

Yes, Virginia!

Issue # 1

The Newsletter of Scenic Virginia

February 1999

Senator Warner Secures TEA-21 Funding For Route 50

The Transportation Equity Act for the 21st Century, or TEA-21 as it is more commonly known, is recent transportation legislation passed by Congress that sets transportation policy and spending for the next six years.

Thanks to Senator John Warner, \$13 million of the TEA-21 funds have been earmarked to implement a Route 50 Traffic Calming Plan. The grant is spread over a five year period and is contingent on an additional 20% in matching funds.

The Traffic Calming Plan was developed by the Route 50 Corridor Coalition, a group of local residents, landowners and business people. The Coalition was founded in 1995 in response to the State's expressed interest at that time in building a four-lane high-speed highway past Aldie, Middleburg, and Upperville, Virginia.

Beginning in 1996 the Coalition and other area residents worked with transportation engineer and internationally recognized traffic calming expert Ian Lockwood to create an alternative plan for calming traffic along 20 miles of historic Route 50. Redesigning Route 50 within the villages with landscaped medians, raised intersections, crosswalks, and mini-traffic circles to self-enforce reasonable speed limits is part of the plan. Interestingly, not a single speed bump is planned anywhere along the entire 20 mile stretch.

Funding of the Route 50 project is in line with TEA-21's acknowledgement of the need to build and preserve communities and to consider the environmental and social consequences of transportation investment. A guiding principle of Traffic Calming is that a roadway through a community is shared space, serving as important a function for residents, walkers, shoppers, and businesses, as for through travelers.

Senator Warner was deeply involved in every aspect of the TEA-21 bill. In pressing for inclusion of the Route 50 project in the legislation, the Senator not only responded to the determination of his constituents, but also viewed the traffic calming in a national context, envisioning the Route 50 project as a model Virginia could offer to the nation. Both the U.S. Department of Transportation (USDOT) and the Federal Highway Administration (FHWA) have expressed interest in conducting a comprehensive research project of Route 50's Traffic Calming Project.

Traffic calming has the potential to significantly decrease injuries from collisions and pedestrian accidents. Moreover, the Route 50 plan is economical, estimated to cost only 5% of the State's proposed four-lane highway with bypasses.

Anyone interested in learning more about the Coalition or its Traffic Calming Plan may call: (540)-687-4055, e-mail: Route50CC@aol.com or write: P.O. Box 1555, Middleburg, VA 20118

Funding For King's Highway

Historic Kenmore & George Washington's Ferry Farm, under the leadership of Vernon Edensfield, Executive Director, is applying for TEA-21 funding to landscape the median on the Route 3 corridor, a part of the colonial King's Highway in front of Ferry Farm. The association hopes to secure the funds in 1999, the year that marks the 200th anniversary of George Washington's death.

Additional TEA-21 funds, if granted, will be used to control and buy out advertising along Route 3 between the Chatham Bridge and the Blue-Gray Parkway. Scenic Virginia supports and applauds Kenmore for taking this bold move toward Highway Beautification in the Fredericksburg Area.

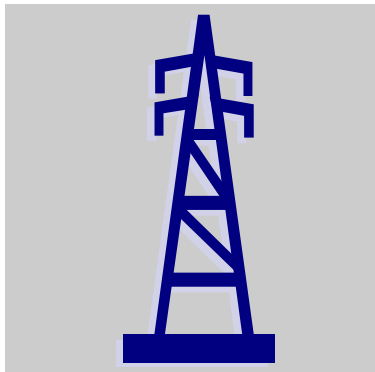
Scenic Virginia Supports

ACIR Interim Report

Members of Scenic Virginia have been diligent in attending the meetings of the ACIR (Advisory Commission on Intergovernmental Relations) since September 1998, when a lobbyist for the billboard industry asked the Visual Quality Committee to delete all references to billboards in its Interim Report on *The Impact of Aesthetics on the Economy and Quality of Life in Virginia and Its Localities*. The ACIR has studied the question of whether state and local efforts to promote visual quality can increase a community's potential for economic development. The report is comprehensive, detailed, and states exceedingly well the case for preserving and enhancing the quality of Virginia's visual environment. We believe the letters written to the ACIR by Scenic Virginia members, and the continuing monitoring of the meetings, will result in the references to billboards as negative features of the visual landscape remaining in the final draft of the report which will be completed later this spring. As the report says, "Few elements can ruin the distinctive character of an area as quickly as billboards, monopolies, and other manifestations of sign clutter."

Senator Couric Sponsors Telecommunications Bill

Scenic Virginia supports State Senator Emily Couric's Telecommunications Tower Bill before the General Assembly. It allows localities to subject telecommunications towers on state land to local zoning and comprehensive plan requirements. Localities may currently exert control over the siting of telecommunications towers in one of two ways. First, facilities such as towers must, prior to construction, be approved by the local planning commission as being substantially in accord with the locality's comprehensive plan. Second, localities have general zoning authority to regulate the use of land, buildings and structures. Local authority over the



Welcome Hampton Roads

In her role as president of Scenic Virginia, Hylah Boyd was the guest speaker at the January "green breakfast" in Virginia Beach, attracting the largest turnout in months. During the question and answer period she was asked whether local chapters of Scenic Virginia were appropriate. Her enthusiastic response was all that was needed to get the ball rolling. Pat Bridges and Les Fenlon, who represent Virginia Beach on the board of Scenic Virginia, volunteered to organize a local chapter. It will offer membership to interested individuals from all of the communities in the region, not just Virginia Beach, and will be named the Hampton Roads Chapter of Scenic Virginia. The organizational meeting will be held on February 6th among the cypress trees and Spanish moss of First Landing/Seashore State Park in the heart of Virginia Beach. Scenic Virginia is proud to have Hampton Roads on board.

Visit Us On the Web

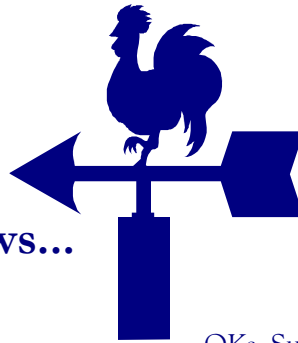
Scenic Virginia will soon be up and running on the Internet at www.scenicva.org. Meanwhile, for a preview, visit Scenic Florida, our good friends at www.citizens4ascenicfla.org, and click on *About Us*.

use of state land, however, is limited to that expressly granted in the Code, and no express authority currently exists for regulating towers on state property.

Senator Couric's bill, **Senate Bill 1283**, provides that telecommunications towers on state

property are one of the facilities subject to comprehensive plan review by the planning commission, and that the siting of telecommunications towers on state property may be regulated under zoning ordinances. The bill also reverses a provision stating that consent of the local board of supervisors is not necessary when telephone companies occupy property in the state highway system.

COMMONWEALTH VIEWS



And When The Wind Blows...

(from *The Virginian-Pilot*, November 2, 1998)

"In 1986, the Virginia Beach City Council enacted tough restrictions on the height and square footage of commercial signs. The maximum height was reduced from 20 feet to 12, and all signs had to be 40 percent smaller. Billboards were outlawed.

Since 1992, ten billboards have been removed and 249 oversized or otherwise offensive signs have been replaced. This year, the tally is two billboards and 53 [oversized] signs. "A good year," says Kevin L. Hershberger, Virginia Beach's sign inspector.

Hurricane Bonnie and bank mergers combined to make the city look better. Both removed chronic eyesores, oversized commercial signs Virginia Beach had been trying to clean out for more than a decade. Twenty years ago Virginia Beach had a "forest of signs" according to Pat Janezeck, the zoning administrator. "They were as plentiful as telephone poles." The 1986 restrictions required damaged signs, if rebuilt, to conform to new city codes, and businesses making major renovations also had to remove nonconforming signs. Numerous lawsuits were filed over an eleven year period, including a failed appeal to the U.S. Supreme Court, but the city prevailed. Hurricane Bonnie's 90 mph winds brought down three oversized signs and back to back northeasters snapped a few more rusted steel necks.

What the storms did not bring down, corporate bank mergers did. When Wachovia Bank acquired Central Fidelity, the city landscape lost eight or nine more oversized signs.

"The sign ordinance hasn't run anyone out of town," a veteran Virginia Beach land-use attorney was quoted as saying. Virginia Beach's retail sales continue to set records proving that good sign ordinances contribute to attractive areas where shoppers go, stay longer and, most importantly, return.

Congratulations to the City of Virginia Beach!

Boarding Up Richmond

By contrast, in Richmond, *The Richmond Times Dispatch's* headline on September 15, 1998 stated, "Council

OKs Super-sized McDonald's Highway Sign." The Richmond City Council overturned a recommendation by the city Planning Commission, rejected the advice of the city staff, and unanimously approved McDonald's plan to put a 150-foot tall 312-square-foot sign high above the highway and beside Interstate 64. Current city height restrictions are 45 feet. The council did stipulate that the McDonalds owner will have to take the sign down if the State allows logo signs on the Interstate highway at the restaurant's exit in the next five years. The irony in this situation is that, even though the neighborhood walk-ins supported McDonald's special use permit, the restaurant is moving from a location where 60% of its business is from walk-ins, to another where walk-ins will account for only 20%. To quote the Interim Report of the Advisory Commission on Intergovernmental Relations, *The Impact of Aesthetics on the Economy and Quality Of Life In Virginia and Its Localities*, "Fast-food restaurants and other franchises are popular additions to communities for a variety of good reasons, but they can also cause problems." Unless they meet community resistance they will utilize low-quality architecture and garish signs which detract from the special characteristics of the community.

More Signs in Star City

Sign control has also made headlines in Roanoke. The Roanoke Times reported on November 7, 1998 that "County's plan will consider billboards." After many residents told the Roanoke County planners that, "Billboards are unsightly, especially in areas considered gateways to the community," the first public draft of the County's new community plan included a goal of pursuing state legislation before December 2008 that would allow the county to eventually remove all of the large signs. Local billboard industry officials pro-

(Continued on page 4)

(Commonwealth Views, continued from page 3)

tested the plan and it now sets a goal to, "Work with representatives of the billboard industry to optimize billboard locations in the county." Lamar's spokesman is quoted as saying, "The plan was extreme to begin with and what we're going to end up with is something innovative and positive." He claims the look of billboards will improve using natural brown color for the billboard frames, and that additional aesthetic improvements will solve the problem.

Fluvanna Lights The Way

Scenic Virginia has received the official recognition of the Economic Development Committee of **Fluvanna County**. The Committee voted to join at the sponsor level, and has included Scenic Virginia on its agenda at two meetings. Also in the County, the planning group for the Fluvanna Heritage Conference has viewed *A Tale of Two Counties—Clarke and Stafford* at its planning meeting and the slide presentation will be available for viewing at the March conference. "Scenic Virginia as an educational organization is very helpful as we plan our future here in this rural county," says Fluvanna resident Julia Borden Burke. "I am proud to be part of this organization."

Vanishing Dark Skies

Dr. Philip Ianna, Professor of Astronomy at The University of Virginia, believes that just as pastoral daytime views are restful and restorative, the natural beauty of a dark starry sky is important to many Virginians. In a statement which he submitted to the Visual Quality Committee of the ACIR at its October meeting, Dr. Ianna expressed the concerns of many Virginians who are alarmed by the increase in intrusive, excessive outdoor lighting throughout the state.

In his statement, Dr. Ianna notes that while outdoor lighting is the sole determiner of visual quality in the nighttime built environment, lighting is rarely regulated in Virginia. The result is that increasingly we are confronted by glare from poorly shielded roadway lighting, overly bright commercial areas, and growing levels of light trespass.

Obtrusive lighting has resulted in several localities, **Albemarle, Warren and Hanover Counties** among them, recently adopting light pollution ordinances. Other counties such as **Fauquier, Loudoun and Fairfax** are considering such laws.

Appropriate lighting can, says Dr. Ianna, emphasize the unique character of particular elements in a community and set the mood for how we feel about particular spaces. "Thoughtfully designed and well controlled outdoor lighting is a benefit to us all. It can attract people to urban areas at night, making them more inviting, enjoyable, and safe. It can reduce energy costs. It will help preserve dark skies for us and future generations."

Virginians Speak Out In Poll

Scenic Virginia commissioned the Northern Virginia Research Laboratory of George Mason University to conduct a statewide telephone survey of 506 Virginia residents to determine the effectiveness of billboards across the state. Here is what Virginians think:

Billboards are not especially useful to Virginians. Only 13% of Virginians said billboards were "very useful" to them, versus 20% who said they weren't useful at all. This implies that support for billboards as an advertising medium is very shallow.

Logo signs are extremely useful to Virginians. 94% of respondents found logo signs useful, with 73% calling them "very useful." Moreover, Virginians preferred logo signs to billboards 71% to 21%—an overwhelming margin.

Most people have had enough of billboard blight. By a huge margin—89% to 5%—Virginians believe there are too many billboards or the right amount of billboards in the state. Moreover, by a 7-1 margin (34% to 5%), Virginians believe there are too many billboards versus too few.

Virginians strongly oppose tree cutting for billboard visibility. By a 2-1 margin (63% to 32%) Virginians oppose tree cutting for billboard visibility and would favor a bill prohibiting the practice. They even strongly support beautification projects, even if those projects block the view of pre-existing billboards.

Tax Free Status!

Scenic Virginia is pleased to announce that the IRS has designated Scenic Virginia, Inc. a 501(c)3 tax free, not for profit organization. Accordingly, all contributions to Scenic Virginia are fully deductible for Federal Income Tax purposes.

Coalition Seeks By-Way Protection for Dismal Swamp

Threatened by present plans to upgrade a 9.8-mile section of U.S. 17 just east of it, preservation of The Great Dismal Swamp Wildlife Refuge and Canal is one of the top priorities of the Chesapeake Bay chapter of the Sierra Club, The Izaak Walton League and the Dismal Swamp Coalition.

As early as 1976, the Secretary of the Interior, numerous planning and natural resource agencies, and conservation groups noted the tremendous scenic and recreational potential of the Canal and existing roadway. At that time a recommendation was made that the existing roadway be designated a scenic highway, and that when it became necessary to upgrade Route 17, the entire roadway should be moved to the east a considerable distance, to minimize the environmental, cultural, and aesthetic impacts on the area.

“Ideally, the currently two-lane road would be swung further east, away from the swamp, and declared a scenic highway.”

—*The Virginian-Pilot, November 15, 1998*

Several alternative routes have been proposed, but the Virginia Department of Transportation (VDOT) favors expanding the existing highway along the bank of the Dismal Swamp Canal, to a 4-lane divided highway.

Environmental regulatory and advisory agencies, including the US Army Corps of Engineers (Corps), the US Environmental Protection Agency (EPA), the US Fish & Wildlife Service (USFWS), and several wildlife biologists, have expressed serious concerns regarding the impact the Route 17 project will have, as currently planned, on

wetlands, wildlife, historic, cultural, and recreational resources, and the Great Dismal Swamp National Wildlife Refuge. The regulatory agencies have identified serious problems with the Draft Environmental Impact Statement (DEIS) prepared by VDOT for this project and indicate that the Federal Highway Administration (FHWA) and VDOT have been uncooperative and unresponsive in addressing the agencies' concerns.

As a recent editorial in *The Virginian-Pilot* says, “Ideally, the currently two-lane road would be swung further east, away from the swamp, and declared a scenic highway. The Great Dismal Swamp is truly a national treasure that should be preserved. It is part of our heritage. It bears a terrific name, one celebrated in literature. For our children, our grandchildren, ourselves, we must protect the Great Dismal Swamp.”

Alaska Voters Say No To Billboards Forever

From the Scenic Missouri Newsletter, Fall/Winter 1998

Alaska has never had billboards. Its state law has always prohibited billboards on federal roads and strict zoning laws in Alaskan cities have also prevented the erection of billboards on non-federal roads. Last year the Alaskan legislature amended the law to allow billboards on private property adjacent to federal roads. Although the Governor vetoed the law, the veto was overridden.

In response to this outrageous assault on Alaska's stunning scenic beauty, a citizen's group named Alaskans Against Billboards took to the streets with a state-wide petition drive to allow a public vote in the general election on November 3, 1998. By a margin of 72% to 28%, Alaskans voted to keep their beautiful state billboard free.

Scenic Virginia salutes the people of Alaska for their strong stand against visual



YES, VIRGINIA!

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*Scenic Virginia, a nonprofit 501(c)3 organization,
is devoted solely to preserving and enhancing the scenic character of Virginia's communities and countryside.*

Next Scenic Virginia Meeting: March 15, 1999, 1 P.M., 3525 Trinity Drive, Alexandria, VA

Join Scenic Virginia Today

ANNUAL MEMBERSHIPS

Name _____

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Do you have time to volunteer with Scenic Virginia?

Yes

No

Individual \$25	Sponsor \$100
Student \$15	Patron \$250
Household/Family \$50	Benefactor \$500
Organization \$50	Corporation \$500

Membership Selected _____

Amount Enclosed \$ _____

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