Protecting Scenic Resources in a Changing Landscape

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MPC/Legal Background
for Protection of Scenic Resources

- Article III, Section 301(a)(6): “The municipal, multi-municipal or county comprehensive plan…shall include…a plan for the protection of natural and historic resources…”

- Article V: Regulation of subdivisions and land development, including issues of parking, landscaping, etc.

- Article VI: Protection of natural and historic resources through zoning

- Article VII-A: TNDs
The Oxford Region’s scenic character is formed in part by the Region’s landscapes, the uses imposed on those landscapes, and the communities that grew on those landscapes. The confluence of agricultural properties, natural resources, open space, historic villages and resources, and urban areas help to create the character that the Region’s residents recognize as their own. Scenic resources are an important part of this local character, forming the visual image that residents carry with them of the place they call home.

Scenic Resources Goal:

*Identify, protect, and maintain the integrity of scenic resources that provide the rural character and cultural feel of the Region.*
Where is the Oxford Region?
Five Steps (we utilized) in the Process

Step 1: Identify Resources
Step 2: Prioritize Resources in the Region
Step 3: Identify Existing and Potential Intrusions
Step 4: Explore Techniques for Scenic Resource Protection/Intrusion Identification
Step 5: Implement Techniques
Identification of Resources (Step 1)

Background Information:

- Mapping and narrative from municipal comprehensive plans and park, recreation and open space plans (mid 90s, early 2000s)
- Task Force input
- Aerial photography (2005)
Preliminary Mapping
Identification of Resources (Step 1)

Hands-on Identification

- Windshield survey of townships
- Walking tour of Borough
- Laptop with GPS to track position and hard copies of mapping for backup
- Camera to record inconsistencies
Identification of Resources (Step 1)

Finalizing Preliminary Mapping

- GIS Updates
- Another field view (where necessary)
Prioritize Resources in the Area (Step 2)

The Oxford Region identified:

- Scenic Features
- Scenic Vistas
- Scenic Roadways
- Scenic Corridors
- Scenic Landforms
Defining the Resource: Assumptions?

Historic resources are scenic and should be protected and regulated as scenic, as well as agricultural resources.

Agricultural resources represent the source for most of the Region’s scenic resources.
A specific feature, visible from multiple public viewpoints, but limited in overall geographic scale, that has inherent scenic or aesthetic value. Stone walls or covered or stone bridges would be examples of scenic features.
What is the Resource: Scenic Vista

A physiographic area composed of natural, historic, agricultural, and/or cultural elements that may be viewed from a public area such as a roadway or park, and which has inherent scenic qualities and/or aesthetic values.
What is the Resource: Scenic Road

A road that, in addition to its transportation function, provides a unique traveling experience as a result of the characteristics of the road itself that may include its narrow width, a canopy of trees, or the informal nature of the road’s alignment.
What is the resource: Scenic Corridor

A corridor such as a roadway or waterway and its adjacent area that provides opportunities for the enjoyment of exceptional beauty or natural, historic, or cultural features. A scenic corridor moves the experience of the driver, pedestrian, cyclist, fisherman or boater beyond the immediate area to those attributes within view.
What is the Resource: Scenic Landform?

A broad geographic area that has some consistency in form throughout and which forms a significant, scenic landscape. Only two landforms have been identified in the Region, the serpentine barrens and the Route 10 ridgeline, both of which contain scenic features or vistas within their bounds.
Identifying Existing and Potential Scenic Intrusions (Step 4)

Those manmade objects or structures that detract from the landscape, such as: poorly sited or designed (residential, commercial, or industrial development); light pollution; inappropriate signage; utility structures or transmission lines; parking facilities; and abandoned or unkempt properties. Depending on how topography and landscaping either permit or obscure views, a single intrusion can mar an otherwise scenic landscape.
Back-at-the-Office

- GIS updates/cleanup
- Review of edits *(don’t forget the taskforce’s input)*
- What still doesn’t make sense?
- Another fieldview?
- Revisions...edits...review...revisions...
  *(especially in regard to recommendations)*
Explore the Techniques (Step 4)

Protecting Resources through Ordinances

*Force the consideration of scenic qualities early in the development process*

1) Recognize the importance of scenic resources (Purpose statements),

2) Define Scenic Resources (Definitions Section),

3) Map and maintain a current inventory of resources, and,

4) Require within ordinances that any proposed subdivision, land development, or permit action in the vicinity of a recognized scenic resource coordinate early and throughout project development with the municipality to avoid, minimize, and/or mitigate negative scenic impacts

- *four step design process*
- *conservation by design*
- *site inventory plans*
Explore the Techniques (Step 4)

More Regulatory Techniques...

1) **Natural Resources Protection Standards:** Riparian Buffers, Wetlands, Steep Slopes, Woodlands...

2) **TND for infill in historic villages…**it can be used to
   “relate the type, design and layout of residential and nonresidential development to the particular site and the particular demand for housing existing at the time of development in a manner consistent with the preservation of the property values within existing residential and nonresidential areas…”

3) **Ag Preservation:** Effective Ag Zoning, Transfer of Development Rights...

4) **Historic Resources:** Historic District Act/Act 167, Historic Overlays in Zoning…
Explore the Techniques (Step 4)

Cleanup Programs

1) Adopt a Highway (PennDOT)
2) Keep Pennsylvania Beautiful (www.keeppabeautiful.org)

State or National Designation

1) National Scenic Byways Program (www.byways.org)
   Examples in PA: Great Lakes Seaway Trail, Historic National Road, Journey Through Hallowed Ground Byway

2) Pennsylvania Byways: 18 currently designated through PennDOT  www.visitpa.com/scenic_byways
Explore the Techniques (Step 4)

Minimizing Scenic Intrusions

Update municipal ordinances to:

1) **Define Scenic Intrusions,**
2) **Recognize the negative impact of scenic intrusions,**
3) **Require that developers of a scenic intrusion investigate options to avoid, minimize, or mitigate the negative scenic impacts of these intrusions.**

The SLDO is key to minimizing intrusions, as are well thought out sign, landscaping, parking, and other general regulations in a zoning ordinance.
Explore the Techniques (Step 4)

Types of Scenic Intrusions

1) Poorly Sited or Designed Development
2) Lighting
3) Utilities
4) Signs
5) Parking
6) Abandoned Properties
Explore the Techniques (Step 4)

Addressing Scenic Intrusions: Poorly Sited Development

1) Create and maintain a current list of scenic resources

2) Require Natural Resources Protection

3) Use a thorough SLDO process

This type of development ignores the context and resources of the site and, in doing so, loses an opportunity to fit in with the existing landscape.
Explore the Techniques (Step 4)

Addressing Scenic Intrusions: Lighting

1) Public Education

2) Ordinance language: prevent glare and light pollution, require use of reasonable lighting levels, luminaries that do not emit glare and light above the horizontal, and automatic extinguishing of lighting when it is not needed.

Light Pollution: Any adverse effect of artificial light including sky glow, glare, light trespass, light clutter, decreased visibility at night, and energy waste. 

IDSA

Inappropriate lighting impacts human health, safety, energy, and wildlife.
Explore the Techniques (Step 4)

Addressing Scenic Intrusions: Lighting

International Dark Sky Association
www.darksky.org
Pennsylvania Outdoor Lighting Council
www.polcouncil.org
Explore the Techniques (Step 4)

Addressing Scenic Intrusions: Utilities

Siting and design of utility structures and powerlines should be *regulated/negotiated* in order to avoid, minimize, or mitigate impacts to scenic features.
Explore the Techniques (Step 4)

Addressing Scenic Intrusions: Signs

1) The MPC permits municipalities to regulate the size, location, and lighting on signs. DO NOT REGULATE CONTENT.

2) Ordinance provisions: prevent the overuse of signs of all types, ensure signs are not a distraction to drivers, promote good sign design guidelines, and avoid impacts on scenic resources.

3) Encourage appropriate signage by adopting specific design standards (size, color, material, lighting, legibility, sign type) for designated areas.
Explore the Techniques (Step 4)

Addressing Scenic Intrusions: Parking

Ordinance provisions: access, location, layout, surface treatment, screening, buffering, and landscaping

Avoid endless pavement, lack of vegetation, and locational prominence in a parking area
Explore the Techniques (Step 4)

Addressing Scenic Intrusions: Abandoned Properties

Protecting public health and safety should be the primary consideration

PA Wilds Design Guide
Explore the Techniques (Step 4)

Define
Map
Regulate
Negotiate
Encourage
Educate
What’s the End Product?

- Scenic Resources Chapter (goal, objectives, inventory, recommendations) in multi-municipal Comprehensive Plan

  - **GOAL:** Identify, protect, and maintain the integrity of scenic resources that provide the rural character and cultural feel of the Region.

  - **OBJECTIVES:**
    - Continue to maintain and update the listing of resources that visually characterize the Region’s rural/agrarian landscape, including scenic roads, corridors, vistas, features (such as historic structures and bridges), and landforms.
    - Protect and maintain the quality of scenic resources by developing and implementing appropriate land use strategies and regulatory measures.
    - Protect and maintain the quality of scenic resources by supporting community education efforts and activities.
    - Continue to maintain and update the listing of resources that may visually impair the Region’s rural landscape, including poorly sited or designed residential, commercial, or industrial development; light pollution; inappropriate signage; utility structures or transmission lines; parking facilities; and abandoned or unkempt properties.

  - **RECOMMENDATIONS:** 16, half directed at scenic resources and half at scenic intrusions
Final (Draft) Products

- Individual municipal scenic resources maps
Some of the Draft Recommendations

- Update municipal ordinances to guide development to areas less likely to impact scenic resources.

- Coordinate with PennDOT (or Chester County as appropriate) on any proposed transportation projects early and throughout the project development process to ensure a context sensitive design.

- Update municipal ordinances to recognize the negative impact of scenic intrusions and require that developers of a scenic intrusion investigate options to avoid, minimize, or mitigate the negative scenic impacts of these intrusions.

- Adopt ordinance language to diminish the negative impacts of lighting and promote the continuance of dark skies.

- Encourage appropriate signage by adopting specific design standards for Oxford Borough and designated village areas.
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Questions?

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www.chesco.org/planning/oxfordregion
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Thank you and Enjoy the Conference

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