

Centreville Village Plan

Chapter Four

RESOURCE PROTECTION

4.1 Natural Features

The natural features within and around a village typically influence that settlement's form. To put it into context, the areas surrounding Centreville, west on Snuff Mill Road and east on Center Meeting Road, consist of gently-to moderately-sloping topography. Bottomlands and crests in this region of New Castle County are typically flat, while areas near streams can be very steep. Centreville itself is situated on a crest and is relatively flat. Primary soils found within the Centreville area are the *Glenelg-Manor-Chester* association. The soils are generally well drained and have few limitations as building sites.

Centreville is situated in the Brandywine-Christina watershed where the majority of Northern New Castle County residents rely on surface and ground water for their domestic water supply. Base flow provided by ground water is considered to be the primary source of fresh water to streams and can also be a source of nutrients and other pollutants to surface waters. Within the village, an abundance of small lots created many years ago have created challenges to landowners and developers in complying with county and DNREC on-lot water supply and sewage treatment and disposal requirements.

Located in an upland area with well drained soils, Centreville's stormwater is effectively carried away from the village during normal storm events. Stormwater generated by the Kennett Pike is either conveyed by curbing into catch basins or allowed to follow a natural course to lower outlying areas. Stormwater generated by residences and businesses (including parking areas) is infiltrated into the ample lawn and garden areas separating buildings and impervious surfaces. A relatively low percentage of impervious cover (such as driveways and parking areas) in combination with a large number of mature trees currently contributes to effective stormwater

infiltration and groundwater recharge within the village. While groundwater recharge is encouraged, water quality must be carefully monitored to protect the quality of drinking water. New development will need to address County and DNREC stormwater management requirements on-site. The use of green technology and best management practices is strongly encouraged.

The vegetation that grows in the village is a significant natural resource worthy of conservation. Large native tree specimens, such as sycamore and dogwoods, are commonly found growing in front and rear yard areas. Lawn areas and gardens with shrubs and groundcovers provide areas for infiltration of stormwater and help to moderate summer temperatures. The deciduous trees and evergreens that tower over the buildings, the fruiting crabapple trees, and the private gardens with their varied colors and textures provide a pleasing, park-like setting for the historic buildings that line the scenic Kennett Pike.

4.2 Surrounding Land

The large, open estates that envelope Centreville Village from the north, east, and southeast, serve as an ideal greenway buffer from other more-densely settled areas of northern New Castle County and southeast Pennsylvania. Much of this estate land includes the above-described natural resources, and has been permanently protected through the extreme generosity of conservation-minded landowners in partnership with several local environmental/preservation groups. The Delaware Nature Society, the Brandywine Conservancy, Delaware Greenways, New Castle County, the State of Delaware and others have championed this area's land preservation efforts through the use of conservation easements, deed restrictions, land donations, and fee-simple purchases. Over 4,500 acres in the area surrounding the village is either in public ownership or under private conservation easement.

Some of Centreville's neighboring lands have been converted to public or private recreational uses. Greenville Country Club, Bidermann Golf Course, Vicmead Hunt Club and Brandywine Creek State Park are each on property once owned by du Pont family members. Other former estates, particularly those west and southwest of the Village, have been subdivided and

developed with large-lot, single-family dwellings with access to Owls Nest, Old Kennett, snuff Mill and Burnt Mill roads.

4.3 The Kennett Pike

The Kennett Pike and its surrounding communities have benefited from a legacy of preservation. Pierre Samuel duPont purchased all of the shares of the Wilmington and Kennett Turnpike Company and reconstructed the Kennett Pike before turning it over to the State of Delaware for \$1.00 in 1920. This was the beginning of a long history of conservation and preservation of the road corridor.

A newspaper from the time said, "He will make the old Kennett Pike a thing of beauty, a highway that will be a priceless gift for the public for all time." In reconstructing the road he placed great emphasis on the preservation of trees. And later, he inspired and funded the planting of large numbers of elm, sycamore and oak along the 10.5 mile stretch of the Kennett Pike between his home at Longwood Gardens and the City of Wilmington. This string of trees today is often referred to as 'Alice's String of Pearls' because - at his wife Alice's request - he gave them to property owners one year instead of giving her a pearl birthday necklace.

Mr. du Pont also worked closely with private property owners to remove fencing that obstructed views. Deed restrictions were agreed upon with the State Highway department to proscribe laying rails, operating trolley cars or erecting advertising boards or signs upon or along the road without the consent of every property owner on both sides of the 80 ft wide right-of-way. There was also a provision that the state would "protect by every practical means the ancient pear tree at or near the entrance to the private road of Eugene du Pont."

The Kennett Pike Association (founded in 1961) and Centreville Civic Association (1970) have long worked to carry on this legacy of preservation. More recently, Delaware Greenways has led efforts to preserve the Kennett Pike as a State and National Scenic Byway. Centreville Civic Association's current initiative to create a Hometown Overlay for the village section of this corridor through Centreville Village builds upon this shared stewardship.

Kennett Pike was recognized by the national landscape-preservation group Scenic America, Inc., in 2002, as one of twelve areas in its Last Chance Landscapes program. In light of this important recognition, Delaware Greenways, a non-profit organization, sought state and federal designation for the Pike under the Federal Highway Administration's (FHWA) National Scenic Byways Program. Ultimately, the Kennett Pike and nearby Montchanin Road (Del. 100) received a federal designation, and are collectively known as the Brandywine Valley Scenic Byway. This designation can channel federal funds to this area of northern New Castle County for use in corridor management planning, scenic easement acquisition, billboard removal, and other byway related projects.

4.4 Canby Grove Park

Site of an early inn, then a hotel, the park property was purchased by P. S. duPont during the planning phase of the Kennett Pike. Highway workers stayed at the hotel during 1918-1920 road construction; and when work was finished, Mr. duPont authorized demolition of the building. The resulting vacant lot was transferred to the City of Wilmington in 1926. Friends of Centreville resident Henry M. "Harry" Canby petitioned the city to name the property "Canby's Grove" in remembrance of their friend after his death in 1928.

Since the 1950s, community groups (with the untiring dedication of "Mayor" Ed Frederick) have contributed to the maintenance and improvement of the park. Centreville Lions Club and Centre Grange managed these responsibilities until the early 1970s. The first lease agreement between the City and Centreville Civic Association was established in 1973, commemorated by the organization's addition of shrubs, benches, tables, trash cans and a new "Canby Grove Park" sign. The lease has been continuously renewed and was recently extended to 2027.

In addition to CCA's 1973 upgrades, there have been numerous community-funded capitol improvements through the years: initial clearing and playground equipment (1950s), flagpole and flag (1974), electricity (1992), new playground equipment (1999), Victorian gazebo (2006) and on-going landscape improvements. The City and the association are currently negotiating terms for future upgrades and maintenance.

4.5 Historic Resources

The historic summaries contained in this chapter are adapted, in large part, from Centreville, The History of a Delaware Village 1680- 2000. This book was published by the Centreville Civic Association, Inc., in 2001, to commemorate the 250th Anniversary of Centreville. For a more in depth history of the village and its surroundings, please refer to the original source material.

The heritage of the Centreville village is worthy of protection. Clustered architectural resources, still surrounded by considerable farmland, are critical evidence of that heritage. While standing as a visual reminder of our past, these assets can also enhance property values, increase local pride, and bolster economic development. Recognition of these resources, and a desire to continue their vitality, has been the primary force behind the establishment of this community plan.

4.5.1 Centreville Yesterday

Even in its earliest days, the road we know as Kennett Pike served as a primary route between the hinterlands of Kennett Square and the business hub of Wilmington. Centreville, named for nearby Centre Friends' Meeting, was ideally located between these two destinations and the early town center grew to accommodate the needs of farmers traveling to and from the marketplace.

By the mid-1800s, Centreville offered two inns, a school, a town hall, a blacksmith shop, a general store, a post office and taverns all around. Town doctors served patients in both Pennsylvania and Delaware.

The arrival of railroads to areas east and west of Centreville in the 1780s moved business traffic away—and the village economy suffered. By the early part of the 20th century, the once-bustling hamlet offered only a butcher shop and two country stores, primarily serving the local region. This decline, though painful at the time, proved to be beneficial to future generations: without a demand for new growth, or funding for "improvement," many of Centreville's 19th century buildings remained intact.

E. I. Dupont de Nemours & Co., a family-run gunpowder manufactory on nearby Brandywine Creek, prospered rapidly during the latter part of the 19th century. The company expanded through the course of several wars,

purchasing land (primarily north and west of the Brandywine) to support the needs of business, family and workers. As the company expanded in the early 1900s, family members bought additional land in Christiana Hundred and built 'American Country House' estates.

By 1920, when the new Kennett Pike was dedicated, Dupont family members or business interests owned forty-eight percent of the frontage on Delaware's portion of the road, essentially halting growth from Wilmington outward. While post-World War II development flourished on other "spoke" roads out of Wilmington, Kennett Pike and the land surrounding it appeared much as it had at the turn of the 20th century. Continued preservation of estate lands has helped insulate the village and protect it from being swallowed up by spreading development.

4.5.2 Centreville Today

Eighteen village structures are listed on the National Register of Historic Places. Many of the buildings that were formerly home to families or taverns now house specialty shops and offices; where a hotel once stood, park benches invite relaxation under spreading trees. Additional residences and adaptive reuse of older buildings brought new vitality to the village in the 1950s.

The edges of the village are now designated by gateway medians on Kennett Pike - near Snuff Mill Road at the north end and, at the southern terminus, near Center Meeting Road. Conservation easements protect open space at the southern edge; the northern boundary is currently framed by open fields, as yet unprotected by easement.

Fertile farmland and proximity to the rapidly falling Brandywine drew Centreville's early residents and helped bring them great wealth; today's residents no longer depend upon the land or water for income, but prosperity continues. The median household income in the Centreville area is \$86,467, according to the 2000 Census. 88 percent of the housing units are owner-occupied, compared with 72.3 for the state and 70.1 for New Castle County.