

Heritage Resources



Fairfax County Park Authority

HERITAGE RESOURCES

INTRODUCTION

Fairfax County is blessed with a variety of historical riches, ranging from 11,000-year-old Native American camps to George Washington's Mount Vernon and the planned town of Reston. Human beings have lived, worked, and played in the County for nearly twelve thousand years, and evidence of their rich and varied lives exists in the many historic structures, landscapes, cemeteries, and archaeological sites found throughout the County. These heritage resources, however, are fragile and often inconspicuous elements of the landscape, and are therefore under intense pressure from development in the County.

The purpose of this chapter of the Plan is to provide guidance to decision-makers and members of the community in achieving an optimum balance between the often conflicting interests of physical and economic growth and the preservation of the County's heritage resources. Objectives and policies for heritage resources focus on three general issues: identification of the resource base, protecting and preserving significant heritage resources, and community involvement.

Identification of Heritage Resources

There are over 2,000 heritage resources on record for Fairfax County (a complete, up-to-date list is maintained by the Environmental and Heritage Resources Branch of the Office of Comprehensive Planning). Since these resources reflect various aspects of the County's prehistoric and historic past, their preservation and study increases understanding and appreciation of the past.

Some of the heritage resources on record have already been lost. The characteristics of those that remain do not represent the full range of past human lifeways in different time periods and geographical areas of the County. Although a great deal of information is available on some aspects of the County's past, the absence of information on other aspects results in incomplete and occasionally inaccurate understanding of the County's history and prehistory.

Heritage resources cannot be protected until they are identified and evaluated. One of the basic axioms of preservation is that a heritage resource cannot be preserved or studied if it is unknown, unrecorded, and unevaluated. In order for a heritage resource to be preserved, or even for its merits to be considered for preservation, a resource must be found, information about it must be recorded, and it must remain undisturbed for an adequate period of time to allow for its significance to be evaluated and to formulate appropriate preservation options.

Since it is not practical, or even desirable, to save every historic structure or archaeological site, decisions must be made on which heritage resources are of value to the community and therefore worthy of preservation. These decisions are made using criteria of significance. In order to conduct a significance evaluation, sufficient information must be available on each heritage resource.

Heritage Resource Protection and Preservation

Heritage resources are vulnerable to damage and destruction from a variety of sources. Protecting heritage resources from damage or destruction and preserving them for continued use, enjoyment, and study is a complex issue. Unprotected significant heritage resources, resources whose significance has not yet been evaluated, and unrecorded heritage resources on unsurveyed lands are particularly vulnerable to loss due to a variety of factors. The most prevalent of these include inadequate or non-existent assessment of heritage resources during the earliest stages of development planning (especially "by right" development), construction on unsurveyed lands, increasing land values that make it unprofitable to retain historic buildings, limited preservation measures, vandalism, relic hunting, and neglect. The ability to protect and preserve the County's significant heritage resources successfully over the long term depends upon a comprehensive, systematic approach.

Preservation law experts point out that courts support preservation programs that have a sound basis in field survey, provide economic and technical assistance, are coordinated with other community policies and ordinances, and operate with sound and explicit standards, criteria, and administrative procedures. One of the underlying aims in developing objectives and policies for heritage resources was to ensure that these issues were addressed in order to provide a legally defensible preservation program for the County. There is enabling authority in the Virginia State Code to implement all of these policies to some extent (see, for example, 15.1-446.1, 15.1-475, 15.1-503.2, 58.1-3220, 58.1-3221, 58.1-3230, and 58.1-3231). Many of the activities that the County is authorized to carry out in implementing these policies, however, are not yet fully operational.

Despite the existence of this enabling authority, there are sections in the State Code that are unclear as to their preservation intent, such as whether, and the extent to which, local governments can adopt ordinances to protect archaeological sites. Other sections of the State Code provide limited authority, such as that covering the control over demolition of duly recognized historic structures. In other sections, the authority provided, such as the tax exemption for certain rehabilitated real estate, makes no specific reference to its applicability for preservation purposes. Still other, supposedly pertinent, sections of the State Code are silent on preservation issues.

Community Involvement

Community involvement and awareness are important elements of heritage resource preservation. Heritage resource preservation occurs, or doesn't occur, within the context of local community issues and concerns. It is important, therefore, for the local community to be actively involved in the preservation of the heritage resources it values. Community involvement has largely been ad hoc, in response to specific, short-term goals. A high level of active community involvement in preserving its own heritage has been shown to foster increased pride in the community. County citizens are also very interested in learning about the history and prehistory of the County and of their communities. A citizenry that is knowledgeable about and aware of the County's past and the issues of preservation increases the potential for the preservation of a community's valued heritage resources. Although there are numerous issues, objectives, and policies related to community involvement and awareness, only those that are related to the development of the County's land are included here.

Implementation

Fairfax County has numerous ordinances, regulations, policies, and procedures that have the potential for affecting the preservation of the County's significant heritage resources, either positively or negatively. The implementation of the objectives and policies outlined above may call for revisions to some of these regulatory and policy mechanisms, and the development of new standards and guidelines, in order to protect and preserve the County's heritage resources more effectively. These objectives and policies, plus associated regulatory revisions and standards, represent an integrated system of new initiatives. This creates a comprehensive countywide policy framework for heritage resource preservation, where none previously existed. Additionally, there are many county, state, and federal agencies and private organizations that deal with or affect heritage resources and their preservation in some way. Successful, legally defensible, and conflict-free implementation of the objectives and policies for heritage resource preservation depends heavily upon careful integration of these objectives and policies with other County objectives, policies, and regulatory mechanisms, as well as close coordination among all public agencies and private organizations.

BOARD OF SUPERVISORS GOAL

Culture and Recreation - Fairfax County should also support and encourage the identification and preservation of its heritage resources for the aesthetic, social, and educational benefits of present and future citizens.

Fairfax County's goal for heritage resource preservation is contained in the broader goal entitled "Culture and Recreation". This goal recognizes that preservation of the County's heritage resources--its historic structures, landscapes, cemeteries, and its historic and Native American archaeological sites--serves a public purpose by (1) enhancing the quality of life through aesthetic diversity in the landscape, and (2) providing a sense of continuity with the County's historic and prehistoric past. This goal also recognizes that heritage resource preservation requires a commitment both from the public and private sectors and from the community.

COUNTYWIDE OBJECTIVES AND POLICIES

Objective 1: Identify heritage resources representing all time periods and in all areas of the County.

Policy a. Heritage Resources should be identified well in advance of potential damage or destruction.

Objective 2: Maintain a County Register of Heritage Sites to recognize the value of significant heritage resources for preservation.

Policy a. In order to determine eligibility for listing on the County Register of Heritage Sites, the significance of heritage resources will be evaluated according to the criteria for the National Register of Historic Places and for public significance, as follows:

1. National Register criteria:

The quality of significance in American history, architecture, archaeology, and culture is present in districts, sites, buildings, structures, and objects that possess integrity of location, design, setting, materials, workmanship, feeling, and association, and:

- a. that are associated with events that have made a significant contribution to the broad patterns of our history; or
- b. that are associated with the lives of persons significant in our past; or
- c. that embody the distinctive characteristics of a type, period, or method of construction, or that represent a significant and distinguishable entity whose components may lack individual distinction; or
- d. that have yielded, or may be likely to yield, information important in prehistory or history.

2. Public significance criteria:

A heritage resource is significant to the public if it:

- a. Meets the criteria for National Register eligibility; or
- b. Possesses information on or represents any aspect of heritage considered important by a discrete population, ethnic group, or community; or
- c. Possesses the potential to serve, or already serves, as a focus of community identity and pride; or
- d. Possesses characteristics that are potentially useful in educating the public about the past and how it is studied, or
- e. Possesses characteristics suitable for the exhibit and display of objects, ruins, or stabilized restored structures for public enjoyment.

Objective 3: Protect significant heritage resources from degradation, or damage and destruction by public or private action.

Policy a. Significant heritage resources should not be adversely affected or destroyed unless there is no prudent and feasible alternative, and appropriate activities have been planned and carried out to minimize the adverse affect.

Policy b. Public and private land uses and development should retain and enhance significant heritage resources and their settings.

- Policy c. Additional Historic Overlay Districts should be established to protect and preserve significant heritage resources.
 - Policy d. Fairfax County's regulatory mechanisms should be compatible with the protection, retention, and enhancement of significant heritage resources.
 - Policy e. Activities affecting heritage resources should be coordinated among County agencies and with other public agencies and private organizations.
 - Policy f. Acquire significant heritage resources to incorporate them into the County's park system for purposes of resource protection and public education and enjoyment.
- Objective 4: Promote and encourage the protection and preservation of significant heritage resources.**
- Policy a. Provide a variety of incentives and assistance to encourage heritage resource protection and preservation.
 - Policy b. Recognize quality preservation projects and activities through a County Preservation Awards program.
- Objective 5: Increase the levels of community awareness of and involvement in heritage resource preservation.**
- Policy a. Provide information on heritage resources and heritage resource preservation for public education and enjoyment, through a County Heritage site marker program and other interpretive facilities and programs.
 - Policy b. Promote active community participation in heritage resource preservation activities.

