaping, lighting, pedestrian access, and buffering, as development occurs on private property along the corridor.
- **Partial Real Estate Tax Exemption Program**. This program will provide, for commercial/industrial or multi-family properties at least 26 years of age and hotel/motel properties at least 35 years of age, an exemption from taxes on the increase in assessment resulting from the rehabilitation and renovation, for a period of seven years.
- **Community Development Block Grant (CDBG)** funds for St. Joseph's Villa pedestrian improvements. Henrico County receives requests for the use of CDBG funds in April each year. The Henrico County Board of Supervisors makes its allocations for the use of these funds in mid-July, for use after October 1<sup>st</sup>. St. Joseph's Villa has used Henrico CDBG funds in the past. The use of CDBG funds by St. Joseph's Villa would provide an early opportunity to proceed with an important element of the Brook Road Enhancement Study.
- **Sanitary District sub-area** for lighting improvements at gateways. The Brook Road Study Area is included in an existing Sanitary District. The creation of a Small Sanitary District within an existing district does not require a petition of registered voters as would the creation of a new district. The Board of Supervisors may petition the residents to determine interest in the establishment of the Small Sanitary District. The County Board of Supervisors would be required to petition the Circuit Court, a petition filed by the County Attorney. Once a Small Sanitary District is defined, the Board of Supervisors establishes the Sanitary District tax rate to be applied to Real and Personal Property. The rate is determined to provide funds needed to support the cost of street lighting or other services to be provided. Lights are installed and maintained by Dominion Virginia Power.
- **County Commercial Assistance Team** with design assistance. This team of senior public Henrico County officials was appointed by the County Manager to provide technical assistance and flexibility in the interpretation and administration of development regulations and alternatives to property owners and developers when proposed improvements cannot be accommodated within the current regulations framework.
- **Tea-21 Transportation Enhancement funds** (pending reauthorization by Congress for 2004). Tea-21, previously ISTEA funds, have been used for many road enhancement projects, especially those with a historic and/or scenic characteristics. Tea-21 federal funds, administered by the Virginia Department of Transportation, will be a primary source to consider for improvements for Brook Road if funds are available in the future.

- **Blight Abatement Program.** Henrico County's new spot blight Abatement Program approved by the Board of Supervisors on August 14, 2001 provides that the County may clear or repair any blighted property in order to abate blight and may recover the cost of clearing or repair from the property owner, under certain conditions.
- **Miscellaneous funding programs** such as local foundation and grant programs such as National Tree Trust, Henrico Heritage Alliance, and The Community Foundation of Richmond, along with volunteer fund raising efforts with local businesses may be tapped by the business association as a non-profit association which can offer tax deductions.
- **Private fund raising efforts.** This can be actively by the residents and through the business association. Businesses in the corridor may be asked to donate funds for selected activities, such as landscaping, or seek community business sponsorship for special projects, such as festivals, celebrations and other marketing initiatives.

