

Historical Marker Guidelines



Fairfax County History Commission

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Table of Contents

- I. Getting Started
 - a. Purpose of Guidelines
 - b. Choosing Your Marker Type
- II. Marker Selection Considerations
 - a. Fairfax County Roadside Marker
 - b. Wayside Marker
 - c. Virginia Roadside Marker
- III. Historical Accuracy and Content
 - a. Research
 - b. Historical Content
- IV. Roadside Markers
 - a. Applying for a Fairfax County Roadside Marker
- V. Wayside Markers
 - a. Obtaining a Wayside Marker
 - b. Design Considerations
 - c. Manufacturers

Getting Started

The Fairfax County History Commission prepared these guidelines to assist developers, property owners, and others who desire to create and install historical markers on private property in Fairfax County.

Choosing Your Marker Type

There are many types and styles of historical markers available; however, the most common are the roadside marker and wayside marker. The roadside marker is a cast aluminum marker mounted on a 10' pole and placed near a road. A wayside marker has a graphic-embedded fiberglass panel set into an aluminum frame that is often positioned near a trail or sidewalk. Both Fairfax County and the Commonwealth of Virginia have roadside marker programs. The Fairfax County roadside marker measures 32”h x 42”w.



Image 1: County Roadside Marker



Image 2: Wayside Marker



Image 3: State Roadside Marker

For assistance in selecting the most appropriate type of marker, contact the History Commissioner who represents the district where the marker will be located. <https://www.fairfaxcounty.gov/history-commission/>

Marker Selection Considerations

Fairfax County Roadside Markers

Roadside markers are appropriate for marking the location of a historic site along a road. The following factors should be considered when analyzing whether it is appropriate to install a roadside marker.

- **Driver Safety:** Roadside markers should only be placed in locations where a driver can safely pull over and park to read the text.
- **Text Word Count:** Typically, a Fairfax County roadside marker will not have more than 100 words of text.
- **Retain View:** Care should be taken in selecting the location of a roadside marker so that the marker doesn't block the view of historic features on the site.
- **Graphics:** Roadside markers are text only.
- **Accessible Design:** Roadside markers are installed on top of a 10' pole, which is above the viewing range desired for accessible design.

Wayside Markers

Wayside markers are appropriate for marking the location of a historic site. The following factors should be considered when analyzing whether it is appropriate to install a wayside marker.

- **Graphics:** Wayside markers should be used if graphics, such as photos, maps, or sketches, are available.
- **Location:** Wayside markers are appropriate for use where there is pedestrian traffic, such as in plazas and along sidewalks and trails.
- **Accessible Design:** The text and graphics on a table-top style wayside marker can be read from a sitting position.
- **Style:** A standard wayside marker has a 36"x24" graphic panel set into a low-profile frame with two legs embedded in the ground.

Virginia Roadside Markers

Virginia roadside markers commemorate persons, sites, buildings, or events of national, state or regional significance. Approval occurs on the state level. For more information, see http://www.dhr.virginia.gov/hiway_markers/hwmarker_info.htm

Historical Accuracy and Content

Research

Research into the history of the person, site, building, or event to which the marker refers is needed to ensure the accuracy of the information conveyed on the marker. Each statement provided on a marker should be supported by primary source documentation such as:

- Newspaper articles (Written around the time when an event occurred)
- Diaries, letter books, and correspondence (Written around the time when an event occurred)
- Period maps
- Court records (Deeds, wills, birth, marriage, and death certificates)
- Chancery cases
- Tax ledgers
- Church records
- School records

Secondary source documentation, such as books written long after an event occurred, are useful in suggesting historical information; however, primary source documentation is needed to provide an appropriate level of confidence that the information is correct.

The Virginia Department of Historic Resources provides a list of consultants who provide historical research services. <http://www.dhr.virginia.gov/> Search for Consultants Directory.

Historical Content

Fairfax County historical markers should commemorate persons, sites, buildings, or events of local significance. Living persons or events that occurred less than fifty years ago are ineligible for a Fairfax County marker. Exceptions may be allowed if the person, site, building, or event is considered by the Fairfax County History Commission to be of extraordinary historical significance. Markers should provide information about the site where the marker is installed rather than providing historical information about nearby places. There should only be one marker at a site or nearby site pertaining to the same subject.

Roadside Markers

Applying for a Fairfax County Roadside Marker

1. Anyone may nominate a site or topic for a Fairfax County Historical Roadside Marker. Contact the chairman of the Fairfax County History Commission Marker Committee at the start of the process. <https://www.fairfaxcounty.gov/history-commission/>
2. The nomination should include:
 - a. A 90 to 100 word text with supporting documentation and references consisting of primary sources (wills, deeds, first person accounts, etc.). Secondary sources may be included to provide supplemental background information.
 - b. A cover letter that includes the name and address of the person or organization that will pay for all or part of the marker. A nomination can be made without a commitment to fund.
 - c. A recommended location shown on a local map (such as a Fairfax County property map). If the recommendation is approved written permission will be required from the property owner who should be identified in the cover letter.
3. Each nomination will be referred to the Fairfax County History Commission's Historical Marker Committee where the text and documentation will be evaluated for accuracy and consistency and may be edited and rewritten. The committee will work with the person, or persons, making the nomination to ensure a full and accurate text.
4. A member of the Marker Committee will visit the proposed marker location with the applicant to determine if the location of the marker is acceptable.
5. After editing has been completed and approved by the Marker Committee, the text will be submitted to the full History Commission for comment and approval.
6. If approved, the Fairfax County History Commission purchases the marker once funding is provided and arranges for installation.
7. Decisions of the History Commission regarding appropriateness of marker nominations, wording of marker text, and approval of supplemental funding (if any) will rest entirely with the Fairfax County History Commission.

Wayside Markers

Obtaining a Wayside Marker

The Fairfax County History Commission does not install wayside markers; however, the Commission may review the historical accuracy of proposed markers at the request of a Fairfax County Supervisor or if review is required by proffer.

Design Considerations for Wayside Markers

In order to have an effective interpretive wayside marker, the following points should be considered in designing the marker panel. Many wayside marker manufacturers provide the graphic design service for you.

- Ideally, wayside markers should contain no more than 300 words and feature no more than four graphic images.
- Break up the text into short topics. By providing a heading for each section, you allow the readers to focus on their areas of interest. Avoid long paragraphs that may overwhelm the reader. Skip a line between paragraphs.
- Line lengths should be from 8 to 15 words. Longer lengths make it difficult to continue reading to the next line.
- Do not hyphenate words at the end of a line as it is difficult to piece back together the parts of hyphenated words.
- The text color should be in high contrast to the background color.
- Text written over images is difficult to read and should be avoided.
- Limit the number of font types so the marker doesn't appear busy.
- Text using serif fonts are easier to follow on interpretive marker panels.
- All text, with the exception of graphic labels, should be aligned flush left/ ragged right. Do not indent.
- Allow 1/2" around the border of the panel. This is the area that will be covered by the frame.
- Contact a wayside marker manufacturer to obtain their file-type submission requirements.
- Consider organizing paragraphs of text and images in a grid format so that there is some alignment. A grid organizes text and graphics in an orderly fashion to make the information easier to understand.

Manufacturers

This list of manufacturers is provided as a service and does not presume to be all inclusive or an endorsement by the Fairfax County History Commission.

Hopewell Manufacturing, Inc. <http://www.hopewellmfg.com>

Pannier Graphics <http://www.panniergraphics.com>