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Downtown Franklin Signage Study

**This report was included in the Work Program
for Fiscal Year 2003-2004, which was approved by the
Commission and the Metropolitan Planning Organization
at their meetings of March 19, 2003.**



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REPORT DOCUMENTATION

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Downtown Franklin
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ABSTRACT

Since the massive flood damage incurred by Hurricane Floyd in 1999, the City of Franklin, Virginia has been working to restore and improve the downtown area. This has included restoration of damaged buildings, reopening of old businesses, introduction of new businesses, recreational improvements, and other improvements to attract visitors to this historic downtown area. The City has asked the Hampton Roads Planning District Commission staff to conduct a study and formulate signage recommendations in order to help them achieve that goal.

ACKNOWLEDGMENTS

This report was prepared by the Hampton Roads Planning District Commission (HRPDC) in cooperation with the U.S. Department of Transportation (USDOT), the Federal Highway Administration (FHWA), the Virginia Department of Transportation (VDOT), and the City of Franklin, Virginia. The contents of this report reflect the views of the staff of the Hampton Roads Area Metropolitan Planning Organization (MPO). The MPO staff is responsible for the facts and the accuracy of the data presented herein. The contents do not necessarily reflect the official views or policies of the FHWA, VDOT, or HRPDC. This report does not constitute a standard, specification, or regulation. FHWA or VDOT acceptance of this report as evidence of fulfillment of the objectives of this planning study does not constitute endorsement/approval of the need for any recommended improvements nor does it constitute approval of their location and design or a commitment to fund any such improvements. Additional project level environmental impact assessments and/or studies of alternatives may be necessary.

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INTRODUCTION

The flooding of the Blackwater River in 1999, caused by rains associated with Hurricane Floyd, devastated the downtown area of the City of Franklin. Since then the City has labored to restore and improve the downtown area until it is better than before the hurricane damage. Old businesses have been restored and reopened, new businesses have arrived, and City leaders



Picture 1: Flooding in Downtown Franklin

Source: City of Franklin

have planned many improvements in an effort to make Downtown Franklin a destination point for travelers and tourists in the area. The City has asked the Hampton Roads Planning District Commission staff to assist in that effort, by conducting a study to formulate recommendations for placement of signs that will direct travelers to the downtown area, and help them find points of interest and parking once they arrive.

The goals of this study are as follows:

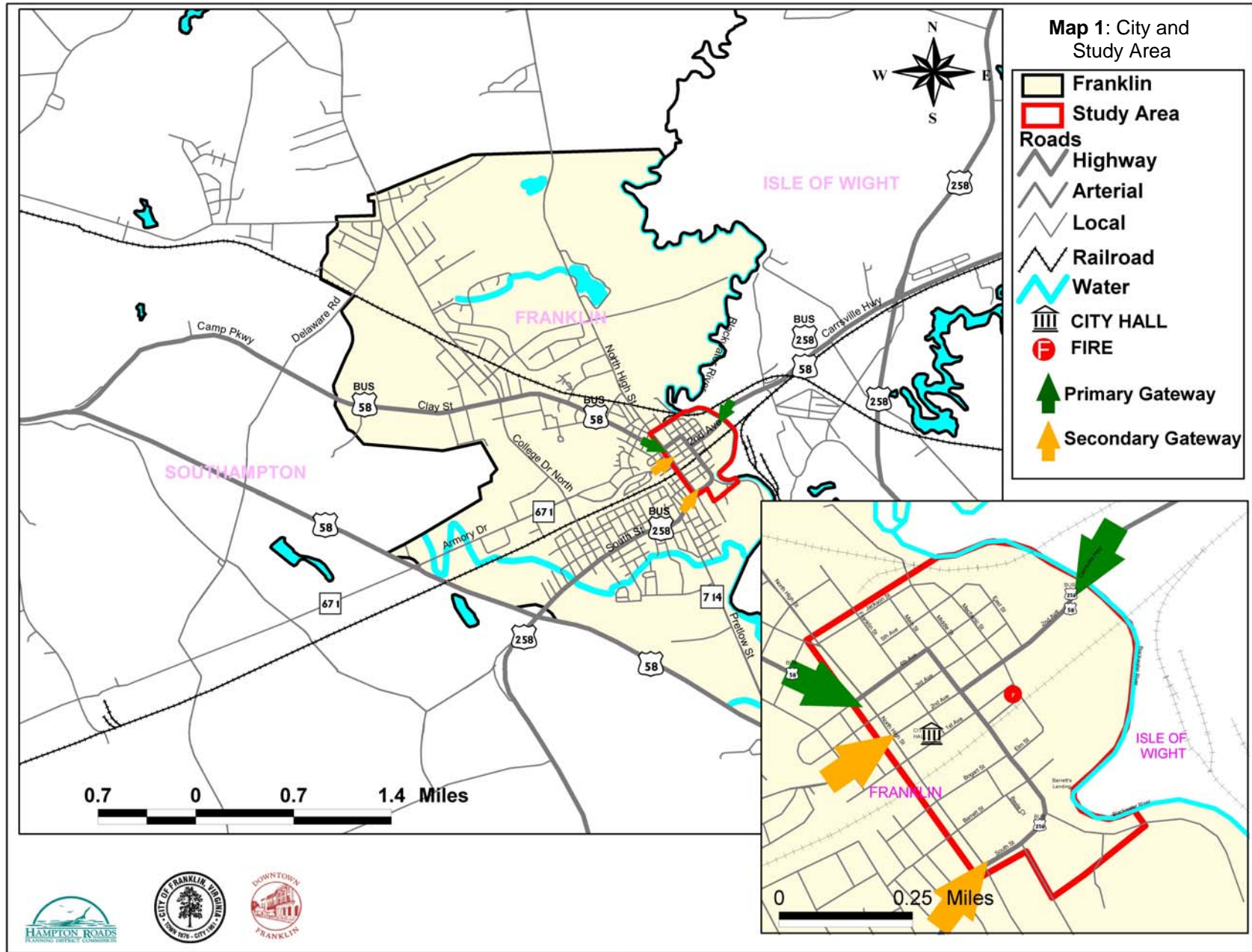
- Formulate a signage system to direct travelers to the downtown Franklin area, and to direct them to points of interest and parking upon their arrival.
- Analyze public parking to determine if the supply is sufficient to meet the demand.
- Analyze street signs and public parking to improve visibility and effectiveness.

This project directly addresses or assists in the meeting of several goals of the Downtown Flood Recovery Master Plan developed for the City of Franklin by K.W. Poore & Associates in January of 2001.

The study examines aspects of travel to and within the downtown Franklin area. This report is broken down into the following sections:

- Land use
 - Population and Employment
 - Flood Impacts
 - Points of interest
 - Parking
- Signage
 - Existing
 - Deficiencies
- Improvement Alternatives
- Conclusions and Recommendations

Map 1 on page 2 details the study area analyzed in this report and highlights the gateways into the downtown area. Primary gateways represent the corridor that is the first opportunity for travelers to leave US 58 and travel into downtown Franklin.



LAND USE

The population of Franklin, as shown in **Table 1** has increased from 7,864 in 1990 to 8,346 in 2000. This represents an annual growth rate of 0.60%, which lags behind the total population of the Hampton Roads Planning district, which had an annual growth rate of 0.80% over the same time period.

Employment in Franklin, also shown in **Table 1** increased at an annual rate of 1.39% from 1990 to 2000, while the rate for the Hampton Roads Planning District as a whole rose at 1.02%

Table 1: Population and Employment

	Population 1990	Population 2000	Population Annual Growth Rate	Employment 1990	Employment 2000	Employment Annual Growth Rate
Franklin	7,864	8,346	0.60%	3,306	3,797	1.39%
Hampton Roads Planning District	1,454,183	1,574,801	0.80%	870,688	963,228	1.02%

Source: Bureau of Economic Analysis, and Bureau of Labor Statistics

Businesses in the downtown area were devastated when Hurricane Floyd caused flooding of the Blackwater River in 1999. City leaders estimate that 182 businesses were destroyed, and that approximately 120 have reopened or been replaced. The City is also in the process of developing locations for new business to come to downtown, such as converting a former peanut processing facility built in 1907 into a Center for Business Development shown in **picture 2**.



Picture 2: Center for Business Development

In addition to business development the City of Franklin is working extensively to make the downtown a destination by adding recreational opportunities. According to the Downtown Flood Recovery Master Plan the City has also planned several recreational improvements to the downtown area including a new boat ramp, park facilities, interpretive trails, a farmers market, and visitor center. The City has already developed Barrett's Landing Park and river walk area to showcase the Blackwater river frontage shown in **picture 3**. These and other points of interest to travelers are inventoried on **Map 2**, page 5.



Picture 3: Barrett's Landing

Of concern to the City when developing these destinations was to provide proper parking for the anticipated traffic. In addition to on-street parking with a 2-hour time limit the City has 7 current public parking lots ranging in size from 13 spaces to 83 spaces. In addition, the City has planned 3 more lots ranging in size from 50-200 parking spaces. Field surveys indicated that use of the existing lots ranged from occupancy rates of 51% up to a high of 69%. An inventory of parking with a summary of spaces and occupancy rates is shown on **Map 3**, page 6.

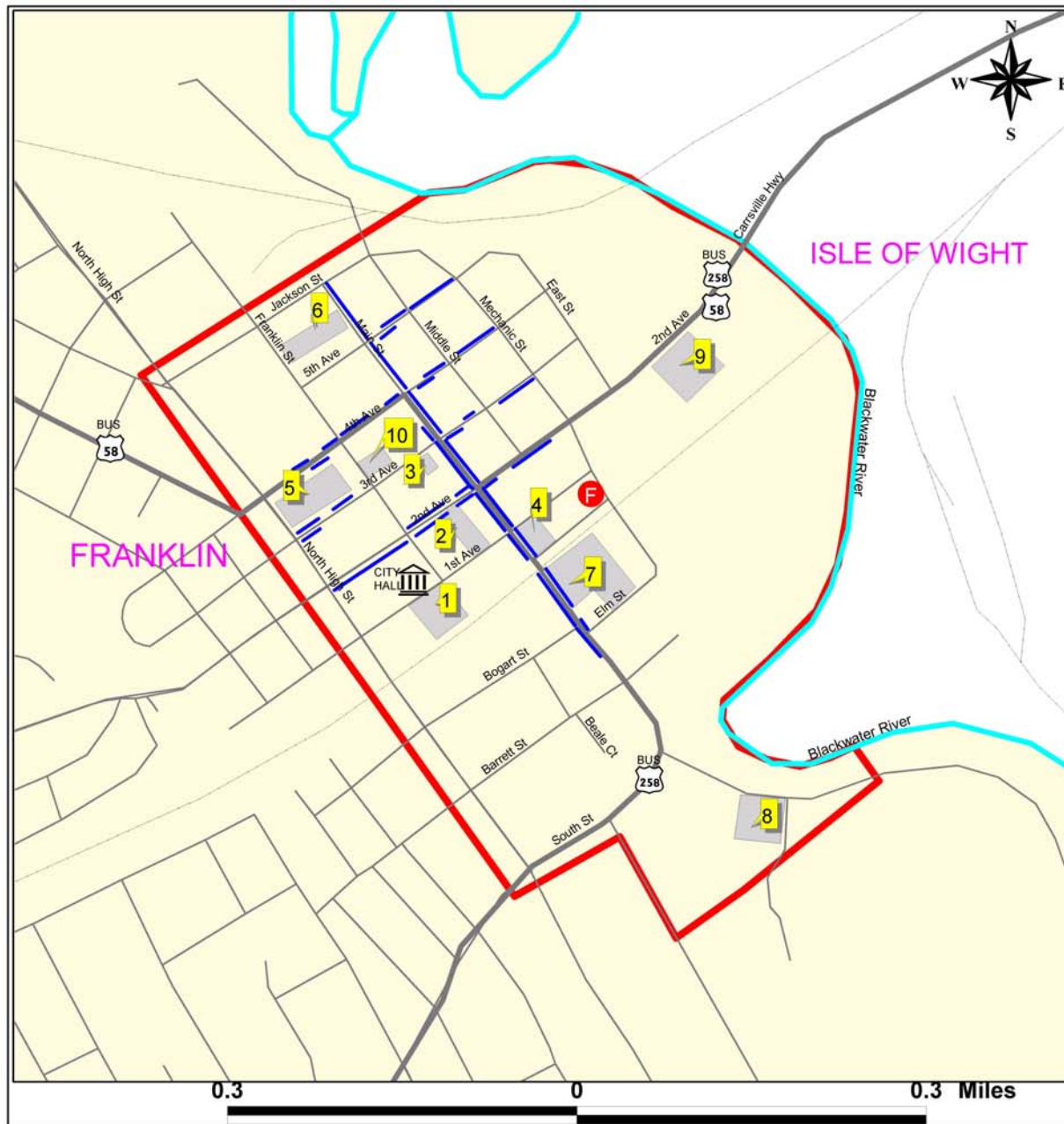
It is important when analyzing destinations and parking to examine whether the parking actually meets the needs of the proposed destination. If parking is too far away from the destination it is intended for people will either use it for something else or not use it at all and an important public investment has gone to waste and the goal of serving the specific destination has not been met. In the case of downtown Franklin, the City has many destinations and services it plans to meet the parking needs for through a network of parking lots throughout the downtown area. No single lot is intended for one destination, but may serve multiple destinations. **Map 4** on page 7, analyzes whether this goal is being met by applying distance radii onto the existing and planned parking lots in the downtown study area at distances of 1/8 mile (660 ft) and 1/4 (1,320 ft). According to the National Personal Transportation Survey the majority of pedestrian trips are 1/4 mile or less¹. According to the Pedestrian Facilities Guidebook, there are many variables that affect walking distances². Just a few of these are weather conditions, size of City, type of destination, and demographics.

Map 4 on page 7, shows that even at the short distance of 1/8 mile all of the points of interest and recreational attractions are served by a parking lot, with the exception of portions of the interpretive trail. However, this does require that the planned lots be built. Without the addition of the planned parking lots the recreational opportunities near Barrett's Landing and along 2nd Ave. north of Mechanic St. will be underserved in terms of parking availability.

1 <http://www.walkinginfo.org/pp/predicting/index.htm>

2 Washington State Department of Transportation, "Pedestrian Facilities Guidebook, Incorporating Pedestrians into Washington's Transportation System", September 1997.





Map 3:
Parking Inventory

Legend

- Study Area
- CITY HALL
- F FIRE
- Parking Lot
- V On Street Parking

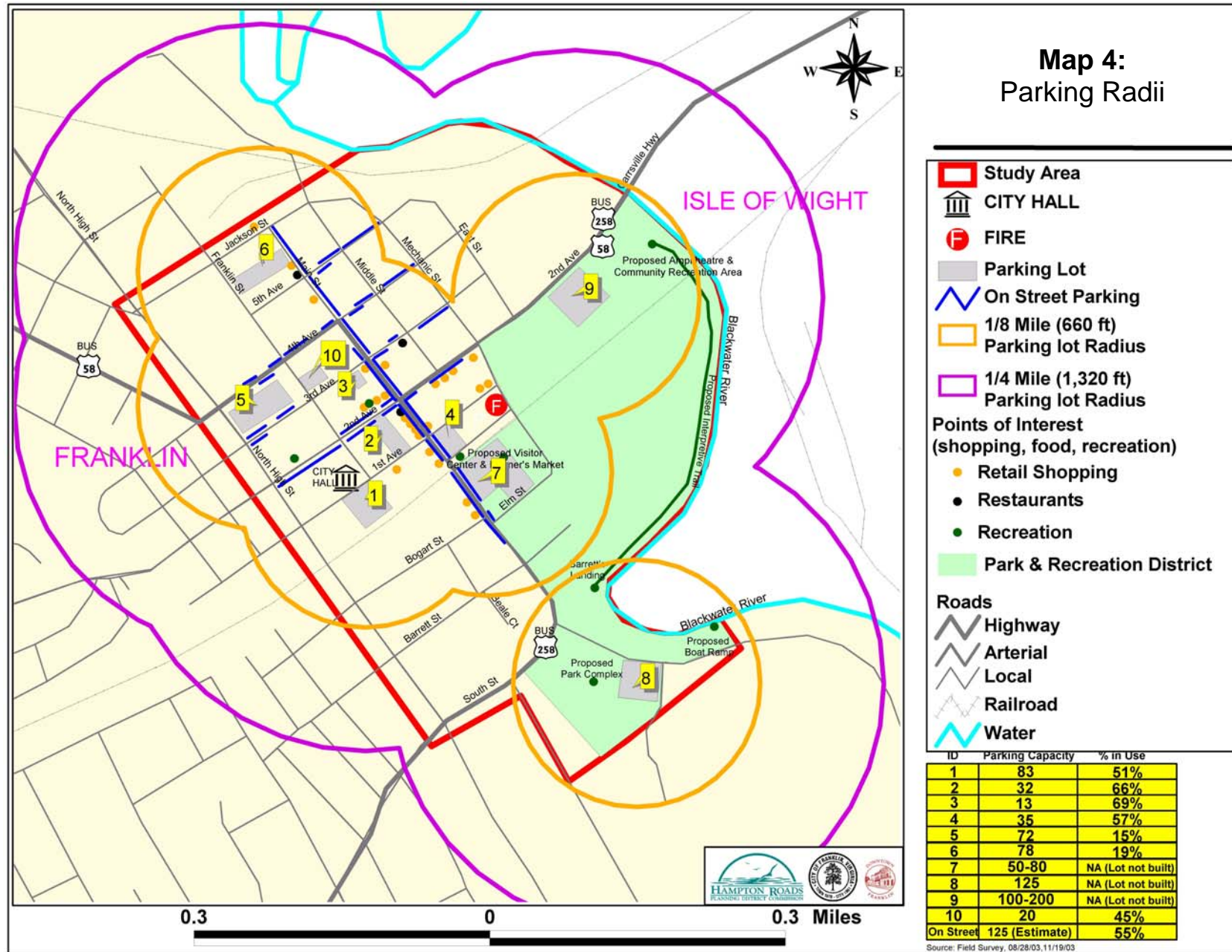
Roads

- Highway
- Arterial
- Local
- Railroad
- Water

ID	Parking Capacity	% in Use
1	83	51%
2	32	66%
3	13	69%
4	35	57%
5	72	15%
6	78	19%
7	50-80	NA (Lot not built)
8	125	NA (Lot not built)
9	100-200	NA (Lot not built)
10	20	45%
On Street	125 (Estimate)	55%

Source: Field Survey, 08/28/03, 11/19/03





SIGNAGE

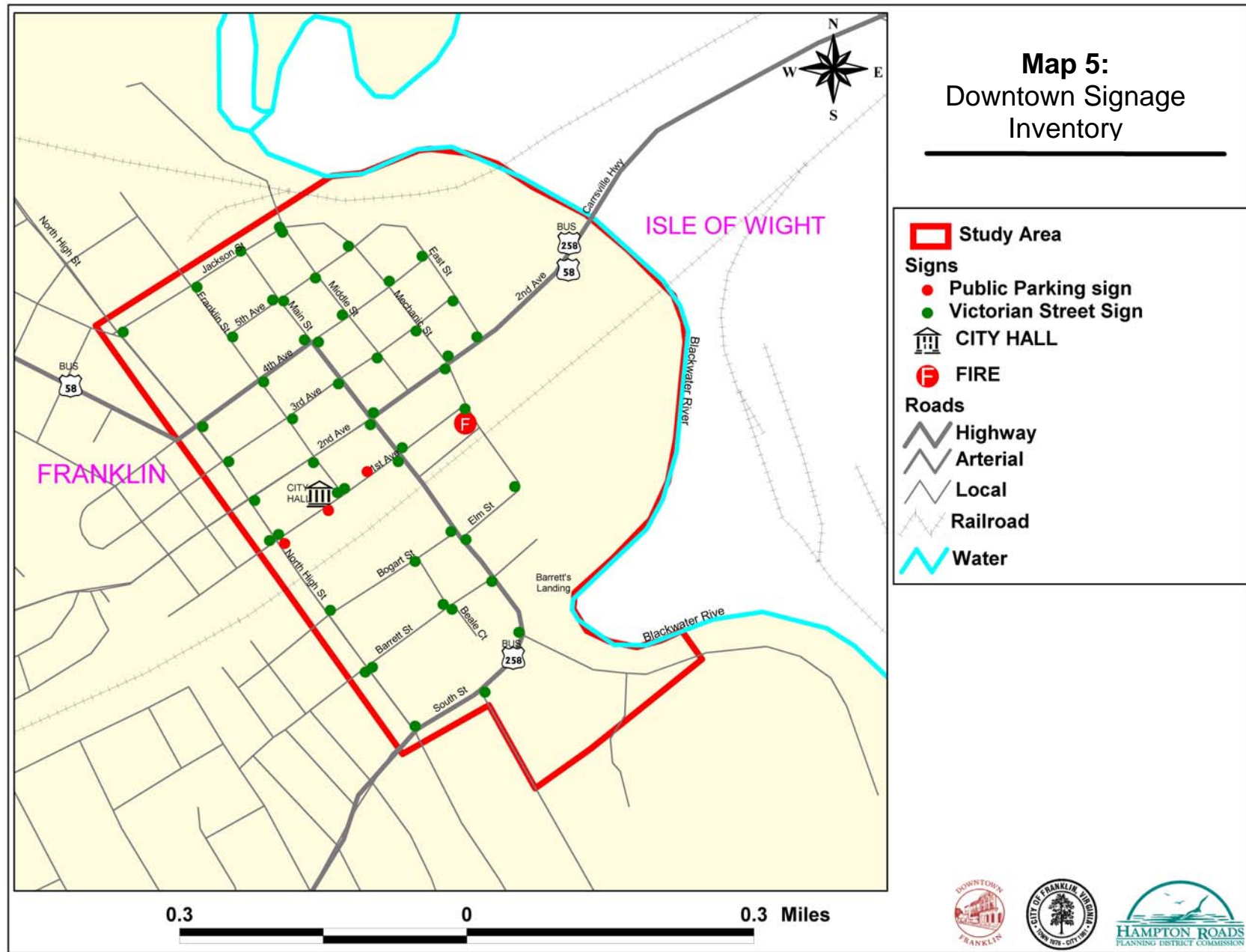
Existing sign improvements in the downtown area are limited to Victorian style street signs and parking signs supplied by the Camp Foundation as shown in **Picture 4**. City leaders have expressed concern with the visibility of these signs when conditions are not ideal. Observation of the signs shows that the current finish on the borders and lettering does not meet the recommendations of the Manual on Uniform Traffic Control Devices which states “ The Street Name sign shall be retroreflective or illuminated to show the same shape and similar color both day and night”. The MUTCD further states “Street Name signs should have a white legend on a green background”. The current finish of the lettering on the signs appears to be a brushed aluminum type finish that reflects and shows up well when the sun is at the proper angle, but can be hard to see when the sign is shaded or at night. The locations of these signs are inventoried on **Map 5**.



Picture 4: Victorian Style Signs

Wayfinding signage in the downtown area is nonexistent, and only two of the 5 existing public parking lots are marked with public parking signs.

Maps 6 and 7 identify the locations of all existing wayfinding signage outside the study area and also show recommendations for signage improvements.



CONCLUSIONS & RECOMMENDATIONS

The goals at the outset of the study were as follows:

- Analyze the signage system for effectiveness in directing travelers to the downtown Franklin area, and to direct them to points of interest and parking upon their arrival.
- Analyze public parking to determine if the supply is sufficient to meet the demand.
- Analyze street signs and public parking to improve visibility and effectiveness

Going into the process of analyzing the signage system for effectiveness in bringing travelers to the area and then showing them how to get to points of interest upon arrival, it was known that, with the exception of the Franklin Historic District signs at certain exits along US 58 (shown on Map 6), there was no signage to direct travelers to downtown Franklin. So, while the traveler may be induced to exit on Armory Drive and shown that they must head east to reach downtown, there is no further signage to ever let them know they have arrived at their destination, or to tell them how to get to the different amenities of the downtown area. In order to address this issue, a three-tier signage system is recommended. The tiers work as follows:

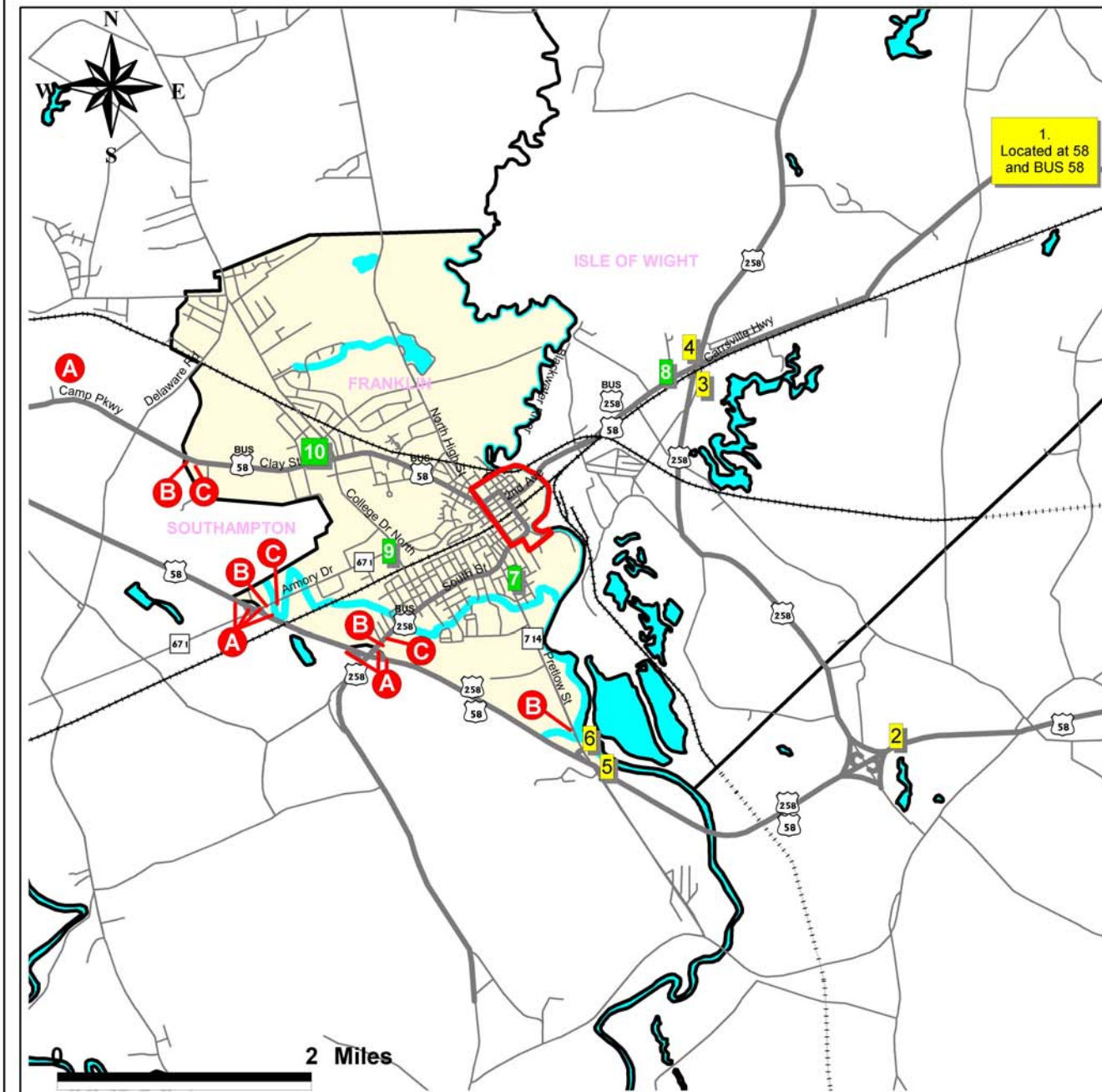
Tier 1: Direct travelers from the main thoroughfare toward the area.

Tier 2: Reference post signs notify travelers of their progress and inform them how far they have to go.

Tier 3: Welcome travelers to the area and guide them to points of interest.

The recommended signage system can be seen on **maps 6 and 7**.

Map 6: Existing & Proposed Signage




- | | |
|------------|---|
| Study Area | Existing Signage |
| Roads | A Franklin Historic District signs |
| Highway | B Welcome to Franklin signs |
| Arterial | C Virginia Main Street/Visit Downtown signs |
| Local | Proposed Signage |
| Railroad | # Tier 1 Signs - Directing Traffic to the Study Area |
| Water | ## Tier 2 Signs - Reference Post Signs notifying travelers of progress |



Existing Signage

- A** Way finding sign directing travelers to the downtown area.


- B** Welcome signs.


- C** Virginia Main St.



Proposed Signage

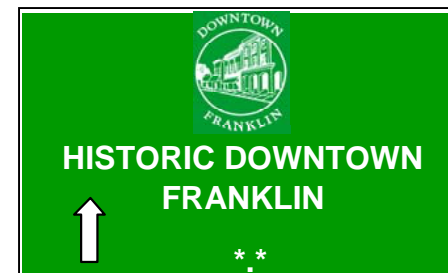
Tier 1 Signs – Directing Traffic to the Study Area

- 1** WB 58 approaching Business 58 at Holland
- 2** WB 58 approaching 258
- 3** NB 258 approaching Business 58
- 4** SB 258 approaching Business 58
- 5** WB 58 approaching Pretlow
- 6** At the bottom of the Pretlow exit



Tier 2 Signs – Reference Post Signs notifying travelers of progress

- 7** Pretlow approaching South St.
- 8** Just past the intersection of 258 and business 58
- 9** EB Armory Dr. approaching College Dr.
- 10** EB Clay St. approaching College Dr.



Map 7: Existing & Proposed Downtown Signage



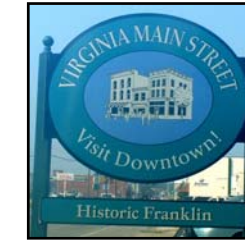
Study Area	CITY HALL	Existing Signage
Highway	FIRE	B Welcome to Franklin signs
Arterial	Points of Interest (shopping, food, recreation)	C Virginia Main Street/Visit Downtown signs
Local	Retail Shopping	# Tier 3 Signs - Welcome travelers to the area and guide them to points of interest
Railroad	Restaurants	
Water	Recreation	
Public Parking Lot	Park & Recreation District	

Existing Signage

B Welcome signs.



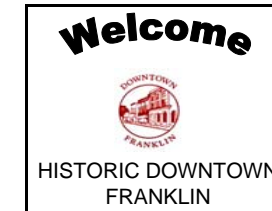
C Virginia Main St.



Proposed Signage

Tier 3 signs – Welcome travelers to the area and guide them to points of interest

- 11** Business 258 (South St.) at the edge of the downtown area
- 12** 2nd Ave. approaching North High St.
- 13** Bus 58 (Clay St.)
- 14** Bus 58 (2nd Ave.) to replace existing sign **C**



15. City of Franklin Welcome Sign to replace existing sign **B**



16	17	18	19	20
HISTORIC DOWNTOWN FRANKLIN	HISTORIC DOWNTOWN FRANKLIN	HISTORIC DOWNTOWN FRANKLIN	HISTORIC DOWNTOWN FRANKLIN	HISTORIC DOWNTOWN FRANKLIN
↑ BARRETTS LANDING	↑ VISITOR CENTER FARMER'S MARKET	↑ BARRETTS LANDING	↑ BARRETTS LANDING →	↑ BARRETTS LANDING
↑ VISITOR CENTER FARMERS MARKET	PUBLIC PARKING ↘	↑ VISITOR CENTER FARMERS MARKET	↑ VISITOR CENTER FARMERS MARKET →	↑ VISITOR CENTER FARMERS MARKET
← CITY HALL		← CITY HALL →	← CITY HALL →	← CITY HALL →
← PUBLIC PARKING		← PUBLIC PARKING →	← PUBLIC PARKING →	← PUBLIC PARKING →
21	22,25	23,24	26	27,28,29,30,31,32,33,34,35,36
HISTORIC DOWNTOWN FRANKLIN	HISTORIC DOWNTOWN FRANKLIN	HISTORIC DOWNTOWN FRANKLIN	HISTORIC DOWNTOWN FRANKLIN	HISTORIC DOWNTOWN FRANKLIN
← BARRETTS LANDING →	← CITY HALL →	← CITY HALL →	← BARRETTS LANDING →	← BARRETTS LANDING →
← VISITOR CENTER FARMERS MARKET →	← PUBLIC PARKING →	← PUBLIC PARKING →	← VISITOR CENTER FARMERS MARKET →	← VISITOR CENTER FARMERS MARKET →
← PUBLIC PARKING →		← PUBLIC PARKING →	← PUBLIC PARKING →	← PUBLIC PARKING →

Analysis of the existing public parking shows there is a need for parking near some key planned recreational areas in the northeast and southeast portions of the study area. However planned parking lots address this problem and parking lot 7 on **Map 3** is already beginning the construction process (see **Picture 5**). As long as the City implements these planned parking lots all areas of the downtown will be well served by parking.



Picture 5: New Parking Lot Site

Visibility of the Victorian style street signs is an issue that needs to be resolved. In researching manufacturers and styles of signs available, staff contacted the manufacturer of the signs in Franklin, Lakeshore Industries in Erie, Pennsylvania. A company representative estimated it would cost approximately \$15.00 per sign plate to refinish the letters and borders with a retroreflective white coating. This is the only upgrade needed to bring the existing signs within MUTCD standards and represents an affordable way to greatly improve the visibility of street signs in downtown Franklin.

In summary, the City of Franklin requested the staff of the Hampton Roads Planning District Commission to analyze existing signage, parking, and corridors of access, and formulate recommendations to improve access to the downtown area, ease of travel once in the area, and effectiveness/visibility of existing street signs.

Implementing the three tier signage system as previously detailed would allow travelers to easily locate the downtown area, and then easily find destination points once in the area. The proposed signage system would eliminate any confusion on the part of the traveler as to whether they have arrived or not by adding reference posts to notify them of progress and welcome signs once they have arrived.

The public parking facilities become more accessible to travelers since wayfinding signage directs them to the parking lots. Further the marking of all lots with signs notifying travelers that they are public parking, removes any perception on the part of the traveler that the lot may be private.

Street signs become much more visible regardless of ambient light conditions by bringing them up to MUTCD standards by refinishing the letters and border in white retroreflective coating.

Implementation of the above recommendations would assist the City of Franklin in meeting the goals set forth in the Downtown Flood Recovery Master Plan and create more interest in the downtown area through increased awareness and ease of travel.