

Millstone Valley Scenic Byway Corridor Management Plan



Over the past year, a team of landscape architects, planners, engineers, and preservation consultants have been working with a committee representing various state and local governments and civic groups to develop a corridor management plan for the Millstone Valley Scenic Byway. The members of the Advisory Committee represent the many different viewpoints of individuals with an interest in the route: people who live or work along the route, those that are responsible for its management, and those with extensive knowledge of the history of the area.

The byway, located in the narrow Millstone River Valley of north central New Jersey, offers a glimpse into the past where skirmishes between the local militia and British troops played a key role in the Revolutionary War. Attractions along the route include the Delaware & Raritan Canal State Park, the relocated Rockingham site in Franklin Township and the 1860 House near Rocky Hill.

The route begins at the intersection of Route 206 and River Road in Montgomery, runs north along River Road on the west side of the Millstone River, across the causeway linking Millstone and East Millstone, then south on Canal Road through Franklin Township. The route proceeds into Kingston on Kingston-Rocky Hill Road, turns south on Route 27 before heading north again on Kingston-Rocky Hill Road by way of Church Street in Kingston. The route crosses the D&R Canal and the Millstone River on Route 518 then North on Montgomery Road, in Rocky Hill, past the 1860 house, to the beginning.

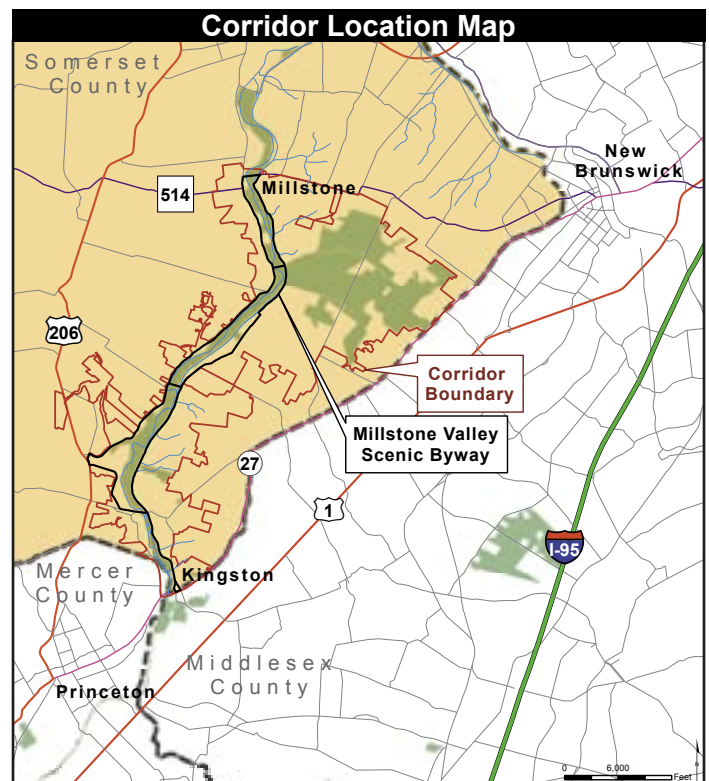
What is a Corridor Management Plan?

The plan is a written document in which the sponsor describes the goals, strategies and responsibilities for conserving and enhancing a byway's most valuable qualities. It is developed collaboratively with all those who have an interest in the future of an area included in the byway corridor. It includes both a long-term vision for what the byway may become over time and also a short-term action plan.

The plan is being prepared with funding from a Federal Highway Administration grant through the National Scenic Byways Program. The grant is being administered by the New Jersey Department of Transportation. The byway management plan is needed in order to complete requirements for designation as a New Jersey Scenic Byway and to apply for designation as a National Scenic Byway.

Why a "National Scenic Byway"

At the end of the year long planning process, citizens and communities along the byway will decide whether to pursue designation as a "National Scenic Byway" as part of the Federal Highway Administration's National Scenic Byway Program.





Under the National Scenic Byways Program, the U.S. Secretary of Transportation recognizes certain roads as National Scenic Byways or All-American Roads based on their intrinsic qualities. The Federal Highway Administration promotes the collection as America's Byways®.

The designation provides additional opportunities for heritage-based tourism development including additional funding opportunities for preservation and enhancement projects. New Jersey has yet to designate a byway through this program, but Route 29 along the Delaware River is considering this type of designation. The Brandywine River Valley Scenic Byway was recently designated as a national scenic byway from Wilmington, Delaware northward into Pennsylvania along the historic Kennett Pike.

If the group recommends pursuing designation as a National Scenic Byway, and the five municipal governments along the byway agree, then a permanent management entity will need to be created to implement the plan (see page 8).

Defining the Byway Corridor

For the purposes of preserving and enhancing the Millstone Valley, the Millstone Valley Scenic Byway corridor includes both the travel route and the lands and places associated with that route.

The lands and places associated with the travel route, referred to as the byway "corridor" include:

- 1) Places and landscapes that can be seen from the byway, canal or trail
- 2) Places to visit along the travel route that are

open to the public and are related to the byway theme(s); and

- 3) Resources associated with the corridor that contribute to its regional character and identity including historic districts, woodlands, farms, stream valleys, and connecting greenways and parks.

A Vision for the Byway

The Millstone Valley Scenic Byway Advisory Committee developed an initial vision for the future of the byway to direct the planning process. The vision statement was modified based on input from the initial public meeting held in March of 2006. The resulting statement, below, serves to guide the planning and implementation process:

Working together, and inspired by the regional significance of this rare oasis of natural beauty and historic integrity, byway enthusiasts are working hard to keep this landscape pretty much the way it is today, only better – preserving the most important parts of the byway and enhancing other areas. The Byway will make it easier for visitors to find and learn about the rich layers of history – from the earliest Dutch settlement through skirmishes of the Revolutionary War to the canal era which is still evident in the many authentic historic sites and districts found along the route.

The byway serves as a regional connector linking together historic sites, natural areas trails and greenways forming a major north-south green spine for Somerset County and beyond. Automobiles, bicyclists and pedestrians co-exist along narrow roads and trails winding through and along the Delaware and Raritan Canal and its neighboring farms and woodlands. Canoes and kayaks glide through the waters while watching the wildlife and appreciating the serene qualities of the Millstone River and Delaware and Raritan Canal. Throughout its 25-mile length the layered history of the Millstone Valley is revealed through a coordinated series of interpretive stops, walking tours, and guides designed to teach both visitors and residents alike about the qualities that make this place truly unique and special.

Significance of the Byway

When determining if a local byway meets the requirements for designation as a national scenic byway, the intrinsic qualities of that byway must be

evaluated. The National Scenic Byways Program identifies six different categories of intrinsic qualities: scenic, cultural, historic, recreational, archaeological, and natural. In order for a byway to meet national designation it must have at least one quality considered to be regionally significant. If two intrinsic qualities are deemed significant on a national level, the byway qualifies for All-American Road designation.

While scenic and archaeological qualities are certainly present in the Millstone Valley Scenic Byway corridor, the categories that stand out are historical, recreational, and natural. Historic qualities associated with the canal era; with the revolutionary war era; and with early Dutch and American Heritage are regionally significant. The recreational qualities associated with the Delaware and Raritan Canal towpath trail are also regionally significant. Natural resources associated with the preserved landscapes along the Millstone River in Central New Jersey are also significant, but more so to Somerset County and the State of New Jersey than the region. All three qualities serve as the core foundation of the experience of visiting the Millstone Valley and for its potential recognition as a National Scenic Byway.



Byway Management Strategies

One of the driving forces for gaining additional recognition for the byway is to preserve, maintain and in some places enhance the regional and locally significant resources of the corridor in order to ensure a high quality experience for those that visit the byway or for those that are fortunate enough to live along and use the byway on a regular basis.

Five groups of management strategies will be implemented over the life of the plan as a way to help preserve, maintain or enhance the byway experience.

- Preserving the byway's significant resources
- Maintaining and enhancing the byway's green roadside corridor
- Learning more about the byway's special qualities
- Promoting the byway's heritage resources
- Working collaboratively to manage the byway over time

Preserving the Byway's Significant Historic and Natural Resources

The byway's significant historic resources fall under three distinct themes:

- Canal Era structures and landscapes
- Revolutionary War Era structures
- Early Dutch and American Heritage

There are many historic structures in the corridor that are seriously threatened and in need of preservation assistance. These fall into two distinct categories:

- Structures owned by the state (DEP) either in the D & R Canal Park or in Six Mile Run.
- Privately owned structures that are either moderately well protected by existing preservation ordinances at a local level and those that are subject to redevelopment.



Preserving Historic Structures

The byway corridor is fortunate to have a several key preservation partners already working creatively to address preservation needs and challenges.

State-owned Structures

The Delaware and Raritan (D&R) Canal State Park is responsible for a number of historic structures in the Millstone Valley, but they do not have the necessary funding

to adequately preserve these significant structures. Some potential strategies for preserving additional structures in the corridor include:

- The Somerset County Cultural Heritage Commission or NJ Cultural Heritage Trust has funds that can be used for preservation. One preservation option is to have the D & R Canal Park lease the buildings to Franklin Township for a nominal fee and then Franklin Township (possibly with the county's Cultural Heritage Commission funds or funds from another source) could restore the buildings. The lease term has to be at least 25 years to qualify for these grants. A priority preservation need is for the bridge tender's house in Griggstown to be leased to Franklin Township so that the Township could restore it.
- The D&R Canal Commission is negotiating with the developer of Canal Walk (senior housing) to stabilize the bridge tender's house at Manville Causeway and to restore the bridge tender's house at East Millstone as part of the development project.
- The Barracks or "Long House" on the Griggstown Causeway will be restored by the State (DEP).
- The Sherman House in Griggstown, dating from the Canal era with a 1950's addition and a more recent addition is owned by the State and is also in need of rehabilitation. There are no current plans for this.
- The Park headquarters has moved from the blue house along Canal Road to an old Princeton Nurseries office on the Mapleton Road. The Forest Management Group of DEP Parks and Forestry is moving into this house.



- The Six Mile Run area, managed by DEP, was planned for a reservoir, but, due to changing circumstances, this use is unlikely to occur within the planning horizon of this effort. There are many historic structures in this area. The current inventory of the Six Mile Run historic district needs updating. Since the district was drawn many of the structures, particularly outbuildings, have been lost. A Dutch barn in reasonable shape has been dismantled and will be re-erected on Rockingham's site.



DEP generates a fair amount of money from the structures of 6 Mile Run – from leased structures and land leased to farmers. These funds go into the general fund rather than being available to preserve the structures. Some are leased based on tenants providing maintenance in lieu of rent.

Updating the inventory, and making a new assessment of preservation priorities will be needed. Consultation and coordination is needed with the Director of Parks and Forestry for DEP.

Structures Owned by Franklin Township

Franklin Township has acquired six structures in the 6 Mile Run area. The Meadows Foundation manages these buildings. A full description of these sites can be found at the Meadows Foundation web site. Two of the six structures are along the byway.

Privately Owned Structures

Trap Rock Industries owns two houses on the corner of Old Georgetown and Canal roads. These predate the canal and date to the origins of Rocky Hill. The deeds go back to the 17th century. One may be the oldest house in the area. One was a tavern. A study has been completed that describes and evaluates both houses. Franklin Township is considering taking further actions to preserve these buildings as they are located in one of three redevelopment zones in Franklin Township.



Franklin Inn

The Franklin Inn is privately owned. It is leased to the Meadows Foundation that runs it as a bookstore through a subsidiary. It is located in one of the 3 redevelopment zones in Franklin Township. Franklin Township is considering further actions to ensure preservation of this important historic site.



The Franklin Inn is a direct connection between the Colonial Park and the D & R Canal Park.

The area along the Canal is in a historic preservation area in Franklin Township's Master Plan.

Preserving and Enhancing the Byway's Green Infrastructure

The natural resources, scenic views, roadside trees and woodlands, or "green infrastructure" form the backbone of the byway experience. The Millstone Valley between Kingston and Millstone in Somerset County is an oasis among the suburban areas to the west and the Route 1 Corridor to the east. However, as a result of some progressive and aggressive open space acquisition efforts by community leaders, and with the help of a devoted citizenry, this area remains a haven of historical sites, recreational opportunities and natural beauty.

As shown on the map (right), Franklin Township has the most extensive network of preserved open lands, while Montgomery Township has a wide swath of preserved open space along the Millstone River.

Preservation of open space is needed in two distinct categories:

- the remaining farms and woodlands that are not currently protected but serve to link together public lands within the corridor.
- The ribbon of green along Canal and River Road

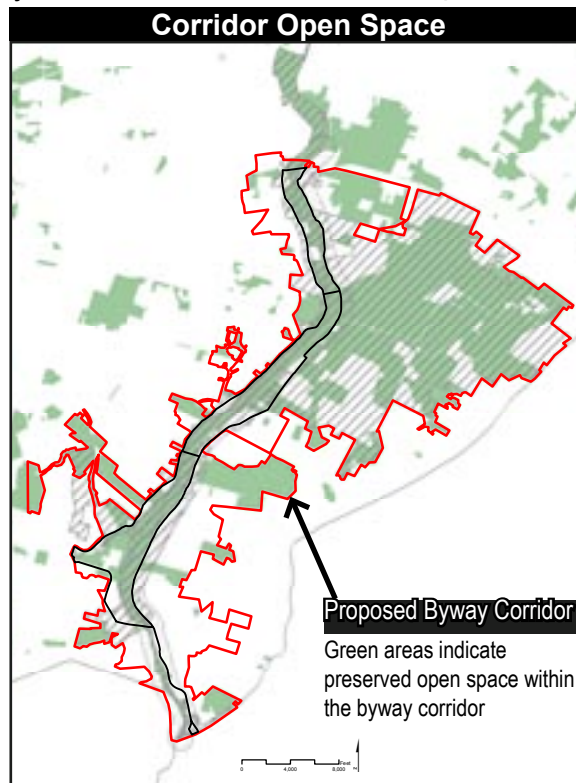
Open Space Preservation Priorities

Priorities for landscape conservation efforts will be placed on those remaining rural parcels that are visible from the byway or help to maintain the general rural character of the area through existing open space programs. Special attention will be placed on maintaining and managing open farm and meadow. Additional efforts should be made to continue linking existing open space parcels to form a continuous network. A more detailed open space map has been prepared identifying the locations of these parcels.

Where direct conservation action is no longer feasible, a set of model design and development guidelines need to be developed to assist the municipalities in their efforts to guide the form and appearance of new residential subdivisions (both large and small lots) to be compatible with the preservation efforts in the

Millstone Valley. Model infill development guidelines and ordinances are also needed to maintain the overall rural and village character of the byway.

Where feasible, efforts should also be directed towards measures that help to maintain or even enhance the water quality in the Millstone River and D&R Canal, as the recreational use of the water is an integral part of the byway experience. The management of the floodplain is also another integral element in the byway experience. Any flood reduction measures taken within the byway corridor should be done carefully so as to not damage the Canal Era



resources. Appropriately scaled water quality and quantity management techniques should be sought that will help to reduce the risk of flooding while at the same time maintain the character and quality of the environment.

Maintaining A Ribbon of Green

Along the roadway itself, there is a high degree of pressure to modify the roadway for the purpose of highway safety or capacity. This pressure creates a series of distinct types of interrelated changes that are not in the best long-term interest of the byway. These changes include:

- Gradual widening of the roadway cross section
- Increase in operating speeds
- Increase in sight distance requirements
- Removal of roadside trees and features to accommodate increasing speeds

Instead, what is needed is a comprehensive look at the purpose of each distinct section of the byway. Capacity improvements should be focused on directing commuter traffic to Route 206 and increasing its capacity rather than relying upon River Road.

Canal Road - This side of the byway represents the most authentic byway experience – the slow route meant to be enjoyed at a leisure pace by smaller vehicles. Speed limits should be reduced to more closely match the operating characteristics of the road (between 25 and 35 mph, maximum).



River Road - This side of the byway provides more functional access to the byway points of interest. Vehicles wishing to travel at a higher speed, larger tour bus and recreational vehicles, or those just wanting to get from Millstone to Rocky Hill or Kingston can use this side, more suitable for this type of travel. Speed limits should be posted to better match operational characteristics (35-40 mph, maximum).

River and Canal Crossing Points – The main east west travel routes across the byway also increase the pressure for more intersection capacity. Amwell Road

(SR 514) is the main east-west route between Hillsborough and New Brunswick as well as other points north. Pressure also exists for crossings that connect to points south, primarily SR 27 at Kingston.

Efforts to increase the capacity of existing intersections in the central part of the byway should be resisted in order to maintain the integrity of the byway as a distinct place with its own identity associated with the Canal Era landscapes.

Any changes to roadway cross-sections, intersections or roadside environments should be accomplished using the principles of context sensitive design (CSD). The New Jersey DOT defines CSD as an approach to planning and designing transportation projects based on active and early partnerships with communities.

The NJDOT formally incorporated CSD into its procedures in 1999. According to NJDOT, “CSD involves a commitment to a process that encourages transportation officials to collaborate with community stakeholders so the design of the project reflects the goals of the people who live, work and travel in the area. Such collaboration results in creative and safe transportation solutions”.

The overall CSD approach should be applied to the byway corridor for all transportation and right-of-way alterations, including roadway maintenance programs, drainage projects, and 3R (Resurfacing, Restoration, and Rehabilitation) projects.

Somerset County has primary responsibility for the majority of roads and has been generally taking the CSD approach for many of the projects it undertakes along the byway.

Maintaining the narrow, winding and rustic character of the travel route and roadside trees will require a





Access and egress to subdivisions should be treated in a more respectful way to the byway to better maintain the narrow look and feel of the road. Another alternative could be the use of a different pavement for the egress lanes to differentiate them from the through travelway. Slowing the design and operational speeds of the roadways might also reduce or eliminate the need for the access and egress drives into and out of the subdivisions.



more detailed examination of the following issues using the CSD approach. A set of design guidelines should be developed that result from the CSD approach for use by Somerset County and NJDOT:

Crowning on Canal Road – There does not appear to be a clear consensus as to whether the crowned section of road should be repaved with a smoother treatment. The newly paved area at the northern end of Canal Road, posted at 25 mph appears to be working in an acceptable manner and could be a model for other sections of Canal Road, with the understanding that strict tree preservation measures be undertaken to ensure that the character of the roadway be maintained.

Intersections – The following intersections need to be redesigned to achieve a better fit with the byway while resolving safety and capacity concerns:

- The Route 518 & Canal Road
- The Amsterdam Road/Canal Road intersection

Roadside Details – Guidelines are needed to demonstrate how the use of more context sensitive roadside details could be utilized to achieve a more holistic sense of the entire byway loop. For example, all of the guardrails should be of one style (such as steel-backed wood), and the backs of all signs should be painted dark brown.

Road “Diet” - Full consideration should be given to reducing the width of River Road in certain places (primarily subdivision access and egress lanes) so that it is consistent with driver expectations including the lanes just north of Grist Mill and Staats Farm Roads in Montgomery, and at Hillcrest, Strawberry and Amsterdam Roads in Hillsborough.

Intersection “Diet”

The size of some of the intersections should be considered for reduction, including the scale of lighting and signage approaching the intersection. Slowing the design and operational speeds of River and Canal Roads should allow for smaller and fewer signs. Of particular concern is the SR 518/Canal Road intersection.

Roadside Trees and Hedgerows –

New trees and hedgerows are needed to further screen residential subdivisions and to narrow the look and feel of the road in Montgomery and Hillsborough.

Gateway Treatments

The Amwell Road gateway is a particular concern in the northern end of the byway. A visitor information kiosk should be installed in Millstone to serve this purpose. A gateway for the southern end should be considered for the Route 27 approach in Kingston (perhaps at the Locktenders house).

Telling the Byway’s Stories

The Millstone Valley Scenic Byway has some very unique and exciting stories to tell – whether it be from the Canal Era that is preserved by the D&R Canal State Park and Somerset County; or stories from the Revolutionary War Era as part of the larger (and soon-to-be designated) “Crossroads of the Revolution” National Heritage Area”

Greater awareness of the unique and special qualities of the byway’s historic resources, natural setting

and related human-powered outdoor recreation opportunities is needed to bring added resources for their preservation. This greater awareness will be achieved through:

- development of a coordinated interpretive system of guidebooks, site installations, and other media to make the stories of the byway come alive without overwhelming the area with signage.
- Coordination and cross-training among interpreters and hosts to improve hospitality and friendliness to visitors.
- Using the byway as an organizing element for interpreting the region's heritage.
- Coordinating signage directing visitors to museums, parks, and other publicly accessible historic sites and open spaces along the byway
- Improving the accessibility of signage, including and especially at existing historic sites.
- Providing visitor information about the byway at both ends of the corridor and at regional welcome centers. Some potential locations include the D&R Canal State Park offices or the Locktenders House in the southern end, and in East Millstone as part of gateway improvements at the northern end.

Promoting the Byway's Heritage Resources

The Millstone Valley Scenic Byway's historic sites and landscapes are especially suited for the "eco-heritage" traveler. Byway visitors can see and experience the canal era and revolutionary war era themes by canoe or kayak, by bicycle, by car and on foot.



Recently published guidebooks and maps: "Explore Experience Enjoy" Franklin Township's Eco-Heritage Tourism Map; and a "Guide to Historic Sites in Central New Jersey" published by the Raritan Millstone Heritage Alliance are two examples of the appropriate type of marketing that should be continued. The byway effort represents a strong opportunity to link up with the Crossroads of the Revolution National Heritage Area and the Delaware River Scenic Byway.

For More Information

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The Millstone Valley Corridor Management Plan is being prepared by Vollmer Associates with Lardner/Klein Landscape Architects, P.C. and Oldham Historic Properties, Inc. with funding from the Federal Highway Administration's Scenic Byway Program and the New Jersey Department of Transportation.

Marketing efforts need to target local and regional visits and getaway visitors from nearby states. Byway leaders need to expand their outreach to take advantage of State Tourism resources, especially brochure and guidebook distribution, promotion of itineraries, and to increase the presence of the byway on the web (along with other New Jersey byways and heritage areas).

Managing the Byway

Working collaboratively among organizations is the best approach to extend the reach of the byway with the least amount of capital investment.

The Millstone Valley Preservation Coalition should continue in their role as the primary byway organization responsible for implementing the plan. The MVPC should expand the advisory committee to include the interests of the various heritage tourism related businesses. In the future, consideration should be given to creating an independent 501c3 non-profit organization to serve as the byway management entity.

Better coordination is needed with the State, County and regional tourism interests to more actively promote the byway. A marketing contact point will be needed at the time of designation as a national scenic byway. A partnership will be needed with the State of New Jersey to establish the Millstone Valley as a potential destination with a heritage tourism focus.

The coordination effort should also extend to the day to day management of the road and right-of-way. A list of standard maintenance projects, safety projects, and other 3R work will need to be communicated to the byway leadership far enough in advance so that other byway initiatives can be coordinated, additional funding can be pursued for enhancements to standard details, and alternatives explored for standard maintenance and safety work.

Finally coordination will need to extend to the local municipalities so that the byway interests can be represented as part of any land use and development decisions that will affect the preservation and enhancement of its intrinsic qualities.