

# Pointing to our Future:



## An Inventory of Falls Church Signage and Recommendations

Prepared by Virginia Tech's Spring 2018 Land Use Planning  
Class

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## Acknowledgements

This signage inventory and report was prepared during the Spring 2018 Land Use Planning class in Virginia Tech's Urban Affairs & Planning program located in Alexandria, Virginia.



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## Introduction

Signage is not simply a communication tool for visitors, making the unfamiliar known. The information provided on signs reflects the community itself and enhances community pride. Effective gateway and wayfinding signage systems offer a myriad of benefits. First, an orderly signage system allows the community to shine, without the distraction of a collection of mismatched signs creating visual clutter. Second, a well-ordered signage system improves the visitor experience and may encourage visitors to return. Signage systems are an economic development tool to point visitors towards important businesses, restaurants, parks, historic sites, and other points of interest. Third, wayfinding signs may encourage visitors to take advantage of walking and cycling if they can easily navigate to destinations. Vehicular signage may also point drivers to parking lots.

With these benefits in mind, the City of Falls Church collaborated with Virginia Tech to conduct an assessment of current signage in the City and make recommendations to improve it in the future.

The purpose of this study was to develop an inventory of all signs within the City of Falls Church, with the exception of business, traffic, and selected incidental signs. The report focuses on gateway signs, wayfinding signs, and signs that identify key features (e.g. historic sites and parks) and neighborhoods of the City. The specific objectives of the report were to:

- Conduct an inventory of all signs within the City not related to traffic or identifying businesses (pole and monument signs)
- Prepare a table that groups all the signs by type
- Prepare a map (GIS layer) showing the location of all signs
- Conduct a brief literature review on the elements of good signage
- Conduct case studies of signage in neighboring and other communities, focusing on exemplary wayfinding, gateway signage, and neighborhood or district identification
- Assess signage issues in Falls Church, and
- Prepare a final report that includes the inventory (table and map), an assessment of signage issues in Falls Church, and recommendations for new signage. The recommendations focus on signage for the downtown commercial district, neighborhood identification, gateway signage, and wayfinding

# Signage Inventory

## *Methodology*

The inventory of Falls Church signage was conducted in person on April 4, 2018 by five Virginia Tech graduate students and one professor. Additional signs were collected at later dates as needed. Cell phone cameras captured the images, and the coordinates were recorded by the phones' built-in GPS units. After photographing all of the identified signs, students uploaded the coordinates to ArcMap, where the data was reviewed and attributed.

Note: the inventory of signs is not exhaustive and some signs may have been missed. Furthermore, the location of each sign is very close but approximate. The horizontal and vertical accuracy of the points was not determined.

## *Results*

Eight types of signs were identified in Falls Church. The eight sign types include:

- **Banners:** Any sign made from fabric or other soft material that can be suspended from a light pole, rope, etc., and easily removed or replaced.
- **Gateway:** Signs located at the boundary of Falls Church to inform visitors of their entry to the City. Gateway signs are not located at every entrance point, but are instead concentrated at heavy traffic entryways such as Broad Street.
- **Historic – City:** Any historic marker or sign that has been erected by the City. Twenty-six Historic - City signs were identified, which was the most of any sign type.
- **Historic – State:** Any historic marker or sign that has been erected through designation by the state.
- **Miscellaneous:** Miscellaneous includes “Adopt-a-Street” signs, dog signs, and others. These are the second-most prevalent sign type with 25 identified.
- **Neighborhood:** Signs located at the entrance of neighborhoods to inform visitors of their location. Neighborhood signs are the least prevalent in Falls Church, with only two identified.
- **Park:** Signs located at the entrance of the City’s various parks.
- **Wayfinding:** Signs that provide direction to places or amenities. Broad Street features a number of wayfinding signs that point visitors to the City’s library. Wayfinding signs often include directional arrows or distances.

There are a number of signs over which Falls Church does not have design or placement authority, such as traffic signs, including speed limits, pedestrian crossings, parking, snow routes, and other green Virginia Department of Transportation signs. These were excluded from the inventory, as the City already has GIS data on this signage. Also excluded were Metro and Metrobus signs, Neighborhood Watch signs, and signs well within park boundaries. Since the City has GIS data on the bicycle route wayfinding signs, these were excluded from the inventory as well.

Table 1 provides a summary of each sign type. The map in Figure 1 shows the location of each inventoried sign in the City. Appendix B provides an inventory of each identified sign in Falls Church along with its picture.

*Table 1 Number of each sign type in Falls Church*

<b>Type</b>	<b>Number</b>
Banner	11
Gateway	9
Historic - City	26
Historic - State	8
Miscellaneous	25
Neighborhood	2
Park	20
Wayfinding	7
<b>Total</b>	<b>108</b>

Map and GIS

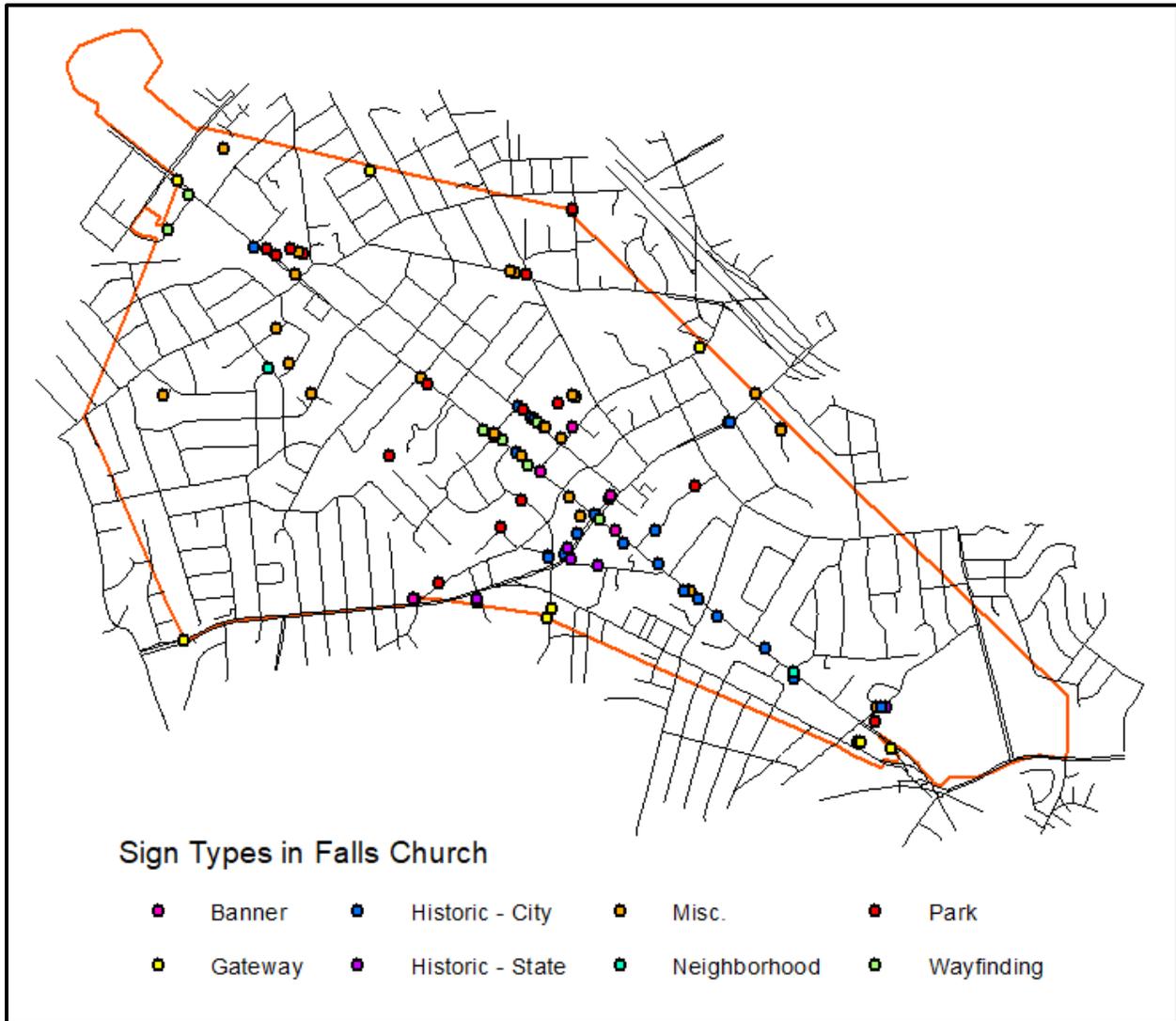


Figure 1 Map of existing signs in Falls Church

## Signage Issues

The City of Falls Church is located between Fairfax County and Arlington County. The greater Falls Church area includes parts of Fairfax County as well as the City of Falls Church. The peach-colored area in the map below represents the five zip codes that use Falls Church in their addresses. The green outline denotes the boundary of the City proper. As can be seen, the greater Falls Church area includes territory well beyond the City itself. Therefore, it is important for the City of Falls Church to have a strong identity with well-defined borders. Signage provides an opportunity to enhance community identity.

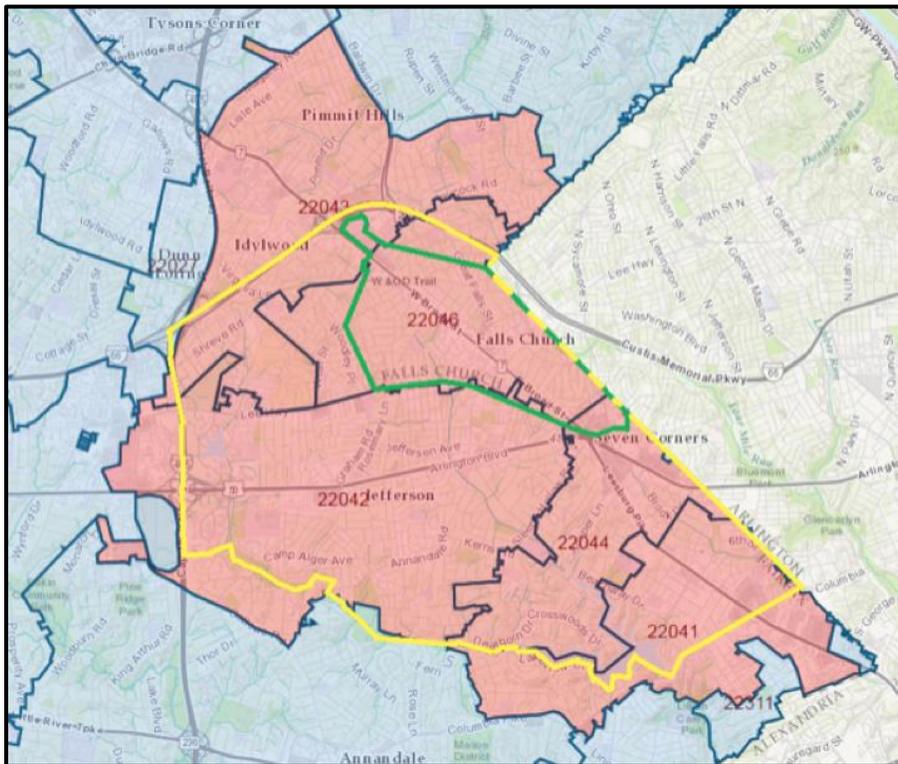


Figure 2 The City of Falls Church within Greater Falls Church Area. Courtesy Greater Greater Washington

Our report begins by discussing the issues we identified with the existing signage in the City.

### *Overall Lack of Consistency*

One of the most apparent issues with Falls Church's signage is a lack of consistency. This includes consistency of color, shape, size, and text within the same type and among different types of signage. This lack of consistency leads to clutter and confusion. It limits Falls Church's ability to create a unified, coherent and polished

image for the City and its streetscape. A good example of inconsistency within the same sign type is seen in the City’s gateway signs. Many of these signs are the same, but some show variation in design and material. Figure 3 provides an example of this inconsistency.



Figure 3 Lack of consistency within Gateway signs

The City’s park signs also show inconsistency. Most of these signs share a similar design language and color scheme, but they have small inconsistencies that detract from their overall uniformity. Figure 4 provides three examples of park signs. They all share the same red and white design but with different shapes and details. Additionally, the texts of the two Big Chimney’s Park signs, while the same in content, are presented differently.



Figure 4 Lack of consistency within park signs

Finally, there is a lack of consistency between the sign types. The gateway signs in Figure 3 and park signs in Figure 4 have drastically different designs. These designs could be streamlined to provide a more unified appearance.

### *Gateway Signs*

A number of issues were identified with Falls Church's gateway signs. As previously mentioned, there is a lack of consistency within the gateway signs. The majority are white with black text, but some vary as seen in Figure 3. Furthermore, the gateway signs can be difficult to read. The size of the signs and the small text make it challenging to read while driving. This issue is compounded by the location of some of the signs, like the gateway sign seen in Figure 5, which is obscured by vegetation.



*Figure 5 Obscured gateway sign*

Additionally, there are only nine gateway signs into the City. Many of these are at main access points, which is beneficial for visitors. Still, there are many other ways to get into Falls Church, and without any type of signage, a visitor may be unaware that she has crossed the City boundary.

### *Lack of Wayfinding*

There is a lack of wayfinding signs in the City. In total, only seven signs were identified. The majority of these signs are auto-oriented and not focused on pedestrian locations. This is especially problematic in the downtown area where wayfinding signs could direct pedestrians to stores and restaurants.

Additionally, the wayfinding signs in the City are inconsistent and do not create a unified system. There is no clear identification of what locations pedestrians or drivers should be interested in seeking out. There is a lack of signage leading to these locations from the City's entry points.

#### *Only Two Neighborhood Signs*

Only two neighborhood signs were identified in the City—Broadmont and Falls Park—and the signs are quite dissimilar. Additional neighborhood signs would help define the City's boundaries and help visitors know what areas they have entered, as well as enhancing neighborhood pride.

#### *Lack of Defined Districts*

Falls Church has no signage to define its districts. The downtown area is especially in need of additional signage. Defining the boundary of the downtown and providing more signage could help in marketing this area as an attractive place for commercial and residential development.

#### *Small Historic Markers Unreadable*

The City's historic markers are small and mostly unreadable. Many of the signs show significant wear, which hinders their legibility. The text is very small and the pictures are not easily seen from a distance. An observer would need to be immediately in front of these signs to read the information, but many of the historic signs are located next to busy streets, such as Broad Street, where a driver would not be able to see them clearly.

The City's historic signs can be compared to the state historic markers. The state signs have large titles and more spacious text to increase legibility. The Tinner Hill Historic Site sign is similar to the state signs in this respect and is a better model for future City historic signs. Figure 6 provides a comparison between state and City historic signs.

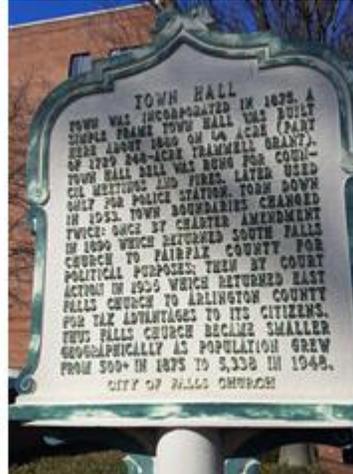


Figure 6 Comparison of State Historic Marker (left) to illegible (center) and legible (right) City Historic Markers.

## Tips for Good Wayfinding and Gateway Signage

Although streets in the City of Falls Church are not under VDOT control, we recommend that the City follow VDOT's *Community Wayfinding Manual of Virginia*. The Manual builds upon the guidance provided in the Manual of Uniform Traffic Control Devices (MUTCD) and offers supplementary policies, procedures, and guidelines unique to Virginia so that wayfinding signs can coexist in congruence with other essential directional and identifying signs.

### *Destination Locations*

The Manual provides guidance on the selection of destinations to which wayfinding signage directs a visitor. Specifically, the following advice is offered:

1. The primary purpose of the destination should be to provide significant cultural, recreational and/or historical experiences.
2. Wayfinding is not intended to advertise for businesses, chambers of commerce, civic or other organizations that have no cultural, recreational, or historical significance, or to provide advertising for destinations catering primarily to local residents.
3. A destination with significance that is recognized nationally should be given priority over those of regional and local recognition.
4. Destinations should typically be open to visitors at least 40 hours per week and close to year round.
5. Destinations should attract significant visitation from outside of the immediate area.
6. Destinations should primarily be non-retail establishments except for retail tourism destinations that are related to culturally significant shopping-oriented destinations.

### *Gateway Signs*

Gateway signs are used on non-limited access roadways to welcome the motorist to a community as well as introducing them to the branding or logo and color scheme of the signing system for the community. Gateway signs are typically located at entryways to corridors providing primary access to key wayfinding destinations.



Figure 7 Gateway sign

## Wayfinding Signs

Wayfinding signs provide directions to a specific destination or a group of destinations. Signs should direct drivers to destinations using routes that best balance safety, distance, and efficiency. Also, the signs should be designed and placed in a context-sensitive manner accounting for the surrounding natural and man-made environment, as well as other signing and nearby traffic control devices. One destination directional sign may be located at each decision point (intersection).



Figure 8 Destination direction sign

## Core Wayfinding Principles

Logical wayfinding for an area means an individual is capable of easily and successfully finding one's way to a destination, able to understand where one is with respect to other key locations and can orient oneself in an appropriate direction with little effort or stress. In addition, an effective wayfinding system presents opportunities to discover new places and services and includes a consistent approach to placement and design. The choices of sign materials, dimensions, colors, and forms should be cohesive to enhance legibility and community identity. Some of the principles of best practices for creating a clear wayfinding experience are:

1. **Connect Places** Effective wayfinding information should assist both locals and visitors to travel between destinations as well as discover new destinations and

services. By being a reflection of local community values, wayfinding elements can also cultivate a sense of pride in one's community resulting in a deeper connection to place.

**2. Promote Active Travel** Wayfinding is a natural extension of existing efforts to encourage active travel behavior by creating a clear and attractive system that is easy to navigate.

**3. Be Predictable** When information is predictable, it can be quickly understood and recognized. Predictability should relate to all aspects of wayfinding information, from the placement of a sign, to the design and its contents.

**4. Keep Information Simple** Information should be presented in as clear and logical a form as possible. Wayfinding signage should be both universal and usable for the widest possible demographic and with special consideration for those without high educational attainment, English language proficiency, or spatial reasoning skills. It is important to provide information in manageable amounts. Information should be provided in advance of where major changes in direction are required, repeated as necessary, and confirmed when the maneuver is complete.

Source of Information:

*Community Wayfinding Sign Manual of Virginia-Operation Manual and Guidelines*, Sept 2017.

[http://www.virginia.gov/programs/resources/Community\\_Wayfinding\\_Sign\\_Manual\\_Low\\_Resolution.pdf](http://www.virginia.gov/programs/resources/Community_Wayfinding_Sign_Manual_Low_Resolution.pdf)

## Case Studies

Virginia Tech students reviewed examples of signage systems in the Washington, D.C., region and around the country in a search for best practices. Following are local case studies from Alexandria and Arlington County, along with case studies from Portland, Maine, and Fort Collins, Colorado. The intent of these case studies is to provide the City with additional resources, examples, and lessons learned from other municipalities' signage systems.

### Alexandria Wayfinding Guidelines

#### *Introduction*

In 2003, the City of Alexandria conducted a Visitor Center Study, which indicated a need to overhaul the City's signage and wayfinding system. The City wanted to more effectively showcase its unique features. As in the City of Falls Church, Alexandria had a plethora of mismatched signs that had been placed over time. There was no consistent design, which resulted in a sense of clutter and confusion for visitors.

Accordingly, the City launched the Alexandria Wayfinding Program in 2008. The program aimed to establish standards for design, installation, and maintenance of wayfinding signs throughout the City. The design guidelines manual was developed with a collaborative approach. A City Working Group (CWG) was established with representatives from City departments, including historic preservation, transportation, environmental, and parks and recreation stakeholders. Additionally, the City appointed a Stakeholder Advisory Group (SAG) for key members of the public to provide input, including civic organizations, local businesses, economic development representatives, seniors, people with disabilities, pedestrian/bicyclist advocates, and others. The SAG was tasked with providing input to the City and the consultant (Sasaki Associates) on design, the hierarchy of all destinations to be signed, size, quantity, and types of signs, and City district header signs.

The Wayfinding Design Guidelines Manual was approved by the Planning Commission in September 2010. Implementation of the recommendations is ongoing with a phased approach, focusing first on "low-hanging fruit" improvements. Funded through the CIP, the first two phases have been completed, dealing on parking-related signage and pedestrian-oriented signage in Old Town. Phase 3, involving vehicular directional signs, is ongoing. Phases 4-7 are planned from 2019-2022 and focus on gateway, destination identification, historic interpretation, and district identification signage.

Alexandria’s wayfinding guidelines cover a variety of signs including highway, gateway, vehicular directional, parking, pedestrian kiosk and directional, shared-use path, interpretive, destination identify, district identity, and banner standards. A few types of signs are highlighted below:

*Example: City Gateways*

The gateway signs are used to create a memorable welcome at major entrances to the City, setting the stage for the remainder of the wayfinding system. Alexandria’s guidelines include numerous versions of gateway signage, including a large brick gateway and metal post gateway sign.

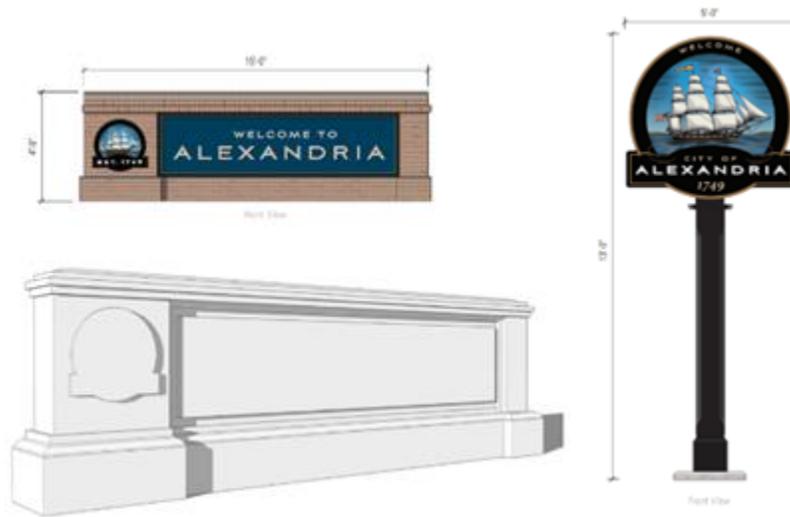


Figure 9 Alexandria Tier 1 Gateway sign (left) and Alexandria Tier 2 Gateway Sign (right)

*Example: Vehicular Directional*

The guidelines also include numerous designs for vehicular wayfinding to points of interest in the City. These signs are intended to be simple and easy enough to be read from a moving vehicle at 25 mph. These signs are branded with a district header to reinforce the City-wide district identities and are located at least 100 feet before vehicles need to make a turn to get to the destination.



Figure 10 Vehicular directional sign in Old Town, Alexandria

*Example: Pedestrian Kiosks and Directional*

Pedestrian directional pointers are used to direct visitors when they arrive at specific destinations as a quick “heads-up.” Alexandria’s pedestrian pointers are located at places where pedestrians might start their trip, such as transit stops or water taxi drop-off. The signs also include supplemental amenity icons for food, hotels, transit, and more.

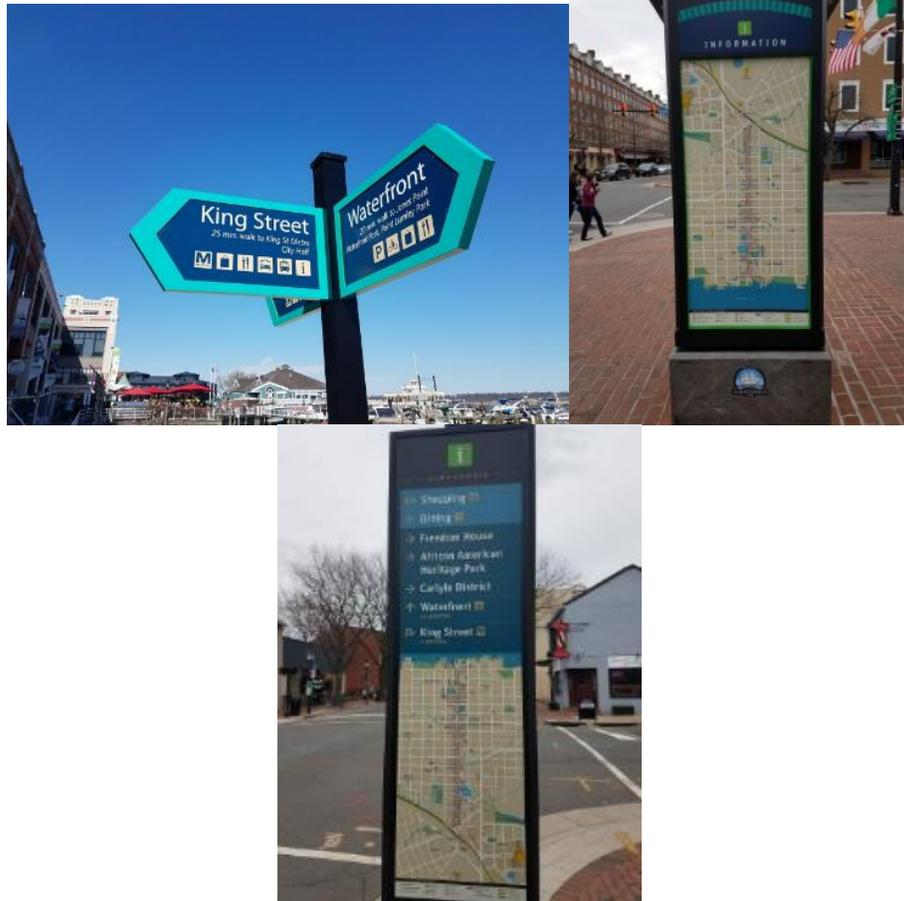


Figure 11 Pedestrian directional sign in Old Town, Alexandria (top left), four-sided visitor kiosk in Old Town, Alexandria (top right) and two sided visitor kiosk in Old Town, Alexandria (bottom)

*Example: Shared-Use Paths*

In an effort to incentivize use of Alexandria’s bike and walking trail network, the guidelines include signage to clearly identify the trails as they enter the City. The signs are located at key intersections and confusing transitions from off-street to on-street bike paths.



Figure 12 Shared-use path directional sign in Old Town, Alexandria

*Example: Destination Identity*

The guidelines cover a variety of destination identification signs, the most common of which is the double-post identification sign found at the entrance to the City’s parks. The goal is to create a consistent, coordinated system of identification for parks (green signs), in addition to community services and historic sites.



Figure 13 Destination identification (park) sign in Old Town, Alexandria

### *Example: District identity*

Although not implemented until later phases, the guidelines lay out designs for district identity markers to identify entrances to individual districts within the City. For each identified district, the City plans to install district markers within the area's commercial core or along vehicular access routes in a median or side of the roadway. The district identity signs have a standard size and footer with the City's wordmark, but the main part of the sign will be custom designed for each district to represent the unique characteristics of each.



Figure 14 District identity marker in Old Town, Alexandria

### *Example: Banner Standards*

The design guidelines manual recommends banners are moved from well-established corridors to remove any unnecessary distractions from the vibrant streetscape. For emerging district corridors such as Del Ray, banners may enhance color, visual unification, and promotion of the area.

Source of Information:

City of Alexandria, "Wayfinding System: Design Guidelines Manual", September 7, 2010  
[https://www.alexandriava.gov/uploadedFiles/alexandriavagov/ProjectsAndPlans/Transp  
ortation/WayfindingSystemDG2010.pdf](https://www.alexandriava.gov/uploadedFiles/alexandriavagov/ProjectsAndPlans/Transp ortation/WayfindingSystemDG2010.pdf)

## Portland, Maine Wayfinding

### *Introduction*

In 2008 the City of Portland, Maine conducted an inventory of its wayfinding signage after receiving complaints from tourists about a general lack of identification and directional information. Various City departments such as Planning, Public Works, and the Visitor's Bureau worked in conjunction with the consultancy group Wilbur Smith to study existing signage and to create public signage guidelines that would enhance the tourist experience of Portland.

Before developing a design standard for wayfinding signage, the City began with identifying what type of visitors were coming to Portland as well the existing challenges with current signage. Portland identified several different types of visitors arriving using different transit modes, from tourists arriving from a cruise ship, to business travelers driving off of I-95, to nearby residents using public transportation. Each type of visitor would require instructions to get to their intended destinations or need assistance in finding different transportation infrastructure. The City also conducted a review of existing signage to identify issues such as the cluttering of small signs together, an inconsistent use of directional or identification signage, and several dilapidated signs.

The City's first step to creating a new wayfinding system was to identify what could and could not be on the new signs. Separate criteria were developed for pedestrian and vehicular wayfinding signage. Both criteria describe what a location or point of interest must contain to be included on a wayfinding sign as well as special exceptions that can be made for parking facilities or other transportation-related facilities. The signs usually include directions to other districts, transportation, or nearby points of interests or landmarks. Both criteria exclude locations such as churches, seasonal attractions, or private venues.

### *Example: Wayfinding*

There are four distinct districts within the City, and planners chose that each district should have its own unique identifier instead of a blanket Citywide design. Each of the four districts wayfinding signs has a unique header with a distinct font and color background that tops the signage. A unique graphic was added as a footer with the same color as the corresponding header. The wayfinding text and symbols used between the header and footers are uniform City-wide and placed on a darkened grey background. The mix of unique headers, footers, and their colors combine to produce a

brand image for each district, and the uniform wayfinding signage provides clear directions to other districts and attractions.



Figure 15 Examples of wayfinding signage family from Portland, Maine. Courtesy Scott Cochrane

### Example: Standards

A graphic standard was produced to provide a visual aid for creation of future signs. All fonts used either for the unique district graphics or main wayfinding signs is stated with examples for each letter of the alphabet. Graphics used on footers for districts are provided along with Photoshop color identifications. A series of symbols is also printed for reference as to what is permissible on wayfinding signage such as directional arrows, parking, and METRO buses. The standard also includes mounting instructions for various sign types to ensure hardware does not block information contained on wayfinding signs.

### Examples: Miscellaneous Pedestrian Signage

Included within the Portland study is commentary on best practices for other pedestrian and vehicular signage outside of the wayfinding system. Identifiers such as banners using the specified district standards can be placed throughout a district's light poles to

help visitors recognize their current district location. Kiosks and maps can be similarly used to identify current district location while also serving as a detailed starting point for visitors to begin navigating the City.



Figure 16 Pedestrian wayfinding family from Portland, Maine

### Example: Parking

Parking signs present a district's unique brand while also helping motorists in need of a parking spot. Entrances to parking facilities with a 200-plus parking capacity require a universal "P" sign, which can be altered to color standards of the district it resides.



Figure 17 Parking sign from Portland, Maine

### Example: Gateways

Briefly mentioned within the Portland study is the possibility of using primary and secondary gateway signs. Primary signs would be used on roads designated vehicular wayfinding routes with messaging limited to taglines such as "Welcome to Portland." Secondary gateway signs could be used on borders between districts or zones with messaging focused on district identification with limited directional information.



*Figure 18 Gateway signage from Portland, Maine*

Source of Information:

City of Portland, Maine. "Portland Wayfinding System Study" June 23rd, 2018.  
<https://www.portlandmaine.gov/DocumentCenter/View/2214/Wayfinding-Report>

# Fort Collins, Colorado

## Introduction

The Fort Collins sign system was designed to help residents, visitors, and guests navigate through downtown and easily find parking and destinations. The need for improved wayfinding signage was identified in the 2004 Downtown Strategic Plan and, more recently, was one of the recommendations for priority projects made by the UniverCity Connections Transit and Mobility Task Force. The design firm Nuszer-Kopatz developed the design concepts after consultation with downtown and City stakeholders.

To develop the schematic design, the project team initially identified local issues and reviewed existing signs, including test-driving key routes with a person unfamiliar with Fort Collins. Also, the project team reviewed other cities' experiences to better understand the design process and guidelines. A public open house was held on the proposed schematic design, and full-size outdoor mock-ups were reviewed by staff and the public.

Selected examples of Fort Collins' signage are provided below.

### Example: Freestanding

The main aim of this sign is to provide direction to public destinations and attractions and public parking. It sets the tone in color and shape so visitors begin to identify this sign character with downtown. It is catered primarily to motorists. The key locations for these signs are along key routes into downtown.

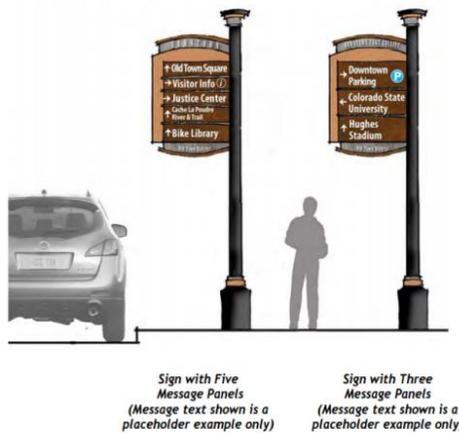


Figure 19 Freestanding signs

*Example: Square Format*

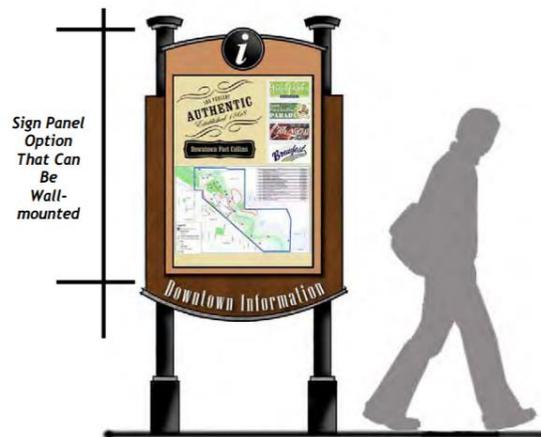
The main aim of these signs is to provide awareness and direction to downtown public parking. They encourage drivers to utilize public parking facilities.



Figure 20 Parking Signs

*Example: Parking Garage/Lot "You Are Here" Pedestrian Informational Sign*

These signs orient parking facility users to downtown and provide information about destinations and attractions that can be reached by foot.



Freestanding Sign

Figure 21 Parking garage "you are here" informational sign

*Example: Information Kiosk*

Kiosks help provide downtown information and links to surrounding areas and attractions as well as reinforcing downtown identity. They are located near intersections

of major pedestrian routes and within major pedestrian “hubs” in highly visible and policed areas



Figure 22 Information Kiosk

*Example: Transit Stop Sign*

Transit signs help identify each transit stop and provide transit schedule and information.



Figure 23 Transit stop sign

*Example: Downtown Gateway*

These signs define major entry points into the greater downtown area and reinforce downtown identity. Each gateway sign is distinct, designed for the site's unique setting and constraints. However, the sign system's materials, colors, and fonts are consistent across the City.



*Figure 24 Downtown gateway monumental style sign*

Source of Information:

Downtown Fort Collins Wayfinding Sign System Dec. 9, 2009

<https://www.fcgov.com/planning/pdf/downtown-sign-system-doc.pdf>

# Arlington Gateway and Neighborhood Signs

## Arlington Gateway Signs

Arlington County has a gateway sign similar to the main one of the City of Falls Church. This consistent gateway sign (see below) is located at most primary entrances to the county, but not all. For example, no gateway signs were identified at the Key Bridge, Chain Bridge, Route 120, Old Dominion Drive, or Route 29. Secondary entrances to the county do not seem to be covered by gateway signs at all. Therefore, the gateway signs are not effectively placed to define the border of Arlington. The map in Figure 25 shows the locations of the gateway signs that were identified.



Figure 25 Example of an Arlington gateway sign

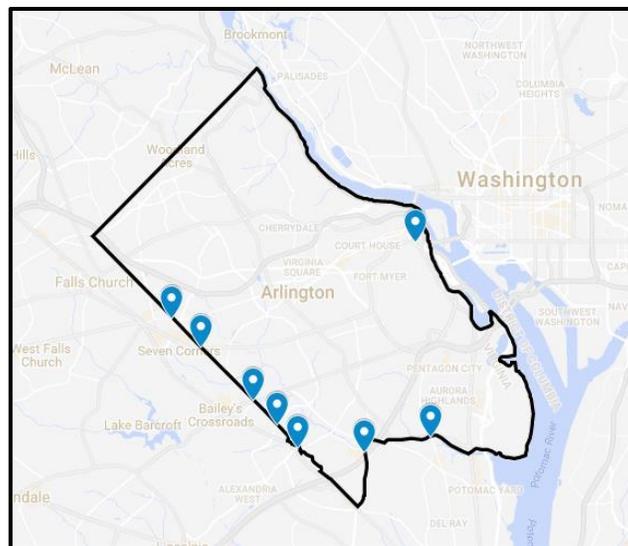


Figure 26 Identified Arlington gateway sign locations

## Arlington Neighborhood Signs

Arlington County has 57 civic associations recognized through the Neighborhood Conservation Program. A map of civic associations is included below. This program was created in 1964 to empower residents to discuss and share ideas for improving their neighborhoods. The civic associations are official organizations within the County responsible for representing their neighborhood. Active associations prepare a Neighborhood Conservation Plan, which establishes a community vision and identifies priority projects to realize that vision. Neighborhoods that have approved Plans are eligible for identifying neighborhood signs.



Neighborhood signs give each neighborhood an identity and instill a sense of pride among residents. The Neighborhood Conservation Program works with civic associations to develop and install signs. The Program funds up to four signs made of synthetic granite and associated landscaping. Small signs are 24 inches square and large signs are 40 inches by 72 inches.

Most neighborhoods within Arlington County have active civic associations that have taken advantage of the neighborhood sign program. Each sign is unique for each neighborhood, with a similar style for both the large and small signs. There is no consistency, however, among neighborhoods. Four signs are not comprehensive for all of the neighborhoods. Some neighborhoods have more than four main entrances. In these cases, it is difficult to understand neighborhood borders, and neighborhoods that are trying to achieve a unique identify end up blending together.

The following graphic depicts several different neighborhood signs. A full list, with images, of Arlington neighborhood signs can be found online.



Figure 28 Examples of Arlington neighborhood signs

Sources of Information:

Arlington Civic & Citizen Associations:

<https://topics.arlingtonva.us/community/civic/>

Arlington Neighborhood Signs Program:

<https://projects.arlingtonva.us/neighborhood-conservation/neighborhood-signs/>

Arlington Neighborhood Conservation Advisory Committee (NCAC):

<https://commissions.arlingtonva.us/neighborhood-conservation-advisory-committee/>

Arlington Neighborhood Conservation Plans:

<https://projects.arlingtonva.us/neighborhood-conservation/nc-plan-program/nc-plans/>

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## Recommendations

Based on the sign inventory in the City of Falls Church and background research on signage in other localities, we recommend the City develop signage standards and a signage plan. We recommend eight steps to achieve these:

1. Publicize this Study, “Pointing to the Future”
2. Establish a Signage Task Force
3. Develop Goals and Objectives
4. Identify Signage Rationale
5. Hire a Design Consultant
6. Develop Signage Plan
7. Secure Funding
8. Implement the Signage Program

### **1. Publicize this Study, “Pointing to the Future”**

Once the City determines that the sign inventory is complete, Planning staff should brief other City staff, Board and Commission members, and other stakeholders on the report’s findings. The public should also be made aware of the report to set the stage for establishing a formal signage plan.

### **2. Establish a Signage Task Force**

We recommend that the City establish a Signage Task Force composed of City staff, Board and Commission members, and citizen volunteers. The task force should first work to understand the range of signage in the City and the issues associated with signage as documented in this report.

### **3. Develop Goals and Objectives**

The task force should then develop signage goals and objectives to determine the priorities for the City. These may include sign types that are important to focus on, such as wayfinding, gateway, neighborhood, and the like. The task force should involve the public in its work at various stages to vet the goals and objectives, discuss initial issues, and determine the priorities with the public. The task force should hold at least one public meeting to garner ideas about signage types and priorities and should also regularly keep the public informed of progress at set intervals.

## 4. Identify Signage Rationale

After establishing goals and objectives, the task force should next develop a rationale for each type of signage. This will guide the development of the signage plan and confirm the initial priorities that were determined. This work can be completed internally by the City before consultation with outside resources and may be further refined during a public participation process.

The steps in this process include:

- Identify Points of Interest in the City
- Determine Gateway Entrances to the City
- Determine Which City Neighborhoods Should be Identified
- Establish Districts for City Wayfinding

### *A) Identify Points of Interest in the City*

The task force should determine the destinations within Falls Church (e.g., the Farmers Market, parks, historical places, and cultural centers) to implement wayfinding signage for. The task force should also decide which types of locations should *not* be included in a wayfinding program. The public should be consulted with to determine the prioritization of locations.

Potential points of interest include historical locations such as Tinner Hill and The Falls Church; public buildings such as City Hall (also location of the Farmers Market); parks and community areas; and potentially other attractions that people could be directed towards such as the State Theater or Eden Center.

### *B) Determine Gateway Entrances for the City*

The task force should evaluate the gateway entrances to the City. Existing gateway signs were identified in the signage inventory. We recommend that additional signage be considered to better define the border of Falls Church.

Two tiers of gateways signs can be utilized to welcome visitors into Falls Church: primary and secondary. Primary gateways signs are designed to introduce visitors entering on major traffic arterials with messaging such as “Welcome to Falls Church.” Secondary signs are designed to be smaller than primary signs and located on side streets or minor access ways with similar messaging.

VDOT traffic data provides a good starting point to identify locations for gateway signs. 2017 Average Annual Traffic Volumes for the City of Falls Church were examined in

both Excel and Shapefile format to identify possible locations for a network of gateway signs. Based on this research, we have determined appropriate locations for signage. Some of these locations may have existing gateway signs as identified in the signage inventory.

Locations for primary gateway signs include:

- West Broad Street near George Mason High School
- East Broad Street near Seven Corners
- South Washington Street near Rosemary Lane
- North Washington Street near Gresham Place

Locations for secondary gateway signs include:

- Wilson Boulevard near Roosevelt Boulevard
- Hillwood Avenue near North Roosevelt Street
- North Roosevelt Street
- Great Falls Street near North West Street
- Lincoln Avenue near North Yucatan Street
- Annandale Road near Hillwood Avenue
- North West Street
- South West Street

These are illustrated in Figure 29 below.

Other data such as bicycle counts and pedestrian studies should be examined to determine if other non-vehicular secondary signs should be implemented to cater to active transportation. In addition to welcoming visiting motorists to Falls Church, gateway signs can also be used to help welcome visiting bicyclists using bike-oriented trails, particularly the W&OD Trail.

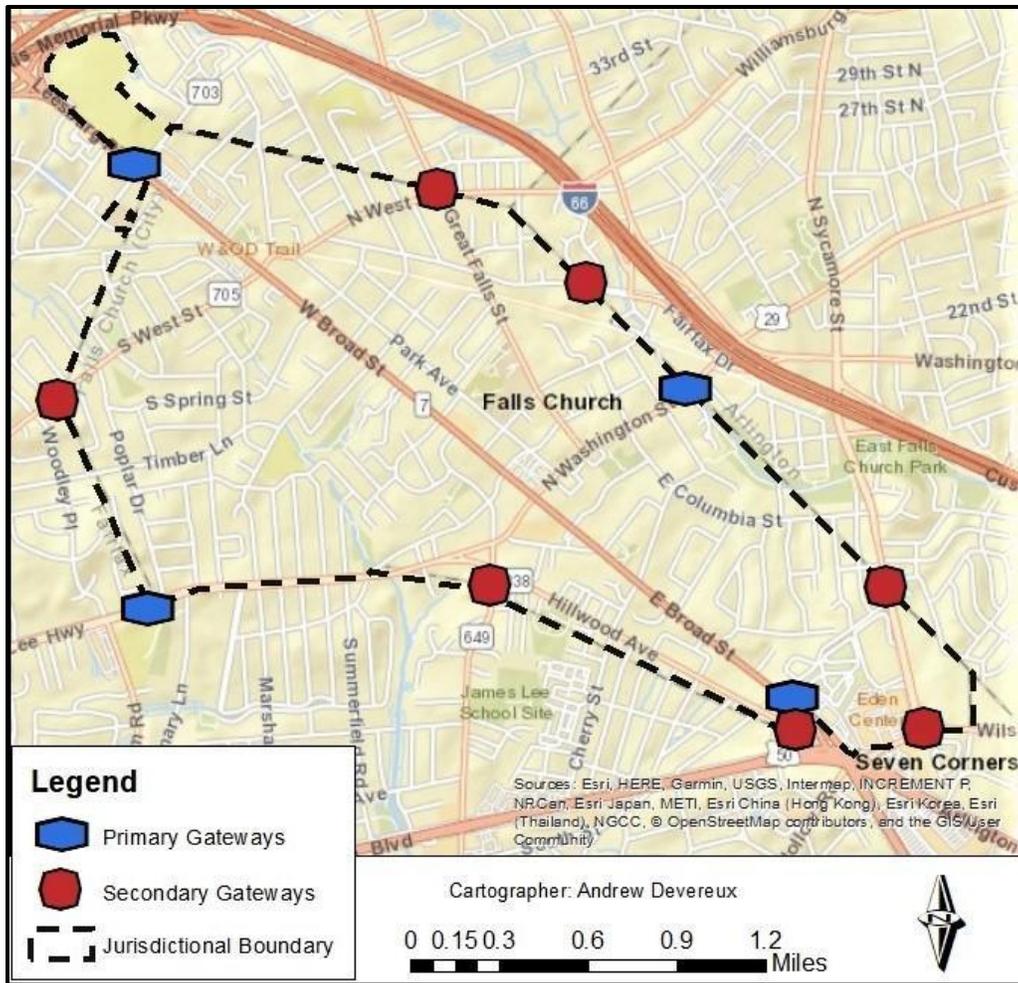


Figure 29 Potential locations for gateway signs

*C) Determine Which Neighborhoods Should be Identified*

There are several issues involved in neighborhood signage in the City. One is that many of the residential neighborhoods are not clearly defined or even known. Many of them have changed in character over time through tear-downs, remodeling, and new construction. In addition, very few neighborhoods have formal civic associations.

Although a few City neighborhoods were established prior to World War II (e.g., Greenway Downs), the era of greatest residential subdivision growth was 1948-1965. (Sechrist) During this time, 31 subdivisions, ranging from 3 or 4 lots to more than 150 lots, experienced substantial growth.

Of the 31 subdivisions, 11 appear on the City of Falls Church Planning Division Subdivision Map (2006). These are:

- Broadmont
- Brookfarm
- Falls Church Heights
- Falls Park
- Lawton Manor
- Roosevelt Court
- Spring Lea
- Sycamore Grove
- Villa Ridge Hills
- Virginia Forest
- Whitehaven

Greenway Downs also appears on the Subdivision Map.

As is done in Arlington, the City should offer residential neighborhoods the opportunity to erect signage. Although the City's Subdivision Map defines the boundaries of some neighborhoods, it does not define the boundaries of all. Thus, a process of self-identification could occur, as individual neighborhoods define their boundaries and determine the best location for entrance signage. The City could provide each neighborhood that wants signage with two identification signs.

#### *D) Establish Districts for City Wayfinding*

We recommend that Falls Church establish districts within the boundary of the City, similar to the Alexandria Wayfinding Guidelines and those developed for Portland, Maine. These districts are different than the residential neighborhoods. While the neighborhoods may group sections of residential properties (as determined by the local residents), the districts are larger areas determined by the task force. These could include historical areas, commercial areas, or existing prominent locations such as downtown.

The City has identified Planning Opportunity Areas (POAs) that could be used as a starting point for developing districts, as illustrated in Figure 30 below.

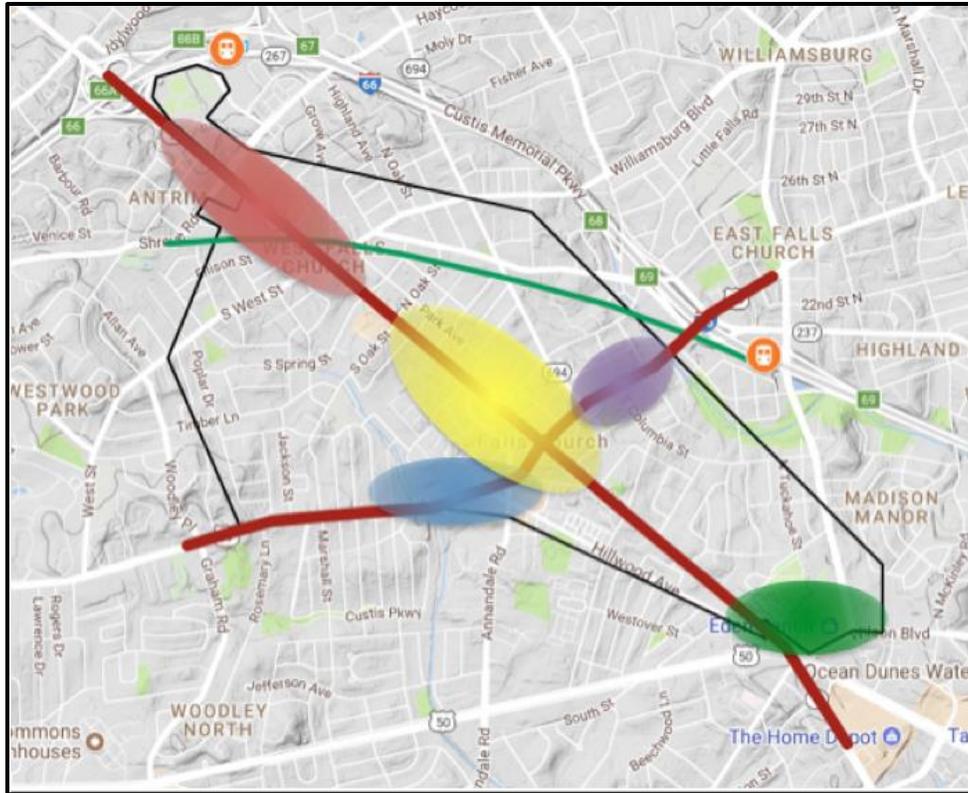


Figure 30 Preliminary district locations

Based on the POAs, the City may start with the following five districts for further vetting by the community:

- Downtown – Yellow
- West End – Red
- North Washington Street – Purple
- South Washington Street – Blue
- Eastern Gateway – Green

Names may be assigned to each district to better define them. This can help to create a sense of place and identity for these parts of the City. Colors may also be assigned to each district, as was done in the signage program in Portland, Maine. This should be determined during the preliminary steps and can be included within the signage plan. These determined colors and other styles should be consistent within each district to reinforce the identity of individual districts within the overall Falls Church.

## **5. Hire a Design Consultant**

After developing goals, objectives, and signage rationale, Falls Church should hire a design consultant to create the sign plan and program, in concert with the task force.

## **6. Develop Signage Plan**

The City should develop signage standards with the consultant, similar to those illustrated in the case studies in this report. This should be a public process, with public meetings to gain feedback at key intervals.

The signage plan should create a unique signage family of multiple type of signs including gateway, wayfinding, banners, park, historic, and neighborhood. These should incorporate a consistent design throughout the City with a distinct font, unique shape, and a determined color scheme.

The City has an opportunity to incorporate the Little City logo in its signage, as has been done on 8 of its 11 existing banners. The logo could be included as a consistent element on all signs. The City may wish to assign different colors to individual districts to create an enhanced sense of place and identity. In addition to the detail of design for each individual sign in the signage family, the signage plan should include guidelines for application and implementation, standards for sign messages, and location or orientation on the street.

The task force and consultant should consider a phased implementation plan, based on the priorities of the City, as is being done in Alexandria. The phasing schedule can determine the installation of signage as funding is available. We recommend that gateway, wayfinding, and banner signs be a top priority. These are important to better identify Falls Church and aid visitors within the City. Park and historic signs can also be updated as funding is available, to ensure consistency and readability. Neighborhood signs are a lower priority and can be installed as neighborhoods are defined by local residents.

## **7. Secure Funding**

Funding is necessary at all stages of the development process but is most important prior to implementation. Funding can come from a number of federal, state and local sources. Although U.S. Department of Transportation programs such as Better Utilizing Investments to Leverage Development (BUILD, formerly TIGER), Surface Transportation Programs, Transportation Alternatives Program, and the Congestion

Mitigation and Air Quality Program typically do not fund signage directly, it is possible that signage could be included in association with other transportation improvements.

Creative federal funding streams are also available outside of the U.S. DOT. One source is the National Endowment for the Arts (NEA). The City of Paducah, Kentucky, recently received NEA funding for downtown wayfinding signs. This could be an interesting funding source given Falls Church's focus on arts and humanities.

Possible state funding sources include VDOT's Transportation Alternatives Program and the Virginia Recreational Trails Program. As with federal funding, in most cases state funding is not directly allocated to signage or wayfinding projects. Instead, these projects must be bundled with other road or trail improvements.

At the local level, Falls Church could consider generating revenue through Business Improvement Districts or Tax Increment Financing. Other communities have successfully used these tools to supplement state and federal sources of revenue. The City could also consider funding a signage program through the CIP, as has the City of Alexandria.

## **8. Implement the Signage Program**

Based on funding availability and the phased implementation schedule established in the signage plan, the City may consider a phased installation approach for the new signage. Similar to Alexandria, the first installation would focus on "low-hanging fruit" that can be implemented quickly and easily and/or signage of the highest priority.

## Appendix A: Additional Resources

Albemarle Regional Bicycle Plan. "Wayfinding Signage Design Guidelines." 2013. [http://www.nagsheadnc.gov/vertical/sites/%7BB2CB0823-BC26-47E7-B6B6-37D19957B4E1%7D/uploads/Albemarle\\_Regional\\_Bicycle\\_Plan\\_wayfinding\\_supplement\(1\).pdf](http://www.nagsheadnc.gov/vertical/sites/%7BB2CB0823-BC26-47E7-B6B6-37D19957B4E1%7D/uploads/Albemarle_Regional_Bicycle_Plan_wayfinding_supplement(1).pdf)

Community Wayfinding Sign Manual -Operation Manual and Guidelines, Sept 2017. [http://www.virginia.gov/programs/resources/Community\\_Wayfinding\\_Sign\\_Manual\\_Low\\_Resolution.pdf](http://www.virginia.gov/programs/resources/Community_Wayfinding_Sign_Manual_Low_Resolution.pdf)

Department of Conservation and Recreation, "Virginia Recreational Trails Program 2016," 2016. <http://www.dcr.virginia.gov/form/DCR199-123.pdf>

National Endowment for the Arts, "Grants for Organizations," nd. <https://www.arts.gov/grants/apply-grant/grants-organizations>

The Paducah Sun, "Guiding signs," 2018. <https://docs.google.com/document/d/1zk6tf4jo6GRe5bXzSUHfTPipwtgcyrlcZ6V4O1xRJR4/edit#>

San Francisco Bay Conservation and Development Commission. "Shoreline Signs; Public Access Signage Standards". August 2005. <http://www.bcdc.ca.gov/planning/SSSG.pdf>

Sechrist, Stephanie, "Falls Church Residential Development, 1948-1965," paper for American Civilization class, GW University, April 15, 1992.

Signage Foundation, inc., "Urban Wayfinding Planning and Implementation Manual," 2013. <http://www.ncmainstreetcenter.com/wp-content/uploads/2015/03/UrbanWayfindingPlanningImplementationManualWebsite.pdf>

U.S. Department of Transportation, "BUILD vs TIGER Fact Sheet," nd. <https://www.transportation.gov/sites/dot.gov/files/docs/policy-initiatives/tiger/308656/build-vs-tiger-fact-sheet-042018-1049am.pdf>

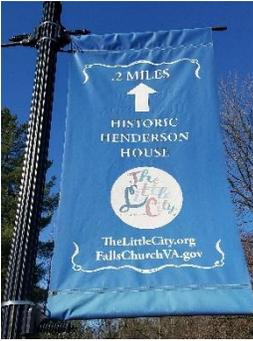
"Wichita Bicycle Wayfinding System Plan," 2016. <http://www.wichita.gov/Planning/PlanningDocument/Wichita%20Bicycle%20Wayfinding%20System%20Plan.pdf>

Virginia Department of Transportation, "Transportation Alternatives Program Guide," 2017a. [http://www.virginia.gov/business/resources/local\\_assistance/2017\\_TA\\_Program\\_Guide\\_Update\\_-\\_Interim.pdf](http://www.virginia.gov/business/resources/local_assistance/2017_TA_Program_Guide_Update_-_Interim.pdf)

Virginia Department of Transportation, “FY18 Surface Transportation Block Grant Set-Aside for Transportation Alternatives Program Project Approval,” 2017b.  
[http://www.viriniadot.org/business/resources/transportation\\_enhancement/FY18\\_TAP\\_Final\\_Allocations.pdf](http://www.viriniadot.org/business/resources/transportation_enhancement/FY18_TAP_Final_Allocations.pdf)

## Appendix B: Sign Inventory

Table 2 Sign inventory of Falls Church captured by Land Use Planning students

Type	Description	Image
Banner	.1 Miles Tinner Hill Arch	
Banner	.2 Miles Historic Henderson House	
Banner	City Arts Theatre Culture History	

Type	Description	Image
Banner	Falls Church Arts	
Banner	Falls Church Arts	
Banner	Falls Church Farmers' Market	
Banner	Farmers Market	

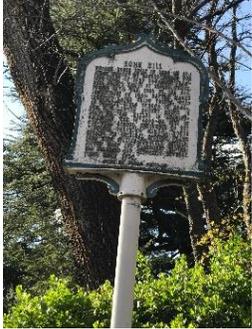
Type	Description	Image
Banner	Play Falls Church Virginia	
Banner	Shop Falls Church Virginia	
Banner	The City of Falls Church	
Banner	Welcome City of Falls Church	

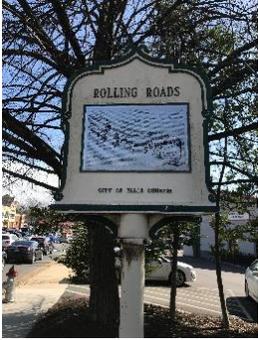
Type	Description	Image
Gateway	City of Falls Church Settled 1699	
Gateway	City of Falls Church Settled 1699	
Gateway	City of Falls Church Settled 1699	
Gateway	City of Falls Church Settled 1699	

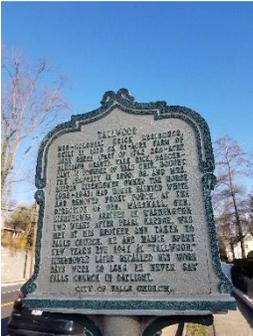
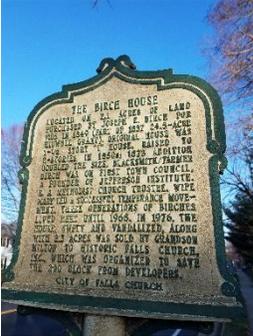
Type	Description	Image
Gateway	City of Falls Church Settled 1699	
Gateway	City of Falls Church Settled 1699	
Gateway	City of Falls Church Settled 1699	
Gateway	Enter City of Falls Church	

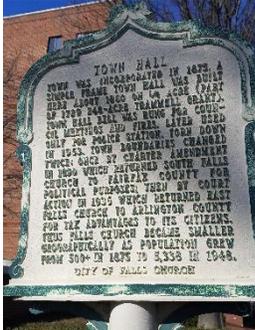
Type	Description	Image
Gateway	Welcome to the City of Falls Church	
Historic - City	Cherry Hill	
Historic - City	Cherry Hill Farm	
Historic - City	Columbia Baptist Church	

Type	Description	Image
Historic - City	Dulin Methodist Church	
Historic - City	Falls Church Historic Trail Information	
Historic - City	Falls Church Historic Trail Information	
Historic - City	Falls Church Historic Trail Information	

Type	Description	Image
Historic - City	Home Hill	
Historic - City	Jefferson Institute	
Historic - City	Pearson's Funeral Home	
Historic - City	Presbyterian Church	

Type	Description	Image
Historic - City	Presidential Visit to Falls Church, 1911	
Historic - City	Rolling Roads	
Historic - City	Star Tavern	
Historic - City	Swamp White Oak In Honor of Mel and Ruby Bolster	

Type	Description	Image
Historic - City	Tallwood	 <p>A decorative, green-painted metal marker with a scroll-like border. The text is in all caps and describes the history of Tallwood, mentioning its founding in 1884 and its status as a city of Falls Church, VA.</p>
Historic - City	Taylor's Tavern	 <p>A white marker with a decorative border, mounted on a white post. It features a small photograph of the tavern and text describing its history as a popular meeting place in the late 18th century.</p>
Historic - City	The Birch House	 <p>A decorative, green-painted metal marker with a scroll-like border. The text describes the Birch House, a landmark building in Falls Church, VA, and its significance to the community.</p>
Historic - City	The Falls Church	 <p>A decorative, green-painted metal marker with a scroll-like border. The text describes the Falls Church, a landmark building in Falls Church, VA, and its significance to the community.</p>

Type	Description	Image
Historic - City	Tinner Hill	 <p>A green and white historical marker on a white post. The text on the marker reads: "TINNER HILL. 1848. TINNER HILL WAS THE SITE OF THE FIRST COTTAGE IN THE CITY OF HALL. IT WAS BUILT BY JOHN TINNER, A FUGITIVE SLAVE, WHO WAS HELD IN CAPTIVITY IN THE STATE OF MISSISSIPPI. HE ESCAPED IN 1848 AND SETTLED HERE. HE BUILT THIS COTTAGE AS A HOME FOR HIMSELF AND HIS WIFE, SARAH. THE COTTAGE WAS BUILT OF LOGS AND WAS ONE OF THE EARLIEST STRUCTURES IN THE CITY. IT WAS DESTROYED IN 1864 BY THE CONFEDERATE ARMY. THE SITE IS NOW A PARK AND IS A REMINDER OF THE EARLY HISTORY OF THE CITY. CITY OF HALL, GEORGIA." The marker is set against a clear blue sky with some buildings and utility poles in the background.</p>
Historic - City	Tinner Hill Historic Site	 <p>A black and white historical marker on a black post. The text on the marker reads: "Tinner Hill Historic Site. A Partnership of the Northern Virginia Regional Park Authority, Fairfax County Park Authority, City of Falls Church and County of Fairfax." The marker is set against a clear blue sky with some buildings and utility poles in the background.</p>
Historic - City	Town Hall	 <p>A green and white historical marker on a white post. The text on the marker reads: "TOWN HALL. 1848. THE TOWN HALL WAS BUILT BY JOHN TINNER, A FUGITIVE SLAVE, WHO WAS HELD IN CAPTIVITY IN THE STATE OF MISSISSIPPI. HE ESCAPED IN 1848 AND SETTLED HERE. HE BUILT THIS TOWN HALL AS A HOME FOR HIMSELF AND HIS WIFE, SARAH. THE TOWN HALL WAS BUILT OF LOGS AND WAS ONE OF THE EARLIEST STRUCTURES IN THE CITY. IT WAS DESTROYED IN 1864 BY THE CONFEDERATE ARMY. THE SITE IS NOW A PARK AND IS A REMINDER OF THE EARLY HISTORY OF THE CITY. CITY OF HALL, GEORGIA." The marker is set against a clear blue sky with some buildings and utility poles in the background.</p>
Historic - City	Turnpike Tollgate	 <p>A green and white historical marker on a white post. The text on the marker reads: "TURNPIKE TOLLGATE. 1848. THE TURNPIKE TOLLGATE WAS BUILT BY JOHN TINNER, A FUGITIVE SLAVE, WHO WAS HELD IN CAPTIVITY IN THE STATE OF MISSISSIPPI. HE ESCAPED IN 1848 AND SETTLED HERE. HE BUILT THIS TOLLGATE AS A HOME FOR HIMSELF AND HIS WIFE, SARAH. THE TOLLGATE WAS BUILT OF LOGS AND WAS ONE OF THE EARLIEST STRUCTURES IN THE CITY. IT WAS DESTROYED IN 1864 BY THE CONFEDERATE ARMY. THE SITE IS NOW A PARK AND IS A REMINDER OF THE EARLY HISTORY OF THE CITY. CITY OF HALL, GEORGIA." The marker is set against a clear blue sky with some buildings and utility poles in the background.</p>

Type	Description	Image
Historic - City	Virginia Training School	
Historic - City	West Cornerstone	
Historic - City	Wren's Tavern	
Historic - State	Falls Church Between the Armies	

Type	Description	Image
Historic - State	Falls Church Home Front	
Historic - State	Harriet And George Brice	
Historic - State	Taylor's Tavern	
Historic - State	The Falls Church	

Type	Description	Image
Historic - State	The Falls Church - Interpretive	 <p>The Falls Church Interpretive sign features a blue header with the title 'THE FALLS CHURCH' and a small photo of the church building. The sign contains several paragraphs of text and a small illustration of a person.</p>
Historic - State	Tinner Hill	 <p>The Tinner Hill historical marker sign is a white sign with a black border and a small logo at the top. It contains text about the history of the area, including the founding of the Tinner Hill community and the construction of the Tinner Hill Hotel.</p>
Historic - State	Virginia Civil War Trails	 <p>The Virginia Civil War Trails sign is a red sign with a white border. It features the text 'VIRGINIA CIVIL WAR TRAILS' in blue and white, a red trumpet icon, and three blue stars at the bottom.</p>
Misc.	Adopt-a-Spot Neighbors of Roberts Park	 <p>The Adopt-a-Spot sign for Neighbors of Roberts Park is a white sign with a black border. It features the text 'Adopt-a-Spot' and 'NEIGHBORS OF ROBERTS PARK'. Below the text are several icons: a no parking sign, a no dogs sign, a no smoking sign, and a person walking a dog sign.</p>

Type	Description	Image
Misc.	Adopt-a-Spot Spiritual Assembly of the Baha'is of Falls Church	
Misc.	Adopt-a-Spot The Boeddekers	
Misc.	Adopt-a-Street Aurora House	
Misc.	Adopt-a-Street Falls Church Lions Club	

Type	Description	Image
Misc.	Adopt-a-Street Falls Church Republican Committee	
Misc.	Adopt-a-Street GMHS Environmental Club	
Misc.	Adopt-a-Street Point of View Eyewear	
Misc.	Adopt-a-Street Starbucks Broaddale	

Type	Description	Image
Misc.	Adopt-a-Street Starbucks Broaddale	
Misc.	All Vehicles Must Stay on Paved Surfaces	
Misc.	Dog	
Misc.	Dog	

Type	Description	Image
Misc.	Dog	
Misc.	Dog	
Misc.	Dog	
Misc.	Four Mile Run Chesapeake Bay Watershed	

Type	Description	Image
Misc.	Future Home of The New George Mason High School	
Misc.	Harry E. Wells Building	
Misc.	Kiosk	
Misc.	No Biking	

Type	Description	Image
Misc.	No Dogs Please	
Misc.	Plastic Bag Donations	
Misc.	Vehicles Not Permitted in Park	
Misc.	Welcome to a Green Power Community	

Type	Description	Image
Neighborhood	Broadmont	
Neighborhood	Falls Park Neighborhood	
Park	Andrew Ellicott Park	
Park	Berman Park	

Type	Description	Image
Park	Berman Park	
Park	Big Chimneys Park	
Park	Big Chimneys Park	
Park	Cavalier Trail Park	

Type	Description	Image
Park	Cherry Hill Park	
Park	Cherry Hill Park	
Park	Falls Church Tricentennial Garden	
Park	Fort Taylor Park	

Type	Description	Image
Park	Howard E. Herman Stream Valley Park	
Park	Howard E. Herman Stream Valley Park	
Park	Isaac Crossman Park At Four Mile Run	
Park	Madison Park	

Type	Description	Image
Park	Missing Park Sign	
Park	Park Closes at Dark	
Park	President's Garden	
Park	Robert's Park	

Type	Description	Image
Park	West End Park	
Park	West End Park	
Wayfinding	City of Falls Church 312 Park Ave	
Wayfinding	City of Falls Church Recycling Center	

Type	Description	Image
Wayfinding	City of Falls Church Recycling Center	
Wayfinding	Farmer's Market	
Wayfinding	Library	
Wayfinding	Library	

<b>Type</b>	<b>Description</b>	<b>Image</b>
Wayfinding	Public Parking	