

# Rural Historic Villages

## Vision

Rural Historic Villages continue to be vibrant communities that reflect historic settlement patterns that preserve and enhance Loudoun’s social and cultural heritage while contributing to the overall character of the Rural Policy Area.

## Introduction

Loudoun County’s historical settlement pattern included hundreds of villages, and smaller rural communities communities, many of which have nearly or completely vanished as the County has developed and the County has begun mapping all historic settlements documented to date to preserve this history (see All County Historic Villages and Communities Map). Many villages and communities remain intact and are vibrant places within the RPA and are noted as historic rural communities or designated in the General Plan as Rural Historic Villages. The County recognizes the Rural Historic Villages as important features of the RPA that possess scenic and historic resources, act as gathering places for citizens, provide services to the surrounding community, and support rural tourism. Many Rural Historic Villages were established during the 18<sup>th</sup> and 19<sup>th</sup> centuries, in areas located around historic mills, railroad depots, or major crossroads that later developed as commercial and mercantile business centers that served the surrounding farming communities. Others were settled in the later 19th century by free

**Rural Historic Villages**

Aldie

Bluemont

Bowmantown\*

Lincoln

Loudoun Heights\*\*

Lucketts

Neersville\*\*

Paeonian Springs

Philomont

St. Louis

Stewartown\*

Taylorstown

Unison

Waterford

Willisville

**Planning Areas**

\*Aldie Mountain

\*\*Between the Hills

and formerly enslaved African Americans who bought and subdivided land to establish churches, fraternal orders, schools and stores creating self-sufficient enclaves across the County. Descendants of founding families continue to own property and live in these communities reflecting a high degree of cultural continuity in many communities.

Rural Historic Villages are communities with ten or more building in a definable historic settlement pattern which typically contain a mix of residential, civic, and community-supporting commercial uses that serve village residents. The historic built environment and/or the cultural

identity of all Rural Historic Villages have such a high degree of integrity that they are listed in, or are eligible to be listed in, the National Register of Historic Places.

Until 2019, County planning documents considered the communities of Bowmantown and Stewartown to be one village name Aldie Mountain. The residents of Bowmantown and Stewartown consider them to be separate, though related villages and the General Plan designates them as such. Because of their proximity to one another and their shared cultural and settlement history, Aldie Mountain will represent a planning area comprising Bowmantown and Stewartown. Similarly, Loudoun Heights and Neersville are small, distinct communities with a shared geographic and cultural history. Individually they do not meet the definition of an Rural Historic Village, but the larger Between the Hills cultural landscape shared by these villages offers a distinct planning area boundary.

The Rural Historic Villages have gradually developed over a number of years and feature a variety of building setbacks, types, and styles as well as streetscapes that reflect the historic growth and character of the individual villages. The Rural Historic Villages are dominated by residential dwellings with some commercial structures that have upper floor apartments and offices. Small scale, non-residential uses, such as country stores, restaurants, antique shops, and other retail establishments that meet local needs and support tourism, are located within some of the Rural Historic Villages. In addition, numerous civic uses, such as churches, post offices, community centers, fire and rescue stations, and schools, are also located within the Rural Historic Villages. In addition to the more densely populated Rural Historic Villages, smaller, mostly residential rural historic communities such as Howardsville, Bloomfield, and Morrisonville exist in the RPA. While these smaller communities do not meet the criteria for Rural Historic Village designation, they are distinctive assets in the RPA that should be valued and preserved.

The County's land development approach for the Rural Historic Villages is to limit residential, business, and commercial activities to uses that are compatible with the historic development patterns, community character, and visual identity of the individual villages. The *Loudoun County 2019 Comprehensive Plan* (Comprehensive Plan) strives to maintain the traditional development pattern and distinguishing features of the individual villages while accommodating opportunities for compact, small-scale growth where appropriate in a manner that enhances existing residential and commercial areas. By encouraging limited compact, residential and non-residential development within the Villages, these policies complement the County's efforts to preserve open space and maintain the character of the rural area. Although limited development is anticipated in the Villages, that development should not adversely affect the quality of life of residents nor pose a threat to public health or safety. Four of the existing Rural Historic Villages – Aldie, St. Louis, Waterford, and Willisville – are currently served by public community wastewater systems. Aldie is the only village that is served by a private water company. While community systems are crucial to the sustainability of these communities, they may also impact future Rural Historic Village development. The remainder of the properties located within the Rural Historic Villages are currently served by individual water wells, and septic sewage systems (i.e., conventional drainfields, alternative systems, etc.), which limit the potential scale and intensity of development. Additionally, a number of the Rural Historic Villages are bisected by major roadways that

experience high volumes of commuter traffic and impact the quality of life of residents. With careful planning and growth management, the Rural Historic Villages will maintain their scenic and historic character.

## **Policies, Strategies, and Actions**

Unless otherwise specified, the following Policies, Strategies, and Actions apply only within the Rural Historic Villages.

**RURAL HISTORIC VILLAGE Policy I: Development and uses in Rural Historic Villages must be compatible with the historic development pattern, community character, visual identity, intensity, and scale of the individual villages.**

### Strategy

- 1.1. Encourage the retention and development of a variety of compatible residential, commercial, and community uses that enhance the attractiveness and vitality of the Rural Historic Villages.

### Actions

- A. Develop criteria to evaluate existing Rural Historic Villages and other historic crossroads communities, such as Airmont, Bloomfield, Howardsville, Morrisonville, Unison, and Willisville, to determine if their current designation is warranted, define and/or redefine community boundaries as necessary, and amend the Comprehensive Plan and Zoning Ordinance as appropriate.
- B. Work with Rural Historic Villages to develop community plans that will support their community goals and address issues related to land use and zoning; economic development; natural, environmental, and historic resources; community facilities and services; water and wastewater; and transportation to maintain the character of the villages.
- C. Review and revise zoning regulations, design standards, and guidelines to achieve compatible building and street design to ensure that quality development occurs within the Rural Historic Villages.
- D. Coordinate with Rural Historic Village communities to determine appropriate methods to differentiate entrances into the villages from surrounding areas, including through street design, landscaping, and building placement.
- E. Incorporate traffic calming measures that are compatible with the village character where appropriate to reduce vehicle speeds and provide a pedestrian-friendly environment.
- F. Evaluate and revise existing Rural Commercial (RC) zoning district regulations to implement Plan policies and design standards for development in the Rural Historic Villages that ensure compatibility with the settlement patterns and neighborhood scale.
- G. Support residents in rural historic communities that are not designated as Rural

Historic Villages to preserve these assets through historic designation, conservation easements, and other targeted initiatives.

Strategy

- 1.2. Preserve the character of the Rural Historic Villages, rural historic communities and their historic structures and sites through the rehabilitation and adaptive reuse of existing buildings.

Actions

- A. Promote and support building maintenance and improvements to preserve the existing building stock and the character of the Rural Historic Villages, and rural historic communities.
- B. Evaluate the establishment of additional County Historic Districts in the Rural Historic Villages.

Strategy

- 1.3. Limited increases in residential densities within the Rural Historic Villages may be considered through legislative approval processes when the design of the project reinforces the character, development pattern, and identity of the village. Conventional, suburban forms of development are not appropriate in or contiguous to Rural Historic Villages.

Action

- A. Adopt zoning regulations and design standards to encourage housing on smaller lots, allow accessory apartments attached to single-family residential units, and allow residential units above commercial/retail uses within the Rural Historic Villages to provide housing options.

Strategy

- 1.4. Business and commercial uses in the Rural Historic Villages should be 1) small scale, 2) compatible with existing development patterns, 3) generate limited vehicular traffic, and 4) meet local community needs or support rural tourism.

Action

- A. Adopt zoning regulations, design standards and performance criteria that are specific to the types of small-scale, community-related commercial uses that the County encourages within the Rural Historic Villages.

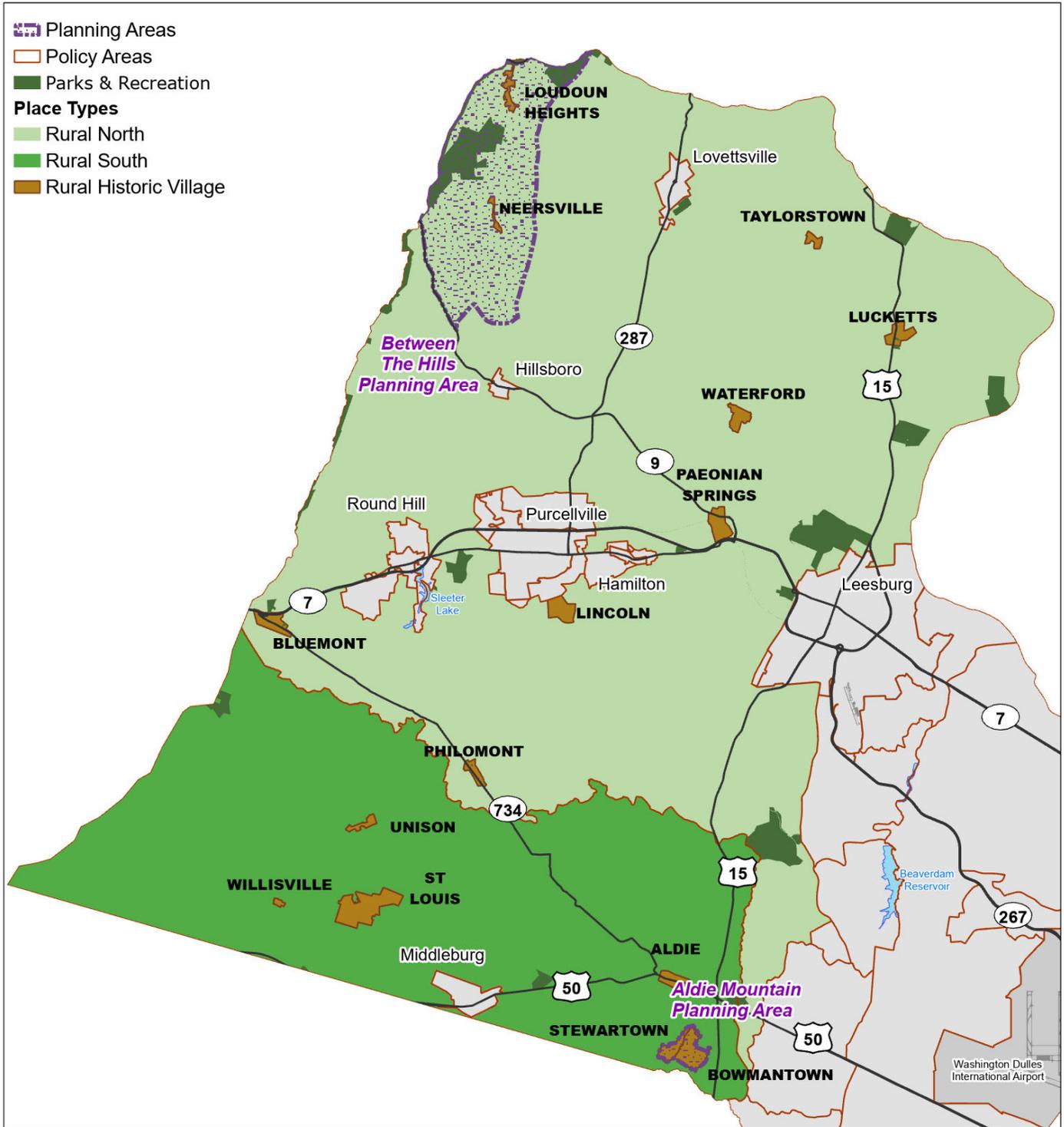
## **Design Guidelines**

The Design Guidelines are to build upon our current high quality development in a manner that allows innovative design and new responses to the market. The Design Guidelines are not meant to be prescriptive and are not intended to be treated as a checklist, but are instead meant to provide a framework for how the desired character of the Rural Historic Villages can be achieved, with the acknowledgement that other methods could achieve the intended results. The Design Guidelines do not supersede or otherwise limit the application of adopted zoning regulations, ordinances, building codes, or any other design standards or regulations administered by Loudoun County.

When using the guidelines make sure to analyze the impact potential development may have on the Rural Village and surrounding landscape, considering not only appearance, but practical considerations such as road and street access, siting of buildings and parking, safe and adequate water and wastewater, community amenities, jobs, and housing to assess compatibility. Development should contribute to the character of the Rural Historic Villages to integrate and blend with existing development patterns and building styles.

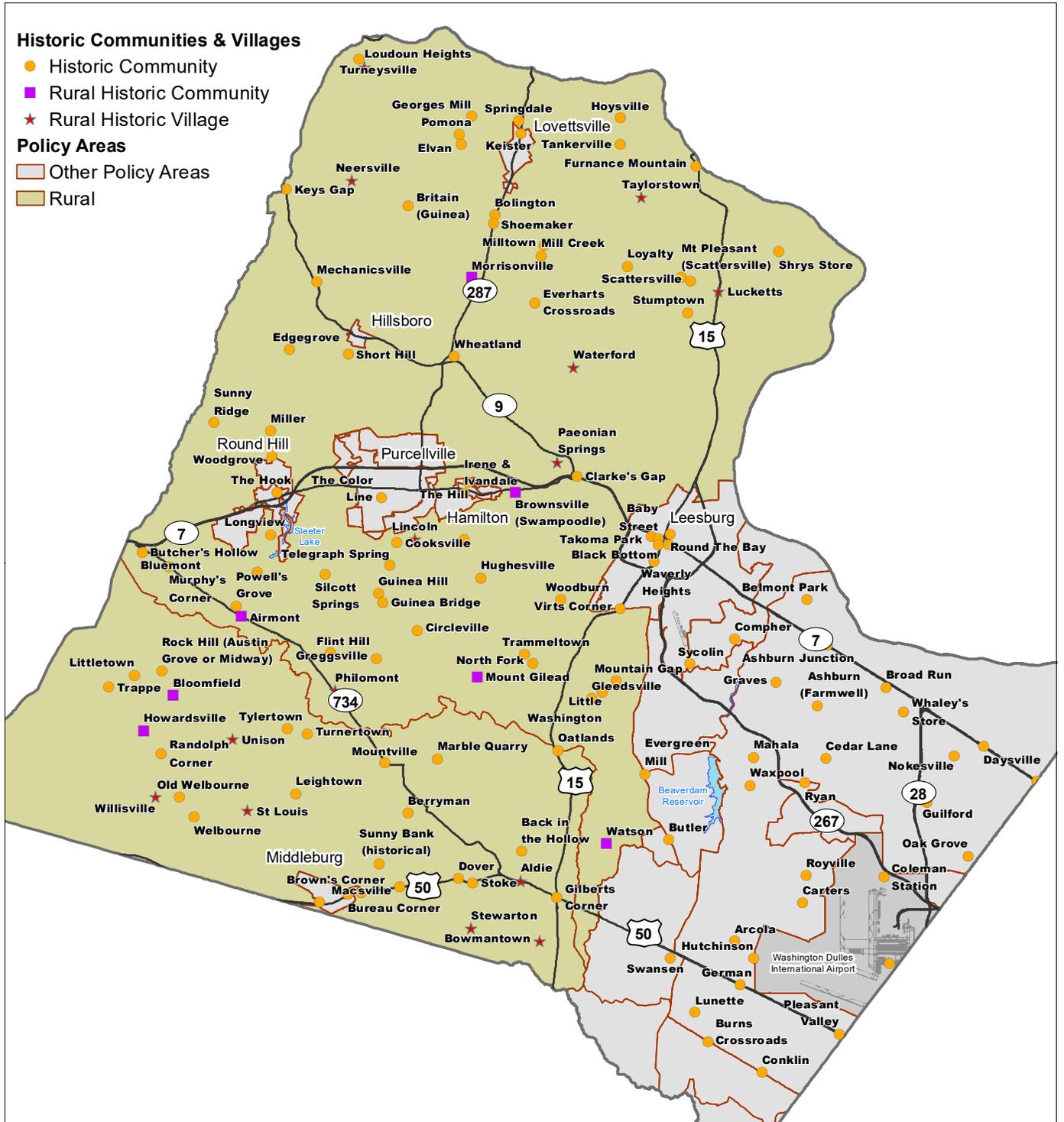
Many properties within the Rural Historic Villages of Aldie, Bluemont, Lincoln, Taylorstown and Waterford are located within County Historic and Cultural Conservation Districts which are zoning overlays that regulate the appearance of properties through architectural design guidelines. Any alterations, additions, demolition or relocation of an existing structure, or any new construction within the conservation districts requires approval from the County's Historic District Review Committee. The goal of the architectural review processes is to ensure the historic, architectural, and landscape characteristics that are unique to the villages are protected, preserved, and enhanced for future generations. While the remainder of the Rural Historic Villages do not have historic district zoning overlays, the County's policies also support compatible development and the retention of the unique character of the individual villages. Public water and wastewater facilities are encouraged to provide services to the villages (See Appendix A for Design Guidelines for Rural Historic Villages).

Loudoun County  
**Rural Policy Area**  
**Place Types**  
 2019 General Plan



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Map Number 2025-072



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Map Number 2025-073

# Rural North



The Rural North consists of pastoral and forested landscapes that serve mostly agricultural and agricultural supportive uses with limited residential. The area allows for complementary agricultural, rural business, and tourism uses that constitute Loudoun’s rural economy. This category also includes low-density, large-lot residential subdivisions that are compatible with the surrounding pastoral character, and subdivisions that cluster smaller residential lots while retaining large lots for open space, agricultural production and/or rural economy uses. Public utilities are not provided and wells and septic systems are traditional; however, shared community water and wastewater systems may be utilized for cluster developments and rural economy uses. Minimum lot sizes vary according to land use and the development option chosen. All developments should incorporate natural and heritage resources while preserving important viewsheds that contribute to the rural landscape.

Core Uses	Complementary Uses	Conditional Uses
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Agriculture</li> <li>• Agricultural Supportive Businesses</li> <li>• Equine Facilities</li> <li>• Rural Economy</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Large Lot Residential</li> <li>• Clustered Residential Subdivision</li> <li>• Accessory Residential Units</li> <li>• Agritourism</li> <li>• Rural/Heritage Tourism</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Public Facilities</li> <li>• Civic, Cultural &amp; Community</li> <li>• Institutional</li> <li>• Special Activities</li> <li>• Parks &amp; Recreation</li> </ul>

## DESIGN CHARACTERISTICS

### Context

Large areas of land preserved for open space, agriculture, and rural economy uses to retain the rural character of the area with limited low-density residential and clustered residential development that blends with and is compatible with the surrounding area.

<p><b>Street Pattern:</b> Contour Forming, Fragmented Parallel</p> <p><b>Block Length:</b> Irregular</p> <p><b>Building Setback:</b> Varies (incorporate existing natural features to protect viewsheds)</p> <p><b>Parking:</b> Surface lot, driveway, garage, shared</p> <p><b>Open Space:</b> Recreation (Passive), Natural, Environmental and Heritage, and/or Agriculture 70% of site for clustered subdivisions</p>
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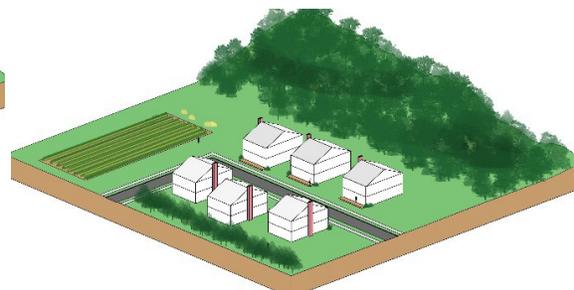
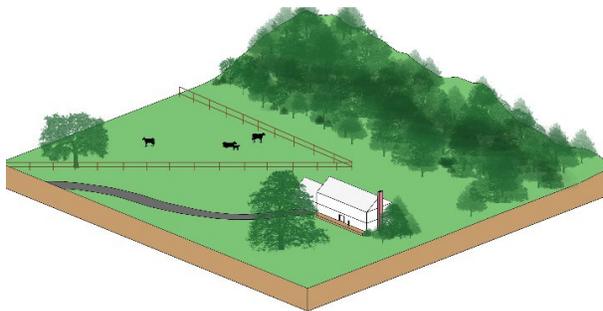
### Place Type Rendering

*An oblique projection of development within a Place Type to showcase the qualitative characteristics of how buildings within the Place Type should interact to create activity.*

**Residential Density: Up to 1 du / 20 acres**

**Residential Cluster Option: Up to 1 du / 5 acres equivalent**

**Building Height: Up to 2 stories**



### Transition

Locate buildings and structures to blend with the existing topography and natural features. Preserve and incorporate existing trees and vegetation on the property and its perimeter to buffer and screen views for adjoining properties. Provide landscaping or supplemental plantings comprised of native species when screening and buffering are required between rural uses.

# Rural South



The Rural South contains mostly agricultural and equine uses and allows for complementary rural economy uses. This Place Type includes very low-density residential with homes located on large lots that are compatible with the surrounding pastoral character and clustered subdivisions that group smaller residential lots while retaining large lots for open space, agricultural production, and/or rural economy uses. Public utilities are not provided and wells and septic systems are traditional; however, shared community water and wastewater systems may be utilized for cluster developments and rural economy uses. Minimum lot sizes vary according to land use and the development option chosen. All developments should maintain the distinctive rural character through the incorporation of natural and heritage resources and the preservation of important viewsheds.

Core Uses	Complementary Uses	Conditional Uses
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Agriculture</li> <li>• Agricultural Supportive Businesses</li> <li>• Equine Facilities</li> <li>• Rural Economy</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Large Lot Residential</li> <li>• Clustered Residential Subdivision</li> <li>• Agritourism</li> <li>• Rural/Heritage Tourism</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Accessory Residential Units</li> <li>• Public Facilities</li> <li>• Civic, Cultural &amp; Community</li> <li>• Institutional</li> <li>• Special Activities</li> <li>• Parks &amp; Recreation</li> </ul>

## DESIGN CHARACTERISTICS

### Context

Large areas of land preserved for open space, agriculture, and rural economy uses to retain the rural character of the area with limited low density residential and clustered residential development that blends with and is compatible with the surrounding area.

**Street Pattern:**

Contour Forming, Fragmented Parallel

**Block Length:**

Irregular

**Building Setback:**

Varies (incorporate existing natural features to protect viewsheds)

**Parking:**

Surface, driveway, garage, shared

**Open Space:**

Recreation (Passive), Natural, Environmental and Heritage, and/or Agriculture

70% of site for clustered subdivisions

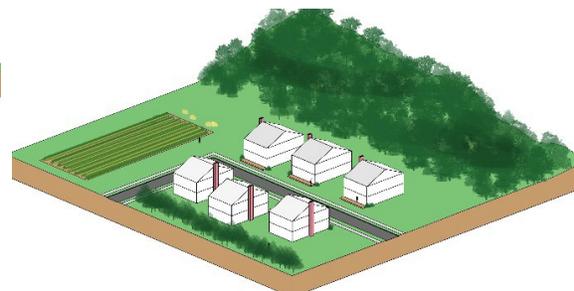
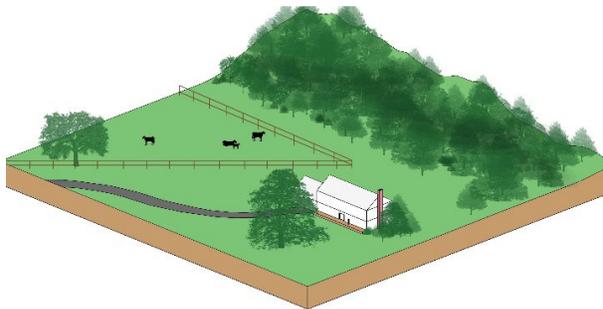
### Place Type Rendering

*An oblique projection of development within a Place Type to showcase the qualitative characteristics of how buildings within the Place Type should interact to create activity.*

**Residential Density: Up to 1 du / 40 acres**

**Residential Cluster Option: Up to 1 du / 15 acres equivalent**

**Building Height: Up to 2 stories**



### Transition

Locate buildings and structures to blend with the existing topography and natural features. Preserve and incorporate existing trees and vegetation on the property and its perimeter to buffer and screen views for adjoining properties. Provide landscaping or supplemental plantings comprised of native species when screening and buffering are required between rural uses.

# Rural Historic Villages



Rural Historic Villages consist of small, pedestrian-scale rural communities that are compact in comparison to the surrounding agricultural landscape. The majority of these villages have developed around a small residential and/or commercial core that provide for the daily needs of village residents, surrounding rural residents, and visitors. Rural Historic Villages are characterized by low-density residential development situated on smaller lots interspersed with limited commercial uses. Residential and commercial uses are generally located in detached stand-alone two-story buildings which are located close to the street. In some instances office or residential uses are located above first floor retail. Each Rural Historic Village has its own unique character linked to its historic development pattern, spatial organization, and location within the County.

Spacing of buildings—both commercial and residential—should respect each village’s historic precedents for lot size, building setbacks, and orientation to the street. Buildings should be designed to be sensitive to the context of the village through compatible siting, size, scale, massing, materials, design details, and roof forms.

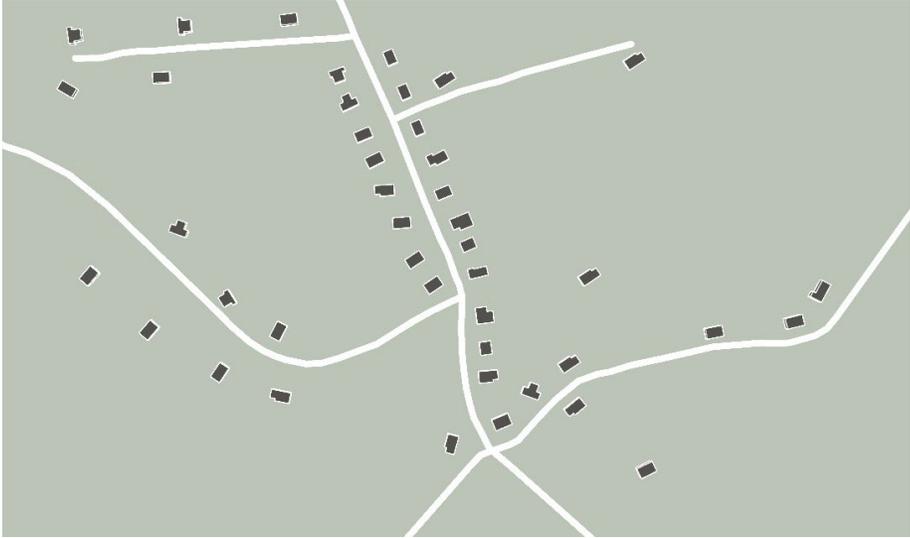
Core Uses	Complementary Uses	Conditional Uses
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Single Family Detached Residential</li> <li>• Retail &amp; Service Commercial</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Office</li> <li>• Live/work units</li> <li>• Civic, Cultural, &amp; Community</li> <li>• Rural/Heritage Tourism</li> <li>• Rural Economy</li> <li>• Agricultural Supportive Businesses</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Accessory Residential Units</li> <li>• Public Facilities</li> <li>• Special Activities</li> <li>• Parks &amp; Recreation</li> </ul>

## DESIGN CHARACTERISTICS

### Context

Small-scale and often historic buildings sited in a compact pattern that contain residential or commercial uses that may also be vertically mixed. Each Rural Historic Village has a unique character and sense of place that should be preserved and enhanced.

<p><b>Street Pattern:</b> Contour Forming, Fragmented Parallel, Irregular</p> <p><b>Block Length:</b> Varies by Village</p> <p><b>Building Setback:</b> Shallow</p> <p><b>Parking:</b> On-street, driveway, garage</p> <p><b>Open Space:</b> Recreation (Passive), Community, Natural, Environmental and Heritage, and/or Agriculture</p>
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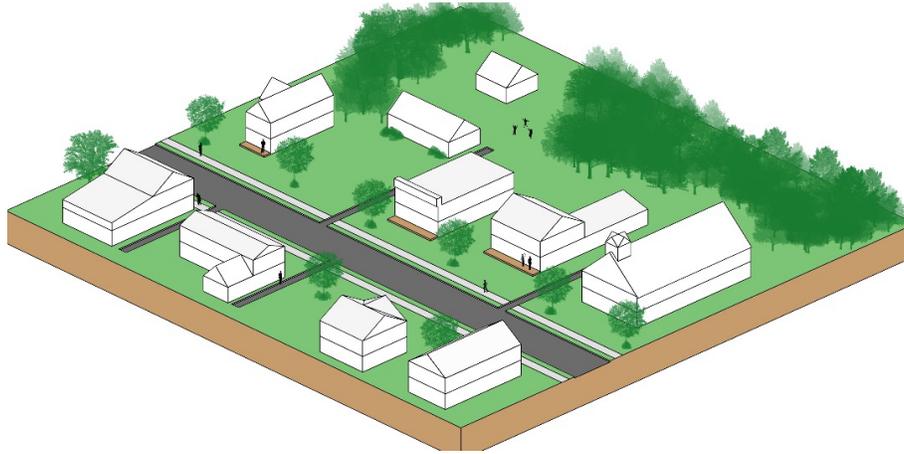
*An example plan view of a Rural Historic Village*

**Place Type Rendering**

*An oblique projection of development within a Place Type to showcase the qualitative characteristics of how buildings within the Place Type should interact to create activity.*

**Residential Density: Varies by individual village; no more than 4 du / acre**

**Building Height: Up to 2 stories**



**Transition**

Maintain areas of open space and natural areas on the perimeter of the villages to maintain a hard edge and visual separation from surrounding uses. Within the village, preserve existing trees and vegetation, which define building lots and contribute to the streetscape. New construction should be designed to complement surrounding properties and maintain the existing development pattern within the Village.