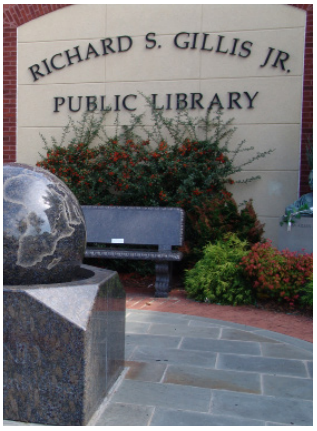
2.0 GUIDING PRINCIPLES

The Town of Ashland has its own distinctive character and a strong sense of place. The following six Guiding Principles were identified during the planning process in an effort to identify the characteristics that define our small town character and as a means to connect the values suggested in the introduction to the policies suggested by this plan. It is by maintaining these principles that the small town character can be preserved and enhanced for future generations. Each guiding principle is followed by the supporting details that make Ashland *Ashland*.

Principle 1: Preserve Small Town Character:

Ashland is the quintessential small town with the benefits of modern conveniences. Ashland possesses many of the characteristics that make a small town stand above the rest. The availability of vital services, of arts and cultural programs, and opportunities to get close to nature are just part of what makes up Ashland's character. The Town is an assortment of quiet, safe, well-kept residential neighborhoods in a variety of price ranges. This small town character comes from more than just the built environment; it comes from the people as well. We are a community of neighbors and the framework of our neighborhoods allows us to easily be part of the community. Our residents are civic-minded and have a strong will to preserve the Town and the Town's history. Our small town has vibrant locally-owned businesses and strong participation in community events.

- Many homes throughout the neighborhoods are closely situated and engage the streetscape with front porches that are large enough to sit on, front stoops to give protection from the weather, and front doors; all of which face the street.
- The networks of streets and walkways are planned in a grid pattern, throughout both the neighborhoods and the Downtown areas. This grid plan promotes slow driving, simplicity of lot layouts, and the creation of blocks that feel like true neighborhoods with quiet, safe, and walkable streets. Our neighborhoods are safe for children at play, and pedestrians and cyclists of all ages and abilities.



- The town landscape includes a canopy of shade trees in the neighborhoods, some street trees in the business areas and front yards with flowers and shrubs that can be appreciated by those who walk by.
- Our centrally located historic Downtown is compact and walkable with handsome small-scale buildings housing locally owned shops and businesses.
- We love that our merchants know us by name. Locally owned and operated businesses are important to our small town quality of life.
- We have schools and churches located within our neighborhoods. It is common in our community to see families and children walking to school and church. This is an important expression of life in a small town.
- We have a whole host of events from the Fourth of July parade to the Ashland Musical Variety Show with strong participation that exemplify the civic-mindedness and pride our residents have for Ashland.
- The small town atmosphere of Ashland seems to encourage the presence of friendly, familiar, and helpful neighbors. At its root, this quality of life in our small town is the one that makes our home special, and makes Ashland feel like the "Center of the Universe."

Principle 2: Protect Ashland's Unique Features:
Ashland is set apart from other small towns by the special places and activities that can be found here. It is these unique features that we must safeguard and support:

- The railroad tracks and the train station are located in the center of town. Few towns in America have passenger rail service, even fewer cherish their railroad as a fundamental part of life, and have the historic downtown, fine residential neighborhoods, and tree-lined walkable streets, all lining the tracks.
- We have Randolph-Macon College and its historic campus filled with beautiful buildings and trees located in the middle of town, professors and employees as neighbors, and many college-sponsored cultural activities for the entire community to enjoy.
- Our Library, Post Office, Town Hall are located in the center of Downtown so that commerce and civic life are intertwined. There is the opportunity to visit the library, have lunch in a downtown restaurant, shop in the downtown grocery store, mail some letters, and then join a volunteer activity in Town Hall all in one trip. This mix of uses generates a lively spirit of activity and a sense of vitality

in the Town.

- Lunches on the lawn, fairs, our Farmer's Market, parades, and more, are all possible because special open spaces have been created and maintained. The Town Green, the Hanover Arts and Activities lawn, and The Plaza support our civic activities, provide public green space and are places to just sit and enjoy the passing by of town life.
- The Town of Ashland hosts many recreational opportunities. We are the intersection of two national bike routes: Route 1 and Route 76. As a result, we have many cyclists passing through town, stopping to socialize, and to shop and dine. There are runners and walkers who drive here from other places to use our quiet, safe streets; the residents are not the only pedestrians here. These activities show off our community, support our Downtown businesses and add to the vibrancy of our town.
- We have links to the wider region and city, even though we feel as if we are sitting within a bucolic farming landscape. Our train and Interstate 95 intersection can take us as far as the edges of the nation; Route 1, Route 54, Ashcake Road, and Elmont Road take us to Richmond and the greater region.

Principle 3: Manage and Enhance our Green Town:
Ask any resident what is special about Ashland, and after mentioning great neighbors, the next comment will be that we have great shaded, tree-lined streets. However, if we press beyond that observation, we find that there is more *green* to our green town than just the tree canopy. We have wetlands, creeks, wooded areas, rural vistas, public parks, trails, and preserved open spaces. We must think of all of these landscapes as part of a single environment to be protected. The cherished green spaces that make up this environment are:

- Our neighborhood street trees are species large enough to spread across the streets, frame views of homes and shops, and give us comfort from the heat. Visitors from outside Ashland, who participate in our many organized runs, are often stunned by the beauty of this place – all because they are running framed by towering trees, protected by their shade.
- Our wetlands and stream corridors weave through many neighborhoods. Not only is it our obligation to protect them, it is our opportunity to live lives integrated with these native habitats.
- We still have some natural wooded areas within the town. These tree stands provide wildlife and bird habitats and add to the breadth of our Town's tree canopy.

- We are proud of our public parks and trails. They provide access to our beautiful natural environment for users of all ages.

- There are sheltering, retail-friendly street trees in the historic Downtown. Hill Carter Parkway is a lovely green-edged roadway. We have maintained our efforts to keep the commercial portions of Route 54 green and tree-lined.

Principle 4: Encourage Continued Variety within Ashland:

The assortment of home sizes and the range of home values allows for a vast mix of people and family types in all the neighborhoods of town. This is a cherished quality of Ashland. The conventional method of developing and marketing houses is single price range / one type only. This tends to lead to the present day patterns of social and economic segregation where people of different ages and incomes are socially isolated from one another. We find that our neighborhoods are not like that, and that variety must be integral with all future developments. The three characteristics listed in this Principle will permit – for example – seniors to remain at home, young people to find starter homes, families to live with other generations, and the affluent and working class to live side-by-side. Houses can be large and small, be of one or two stories, be designed with and without garages, have small gardens and large, and so on – and they all can be neighbors, and can maintain the community vitality that we cherish. Specifically, we intend to continue this variety in the future by reinforcing these basic characteristics:

- A variety of lot sizes, house sizes and home styles all located side-by-side within each neighborhood.
- We value the variety of size, scale and products offered by different businesses available in the Town and encourage more mixed retail in the future.
- We also value the diversity of people of different educational, religious, cultural and economic backgrounds and the new and life long citizens blending into one community.

Principle 5: Promote Continued Economic Development:

Ashland is an affordable place to live and a dynamic place to conduct business. Both exist in one community making life comfortable, easy, safe, and exciting all at once. This balance must continue so that we can always thrive. The following elements contribute to ensuring a strong economic base and are part of our vision for Ashland's future:

- Economic vitality of the business community in Downtown and on England Street must be maintained and must grow. Higher densities of both residential and commercial in this area will aid in this growth.
- High quality of design of buildings, signs, public landscapes, and street lighting in Downtown and on England Street is a necessary part of its success and must be continually encouraged.
- Route 54 between Interstate 95 and England Street, also referred to as the Golden Mile, serves as both a gateway and an economic benefit to the Town. We recognize its importance and strive for its improvement.
- Route 1 must become a special place, with a great landscape, good design of all types, and a variety of uses. This highway is not just a place to pass through; it must be a destination and part of the larger life of Ashland.
- We have a variety of small and large businesses; this must continue, so that we offer jobs to our residents, provide a wide range of services, and enjoy the benefits of both national and local merchants serving us.
- High quality office space or 'Class A' space is as important to include in our land use mix as higher quality homes. This use adds high level jobs, brings people here who will shop and maybe choose to live here, and adds to our tax base.
- We are fortunate to have many long standing businesses that remain here year after year. We will work to preserve and enhance the favorable business climate in the Town.
- Our consumer and service needs can be met here in Ashland thus making our lives easier, requiring fewer shopping and commuter trips out into the region. This keeps ~~us~~ Ashland real home town, where we can all live, shop, and work, right here, close to home.

Principle 6: Provide a High Level of Government Services:

The Town of Ashland's citizens and business owners are privileged to have the opportunity to take advantage of both Town and County services. These are considered the perks of living in the Town and operating a small municipal government.

- The Town Hall in the heart of Town allows citizens the opportunity to have a close relationship with government officials.
- Residents receive trash and recycling curb-side pickup.
- The Public Works Department provides the following services:
    - Brush and leaf collection
    - Snow removal
    - Street cleaning
    - Project management
- The Town maintains six public parks and several trails throughout Town, including the management of a public pool.
- The Ashland Police Department resides in the heart of the Town where officers are able to interact with citizens and business owners on a daily basis to provide a safe community, a high level of service and quick response times.
- Through an adapting street and sidewalk improvement priority plan the Town maintains and adds to its stock of walkable streets and sidewalks. This includes appropriate drainage systems throughout Town.
- The Town provides community planning efforts focused on the needs and future of the Town.
- The Town operates a Farmer's Market between May and October.